

**The Representation of the Northern Irish Conflict  
in the British Media with specific reference to  
the Lee Clegg case in the British Press**

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## **Abstract**

The issue of Northern Ireland is one that has received considerable attention from the media, since the present 'Troubles' began, almost thirty years ago. There has been much criticism of the media coverage of the conflict, which is seen to blindly support the conduct of the British State, regardless of its actions. The British Press is especially likely to support the Government, even though it operates with almost total freedom, and is not confined by censorship tactics as are the broadcast media. This study examines the coverage of the Lee Clegg case in the British Press. The events that surrounded this case, were ones that drew into question the actions of the British Army in Northern Ireland. Lee Clegg's release occurred in the context of a fragile peace process, and was an event that jeopardised that whole process. The following study examines the way in which the case of Lee Clegg was represented in the British Press, and draws attention to a number of themes that emerged in that coverage. It is based on the premise that the material presented will have effects on readers, and this is placed in the context of the evolution of theories of effect.

*To Teresa, with thanks.*

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## **Abbreviations used in this study**

<b>BBC</b>	<b>British Broadcasting Corporation</b>
<b>IBA</b>	<b>Independent Broadcasting Authority</b>
<b>IRA</b>	<b>Irish Republican Army</b>
<b>ITV</b>	<b>Independent Television Authority</b>
<b>RUC</b>	<b>Royal Ulster Constabulary</b>
<b>SAS</b>	<b>Special Air Services</b>
<b>UDA</b>	<b>Ulster Defence Regiment</b>

# Introduction

## **Why Northern Ireland ?**

The present Northern Irish conflict has endured for over a quarter of a century and simply stated centres on the fact that a constitutional debate exists

“in which the majority of the population (of Northern Ireland) wish to remain within the United Kingdom and a minority would prefer that Northern Ireland was incorporated within the Republic of Ireland.”(Bew and Gillespie, 1193,1).

The conflict began with civil rights street disputes in 1968 and escalated into a full scale conflict that some would go so far as to call a civil war. Up to the end of 1992, over 3, 000 people died as a result of what are euphemistically called the ‘Troubles’. 34, 159 people were shot in the same period, 15, 202 people were charged with terrorist offences and 14, 371 bombs were planted.(Ibid., 24-283). These statistics are extremely high when one considers that the population of Northern Ireland is only 1.5 million people.

The Northern Irish Conflict had its genesis at a time when television sets were becoming a standard feature in most homes in the Developed World. As a result the media attention that it received was substantial. There has been considerable awareness of the importance of this media attention, and the British Government has striven to deprive the republican movement of “the oxygen of publicity”(Miller, 1194,36) in its quest to



reinforce the legitimacy of the state. The British Government considers the introduction of Direct Rule in 1972 as having solved the problem of civil rights infringements, and so now defines “any subsequent manifestations of unrest....as initiating from ‘extremists’”(Ibid., 7). The British State and its security forces (RUC and British Army) are seen as attempting to oppose the threat from such ‘extremists’ and keep the peace between ‘warring factions’(Ibid., 8). However there are some alternative viewpoints that place the British Government in the midst of the conflict. These views are held by Southern Irish politicians, the SDLP, some British politicians and a minority within the British Media.(Ibid., op. cit.). The articulation of these differing views has resulted in the conflict being termed by many as a ‘propaganda war’(Miller, 1994, 12). The dispute over which is the more accurate description of the ‘Troubles’ has led to a ‘battle for hearts and minds’(Ibid., op cit.). The representation Northern Ireland in the Media is important therefore as it is the site in which this battle is fought.

### **Why the Print Media ?**

The majority of the British Media operate within the State version of events and are in fact quite restricted due to various censorship strategies. These include the Official

Secrets Act, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Emergency Provisions Act and the Broadcasting Act (affecting only radio and television)(Miller, 1994, 30). The Official Secrets Act (last revised in 1989) is primarily a defence against spying, but also can be used against media institutions. The 1989 revision makes it illegal for any member of the security forces, past or present to disclose any information about their employment to the media. Media personnel who publish such information, suspecting it to be obtained without permission, can also be prosecuted. The act contains no condition for the disclosure of information in the public interest (Ibid. op cit.). The Defence Press and Broadcasting Committee is linked to this system, and can issue its 'D' notices on material too sensitive to be reported. However, material cleared by this committee can still be deemed illegal and clearance is not a prevention against prosecution (Ibid., 31). The Emergency Provisions Act (Northern Ireland), 1989 prevents the collection of information, which may be of use to terrorists and covers media activity. The Prevention of Terrorism Act came into force after the Birmingham bombings of 1974 and was amended in 1976. This makes it illegal to withhold information about future acts of terrorism, or about people involved in terrorism (Ibid. op cit.). The Broadcasting Ban came into effect in 1988 and required media organisations to

“refrain from broadcasting direct statements by representatives of organisations proscribed in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and by representatives of Sinn Féin, Republican Sinn Féin and the Ulster Defence Association. (It will) also prohibit the broadcasting of statements by any person, which support or invite support for these organisations”(Douglas Hurd, Home Secretary, 19/10/1988, in Rolston, 1991, 48).

The Broadcasting ban has resulted in the strange scenario of the words spoken by members of these banned organisations being dubbed over by actors. There has also been some uncertainty regarding whether the ban covered persons in their capacity as Parliamentary representatives. In these cases the media institutions have tended to err on the side of caution (Miller, 1994, 56). The Ban has been applied to items as diverse as a song by Irish group ‘The Pogues’(Nov. 1988), *Star Trek* (Oct. 1990) and *Eastenders* (Oct. 1992) (Curtis and Jempson, 1993).

There have also been a number of self censorship strategies used by media Personnel, specifically the broadcast media. Most prominent among these is the ‘Reference- Upwards’ system. This describes the practice employed by the BBC, concerning any programmes on Northern Ireland, whereby media personnel have to ‘refer up’ to management on all stages of the production process. This originated in the early 1970s

when BBC coverage of the 'Troubles' attracted much criticism from politicians. In reply to this criticism the BBC formulated guidelines to prevent against further criticism (Curtis, 1984, 173). The guidelines insisted that all programme matter on the Conflict and on Northern Ireland in general be 'referred up' to management, including the Northern Ireland controller. This also covers artistic material, including dramas and even songs (Ibid., 177). Both BBC and ITV also have regulations regarding interviews with paramilitaries, however these usually apply in practice to republican groups (Ibid., 178).

Media material on Northern Ireland also has to be 'internally balanced'. This especially applies to material containing the views of Republican views or criticism of the British Security Forces. In practice, this means that any material that is hostile to the British side has to be balanced by the opposite view, within the same programme. Linked to this requirement is the practice of 'hostile interviewing' whereby parties or individuals who are opposed to the British State have to be treated in a hostile manner, if they are being interviewed. This usually takes the form of aggressive questioning or frequent interruptions (Ibid., 181).

As is evident from the above material, the British broadcast media are very heavily regulated both by the State and through their own internal structures. However the

British Press is very different, with the idea of Press freedom being a very old and valued one. However, despite the freedom of the Press, a very strange phenomenon occurs concerning the coverage of Northern Ireland. The Press in Britain seems much less likely to question the official State line with regard to Northern Ireland, although to do so would leave it facing few repercussions. The broadcast media with all the rules that entangle it, is much more likely to place the official version of events in Northern Ireland under scrutiny. This is all the more reason to analyse the Press material on issues in Northern Ireland, rather than broadcast coverage.

### **Why Lee Clegg ?**

The Lee Clegg case was one that caused a huge amount of debate in Britain and Ireland in the first half of the 1990s. The incident that led to this debate occurred on September 1990, in Belfast. A stolen car with three teenage passengers drove through a British Parachute Regiment 'roadblock' in west Belfast. The Paratroopers fired at the car and killed two of its occupants - 17 year old Martin Peake and 18 year old Karen Reilly. Peake was a convicted joyrider. The incident was steeped in controversy with Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, who was the West Belfast MP, claiming that the army followed a

'shoot-to-kill' policy (Bew and Gillespie, 1993, 238). In June 1993, Private Lee Clegg was found to have used excessive force in firing at the car when it was no longer a danger, and was thus convicted of the murder of Karen Reilly, and sentenced to life imprisonment. One of Private Clegg's colleague Private Aindrow was sentenced to 12 years in prison for the attempted murder of Martin Peake and for perverting the course of justice (Bew and Gillespie, 1993, 238-9). Lee Clegg's case received much attention and he was the subject of a strenuous release campaign that was widely publicised in the national newspapers. Clegg's case was put before the House of Lords in January 1995 but he was not granted early release. However, in late June of that year, the then Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew took the decision to release Clegg, after serving only two years of his sentence. The newspaper coverage of Lee Clegg and his conviction was very limited in its nature. Most journalists, especially those writing for the tabloid newspapers, presented the case in terms of his position as a husband, father, and defender of his country in a place portrayed as being beyond the pale of rationality. Some journalists in the broadsheet newspapers, however, were somewhat more responsible in their coverage of the case and questioned the British State's actions with relation to Clegg and his premature release.

Clegg's case is interesting because of the strength of feeling that it created and its parallels with the cases of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six. These cases however were not dealt with as efficiently as Private Clegg's, nor did they receive the same amount of media support.

The aim of this study is to examine the British Media coverage of the main events in the Clegg case, and assess whether it is biased towards the British States interpretation of the conflict.

The following chapter contains a brief description of the research method used and will outline the sources that were consulted. In Chapter 3, I will present a brief overview of the literature already written concerning the British Media coverage of the 'Troubles', with specific reference to the Print Media. The theories of media effect are reviewed in Chapter 4, which will also present a number of studies that have been undertaken to prove the existence of such effects. The following four chapters will outline the findings of the study. These are discussed in terms of a number of themes that emerged in the analysis of the sources. In the final chapter, the results will be discussed briefly and the conclusions will be presented.

# Methodology



The methodology used in this study is content analysis. This research method is based on the premise that the intention of the communicator is evident in the material that they produce. Content analysis can be defined as

“..a methodology by which the researcher seeks to determine the manifest content of written, spoken, or published communications”(Zito, in Asa, 1991, 25).

Therefore we can assume that the content of British press coverage of the Lee Clegg case, will illustrate the views and biases of the writer. This becomes important when one considers that individuals take their world views from mediated material.

“men (sic) live in second-hand worlds... The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received by others. Everyone lives in a world of such meanings..”(Wright-Mills, in Negrine, 1994, 3).

The ideal would be that all material would be objective, and merely present facts to the receiver. However all communication, because it is produced by individuals, with their own unique world view, must be subjective. Nevertheless there can be a certain degree of responsibility exercised by communicators, whereby they attempt to present their subject matter detached from biases. The aim of this study is to examine the ways in which such biases, if they exist are presented in the coverage of the Lee Clegg case by

the British Press. This method of analysis is very suitable for such an aim as it is an unobtrusive method. This is important as the physical presence of a researcher can, and usually does, affect the results. Individuals act differently if they suspect that they are being observed (Asa, 1994, 28-29). Thus content analysts can assume that the material under scrutiny has not been altered due to the presence of the researcher. However, the presence of the researcher still needs to be taken into account in content analysis. The researcher, after all, selects the material to be analysed and picks the elements that *they* see as important, in the material. This introduces a certain amount of subjectivity to the research.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to discuss what is defined as 'bias' in the context of this study. 'Bias' is defined as "a mental tendency, especially towards prejudice" (Collins English Dictionary, 1991, 50). The term 'bias' as put forward in this study incorporates this definition and includes in it any material intending to promote a particular opinion (positive or negative) about any group, place or individual, in the receiver. The presence of bias will be assessed in relation to the themes that emerge in the analysis of the material, and so will be qualitative in nature.

The newspapers that will be analysed are those on wide circulation in Britain, and are specifically those issues for sale in Britain. They include *The Mail on Sunday*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Express*, *The Daily Express*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Sun*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. It is important to analyse the issues for British circulation, simply because news is often presented very differently in regional issues of the same newspaper. This is frequently for economic reasons, as readers in different areas may have different views, and so newspapers cater for this diversity. This is illustrated clearly by David Miller who compares the Dublin and London versions of the same story in a popular tabloid newspaper (Miller, 1994, 24-25). The story concerned the shooting dead of three would-be thieves by undercover British soldiers. The London issue was very much in accordance with the British State line, but the Dublin issue was quite critical of the security forces.

The volume of material about Lee Clegg is considerable, and so, in order to make the study viable, it was necessary to confine it somewhat. Therefore the material chosen is

that written about the main events in the case i.e. the incident in 1990(in retrospect), Clegg's appeal to the House of Lords, the decision to free him, and his actual release.

It is also important to acknowledge that this study cannot be completely objective, as it is also mediated material. The very fact that the information was selected and edited, means that it can not be as impartial as I would wish it to be. However, it is important to state that I attempt to hold no sympathies towards either 'side' of the Northern Irish conflict, although it is difficult to know whether such a position can exist, given that all citizens of Ireland, north and south, are culturally conditioned to have a certain opinion on the conflict. Nevertheless, my loyalties lie with the responsible reporting of information and in many cases an in-depth analysis is not necessary to see that the biases of the communicators of the material in question, are often thinly veiled.

# Theories of Media Effect

The premise behind this study is that the media has effects. There would be little point in discussing the British Media coverage of Northern Ireland, unless this was the case. However, there have been a number of different theories of effect put forward by sociologists, and it is necessary to briefly examine these, before attempting to conclude the extent of media effect.

The first real concern with the 'power' of the mass media came in the 1930s with the rise of Nazi Germany (Curran and Seaton, 1985, 53). When the Nazi regime became powerful in the early 1930s, a number of German Marxist intellectuals, later termed the 'Frankfurt School', took a considerable interest in explaining the popularity of the regime. The Frankfurt School was founded as the Institute for Social Research in 1923. It became what is nowadays recognised as the Frankfurt School, in 1930 with the appointment of Max Horkheimer as its director. The institute, under his direction attracted many German Jewish intellectuals such as Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse. The Institute relocated in Geneva in 1933, and then in New York in 1935, as a result of the anti-Semitic and anti-liberal beliefs of the Nazi regime (Waters, 1994, 188). The context in which the Frankfurt School emerged led to an interest, among its writers, in the rise of fascism. They believed that the family structure was responsible for the

development of a personality such as Hitler's but saw the mass media as being very important in spreading fascist beliefs. The Frankfurt writers' relocation in the United States was not a happy one and their disillusionment with what they saw as a destruction of superior European cultures by American mass culture, led to much criticism of the mass media (Curran and Seaton, 1985, 254). They saw the spread of mass culture as rendering a population susceptible to fascist ideologies, through an emphasis on the "cult of leadership" and on the idea of an "external threat"(Waters, 1994, 190). They saw the media message as one of obedience to authority and as a mechanism to control the public in the interests of capital (Curran and Seaton, 1985, 259, 261). These observations were not based on any scientific studies, but on observations of the popularity of the press, cinema and radio, and on the fact that the majority of citizens were exposed to some cultural products (McQuail, 1977, 72).

This view became obsolete in the early 1940s when mass communication research in the United States became more substantial, and researchers approached specific questions about media effects in a more empirical manner (*Ibid.*, op cit.). This trend lasted until the early 1960s and produced an influential body of research. The power of the media that the Frankfurt writers had talked about, seemed to be disproved. The various surveys

conducted, proved that the media had a minimal influence on people, and citizens had not become isolated and individualistic, in the midst of a mass society (Curran and Seaton, 1985, 261)

The subject of effect entered a new phase in the early 1960s, a phase that is still in existence. At this time, televisions were becoming a feature in many homes, and researchers felt that its influence was greater than the media already in existence. The change also came about due to various criticisms of the methods used by the 'no-effects' theorists. The definition of the word 'effect' was previously quite limited and presumed to be uniform. Only short term effects were considered, and researchers took no account of the diversity of social background and values that existed among populations (Curran and Seaton, 1985, 261; McQuail, 1977, 74). The research in the present phase has produced a number of different perspectives. Some theorists have discussed the idea of 'persuasibility' (Janis and Hovland, 1959 in McQuail, op cit.). This idea centres on the effect being dependent on factors such as the prestige of the source or the importance of the message for the receiver. It also considers the attitudes of the receiver towards the source (Ibid., op cit.). Kelman (1961) builds on this idea and puts forward the idea that the receiver accepts the message in anticipation of reward, or because it corresponds to



their pre-existing values (Ibid., 75). Katz (1960) agrees with the importance of the receivers wishes and needs, advocating it instead of two previous models of explanation. These place the individual as either susceptible to any mediated suggestion, or as completely calculating and rational (Ibid., op cit.). Such social- psychological theories were replaced by a more sociological approach in the 1970s. DeFleur (1970) pays more attention to the social strata of receivers, and to the complexity of media messages, which he believed made people more likely to respond to them in different ways (Ibid., 76). DeFleur, however, still displays the trappings of the social-psychological approach, and is thus slightly limited. McQuail cites Seymour-Ure as having put forward a more credible framework than previous researchers. He stresses the importance of the composition and form of the mass medium and its activity, not necessarily for large scale effects but in relation to the effect on the individual (Ibid., 77). Seymour-Ure claims that changes due to the media can vary considerably. The media may cause things to happen or may merely contribute, as a catalyst, to different processes (Seymour-Ure, 1974 in Negrine, 1994, 7).

Golding (1981) put forward the idea of an inter relation between intended and unintended effects, and long-term and short-term effects, which acknowledges that

effects are diverse. Golding believed that distinctions such as these were necessary and classified the results of the intersection between them (in brief) as follows :

- deliberate short term effect is bias
- non-deliberate short term effect is unwitting bias
- deliberate long term effect is policy
- non-deliberate long term effect is ideology

One of the more talked about effect of the mass media is what is called the 'agenda setting function' (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 1). The main point behind this theory is that the media

“may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling (people) what to think about”(Cohen, in *Ibid.*, 2).

McCombs and Shaw propose that the media inform us of what is important in society.

This is true because as individuals, we can experience only a small number of events first hand, and so have no choice but to rely on the media to inform us of the wider world (Negrine, 1994, 3). Because those media select and edit events, they interpret for us the way that we should see things (*Ibid.*, *op cit.*). McCombs and Shaw set out to prove the

existence of this agenda setting tendency through their examination of the 1968 U.S. Presidential election campaign. They studied in particular those voters who had not chosen a candidate to vote for. In the course of their study they found that the media was very influential on

“ voters’ judgement of what they considered the major issues of the campaign...In short, the data suggests a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media.” (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, 5).

McCombs and Shaw therefore illustrate in their findings that the media does have a definite effect.

With particular reference to the media and Northern Ireland, David Miller conducted a study to attempt to measure the effects of the media, over a two year period between 1988 and 1990 (Miller, 1994, 202-245). Miller studied two groups of people, one considered to have specialist knowledge of Northern Ireland and were living there, and one not necessarily considered to have this, who lived in England or Scotland. The groups were diverse with regard to age, gender, ethnicity, but were sub-divided into smaller more homogenous groups. The respondents were asked to construct news bulletins about Northern Ireland having been given only photographic stills from the

television news. The news stories were to concern the Gibraltar killings. (This incident happened in 1988, and involved the shooting dead of three unarmed IRA members in Gibraltar, by the SAS. Initial media reports claimed that the IRA members had planted a huge bomb in the Territory, and that they were shot by police officers because they were armed and about to shoot. The incident and its aftermath are explored in more detail in the following chapter.) The respondents were also asked about their views of Northern Ireland, and whether they would visit it. The study was quite long and complex but an interesting point to note was the findings on Gibraltar. Many of the groups had initially thought that they could not remember the shootings. However, following some thought and discussion on the subject, the groups remembered a considerable amount of information about the killings (Miller, 1994, 238). The story that most people believed was the original false one concerning the existence of a bomb, and claiming that the IRA members were armed. A large number of respondents had some recollection of Carmen Proetta being a prostitute, or of dubious credibility.(Proetta was a witness in the Gibraltar Inquest, and claimed that the IRA members had been surrendering when they were shot.) These stories were widely circulated by the Press, but were retracted as a result of legal action on Proetta's part. The damage appeared to have been done,

however. Concerning the portrayal of Northern Ireland as a mainly violent place, many people (of the English and Scottish groups) rejected this image and were aware that any violence was confined to certain areas as opposed to being rampant (Ibid., 239-242).

The people who rejected the media image completely, and saw Northern Ireland as being a mostly peaceful place, were however more hesitant about visiting the North, with a majority saying that they would not go. Of the 22 people who said that they believed that Northern Ireland was mostly violent, 17 said that the media were their only source of information. Of the 60 people who said that they would not visit Northern Ireland, 31 said that the media was their only source of information, and 15 said that the media and one other source gave them their information. Of the 77 people who said that they thought that Northern Ireland was mostly peaceful, only 11 used the media alone for their information, and 22 used the media and another source.

Miller concludes that people accepted Northern Ireland as being violent because of the media image that it holds (Ibid., 242). People that rejected the violent image of the North did so as a result of their visits to Northern Ireland or as a result of accounts from family or friends who had visited.

This brief look at Miller's study shows that there are indeed effects resulting from media coverage. As he illustrates, the people who had a more balanced view of the Northern Irish situation relied only to a small extent on the media alone for their information. However, it is also necessary to avoid over generalising about the impact of the media. People are extremely diverse and so we cannot assume that media messages strike all members of the population equally. The existence of different backgrounds, interests, standards of education and personalities means that media messages will not act as "magic bullets" and strike everyone equally (Asa, 1991, 30). Social groupings like family, religion, peer group and community are crucial in forming attitudes on life, and so it is necessary to avoid over estimating the effect (Chubb, 1992, 55). To do this renders the receiver passive and does not account for factors such as selective exposure (people are not exposed to every media item), selective perception (the tendency to interpret media material in a way supportive of the receivers own views) and selective retention and recall (the propensity to recall selected items) (Howitt, 1982, 22-23). This study acknowledges that effects cannot be applied to all people, in a uniform way, yet it is apparent from the evidence of researchers that the media does have certain effects.

Because of this, the producers of mediated products have an obligation to act with a degree of responsibility in their portrayal of items such as the Northern Irish conflict.

# Review of Coverage of Northern Ireland



The British Media coverage of the Northern Irish conflict has been the object of much criticism in the past. To assess whether attitudes have changed towards the groups involved in the 'Troubles', it is firstly necessary to review some of the past representations, and then compare these with the coverage of the Lee Clegg case.

In the 29 years of the present conflict, it has been difficult to get a complete picture of the events that have occurred, because

“Those in positions of power, both in government and in the media, have proved most reluctant to provide a full picture of events in the North or their context, and have made considerable efforts to prevent journalists, dramatists and film-makers from exploring the situation from any angle other than that favoured by the British establishment.”(Curtis, 1984, 275)

The vast majority of material reported in both the print and broadcast media is made up of a series of images or descriptions which are presented out of context and fail to examine the causes of the conflict (Schlesinger, 1978 in Rolston, (Ed.) 1191, 3). Events are presented in what appears to be a factual manner with details of the persons involved, the location of events and the timing. However, according to Philip Elliot, this is not objective, but misleading. Such accounts make incidents appear random and irrational (Curtis, 1984, 107). Such a strategy makes Northern Ireland out to be an

incomprehensible place. However, some would argue that this is an essential defence against those classed as the State's enemies.

“...a controlled political discourse is an essential part of the liberal-democratic state's fight against its enemies :‘The terms ‘force’ and ‘violence’, are ...like ‘terrorist’ and ‘freedom fighter’, largely emotive propaganda terms which we use about a given act, depending not on the degree of force or violence, but a view of its justification (O'Brien, 1977, in Schlesinger, 1991, 18).

It can be seen therefore that the misrepresentation of the Northern Irish conflict is in the best interests of the British State, given that such a misrepresentation will not question the British presence or actions in Northern Ireland. Rather, the State is portrayed as a benign peacekeeper, battling against extremists.

The actions of the British Media can be seen as especially objectionable concerning the reporting of Republican violence. Violence comprises the majority of the British media coverage of Northern Ireland, with only one third of stories dealing with politics or other subjects (Curtis, 1984, 107). This compares unfavourably with the Irish media who not only carry more material about Northern Ireland, but also pay more attention to political aspects of events.

In the past, the IRA has been accused in the British media of various acts of violence, that were carried out by the British security forces or Loyalist Paramilitaries (Curtis, 1984, 108). This was particularly evident in the early 1980s, when *The Times* journalist Christopher Thomas blamed the IRA for the 2, 094 deaths that had occurred in the 'Troubles' to date. This came in context of the hunger strikes of 1981, when anti republican feeling was running especially high in Britain. The sympathy held by Republicans for the dead hunger strikers was abhorred by the British Media(Ibid., op cit.). The IRA was also held responsible, in the Press, for a number of incidents in which they had no involvement. These include a car bomb in London in 1978, in which the car was eventually found to have contained two Syrian nationals who were carrying the bomb themselves(Curtis, 1984, 109). Bombs or attacks in Britain are the events that receive the most publicity in the British media. In the aftermath of the 1974 Guildford pub bombings, the coverage centred on the bombings although almost twice as many people were killed in the North, as in Guildford, in the same period (Elliot, 1978, in Curtis, 1984, 110).

The British Media pays particular attention to the human interest elements of stories.

This will be discussed in more detail, concerning Lee Clegg in Chapter . However, it is

interesting to note briefly here the way in which the media give much more detail when reporting about the victims of Republican violence. These individuals are much more likely to be named, whereas the victims of Loyalist or security forces' attacks receive scant attention. Curtis illustrates this point when she describes the commentary on a BBC

*Tonight* film :

“In January 1972 British Paratroopers shot dead 13 unarmed civilians during a civil rights march in Londonderry. In retaliation the Official IRA bombed the paras' Aldershot headquarters. The explosion killed five women canteen workers, a gardener and a Catholic padre”(Campaign for free speech in Ireland, 1979, in Curtis, 1984, 111)

This human interest fascination reached absurd proportions in 1982 when a horse became the centre of attention. The horse, named Sefton, had been injured in an IRA bomb that killed 12 soldiers, and became for the Press a symbol of civilisation versus evil (Curtis, 1984, 115).

Liz Curtis also describes the way in which the Republican movement was the subject of some news stories that could be described as nothing more than fantasy. In the early 1970s, many of the British newspapers featured stories about the IRA recruiting children, to riot and kill. One of these concerned an eight year old girl who was supposedly used

to push a pram containing a bomb, towards a military post in Belfast. This was false, and was admitted as such, by the Army Press Office (Ibid., 116). Another such fantasy concerned a 'Czech assassin', hired by the IRA, who was supposedly shot by British troops. This was part of a long running trend that linked the Republican movement to international communist organisations and with the former Soviet Union (Miller, 1994, 7). This story was found to be false, and had been circulating in various forms, for over a year. One particular story that emerged in the mid 1970s, and which had tragic consequences was what Curtis terms 'The Margaret McKearney saga'. This originated after a number of bombs exploded in London. The British police issued a picture of Margaret McKearney, in the aftermath of the bombs, claiming she was "the most dangerous and active woman terrorist" in Britain (Curtis, 1984, 119). This was a huge story in the British Press and Margaret McKearney was described in various articles as 'Terror Girl', 'Danger Woman', 'Death Courier' and 'The Most Evil Girl in Britain'. Margaret McKearney was in Ireland when her alleged crimes were committed. As a result of this media notoriety Margaret McKearney and her family were threatened by Loyalist paramilitaries, and had to receive police protection. Two members of a different McKearney family from the same area were shot dead shortly after this, presumably

thought connected to her. This illustrates some of the more sinister results of the Media's hounding of people thought involved in crimes in Britain.

However, it is important to acknowledge that all is not lost regarding the British media coverage of the Northern Irish conflict. There have been a number of reasons to be hopeful, especially concerning the broadcast media, who have set out at times, to challenge the state interpretation of events, and hold the Security Forces responsible for their actions. This was especially evident in the mid to late 1980s when two programmes caused great controversy within media and Government circles. These were *Real Lives* (1985) and *Death on the Rock* (1988). The debate over the *Real Lives* programme is explained in more detail in Chapter 5, and so it is not necessary to go into great detail about it in this section. In brief, the controversy over this programme, centred on an interview with Sinn Féin member Martin McGuinness. The BBC governors, with the support of a number of MPs banned the programme, and as a consequence, a journalists' strike was held on the night that it was originally scheduled for broadcast. This strike crippled the day's news broadcasts and put the BBC World Service off the air (Miller, 1994, 35-36). The case of *Death on the Rock* was more successful from the point of



view that it was broadcast on the scheduled night. *Death on the Rock* concerned the Gibraltar killings of March 6, 1988. Three IRA members, Mairéad Farrell, Danny McCann and Seán Savage were shot dead in the British territory of Gibraltar. According to initial police and media reports they had planted a huge bomb and were killed by plain clothed police officers, after a gun battle. In actual fact, they were shot by the SAS, and not the police, there was no bomb and they were unarmed at the time of their death (Miller, 1991,69). The Thames Television Company mounted an investigation into the shootings. The Government requested that the IBA postpone any resulting programme until after the inquest on the shootings, which was to be held in Gibraltar. The IBA refused to do so despite the Government opposition to the proposed programme. The then Northern Ireland Secretary, Tom King went so far as to describe it as 'trial by television' and the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher described such 'trial by television' as the death of freedom (Ibid., 72). The programme makers insisted that the programme was very critical of the IRA and its tactics and stressed the catastrophic results that any bomb would have resulted in (Ibid., 72-73). The controversy over *Death on the Rock* continued with a *Sunday Times* article reporting that the programme was inaccurate. However after proof to the contrary the *Sunday Times* admitted that it had been in the

wrong, but not until eight months after the article was published. The Sunday Times interest in the programme has been interpreted by some as being the result of the editor of the newspaper being appointed as an executive chairperson to BSkyB (Ibid., 75). BSkyB's owner Rupert Murdoch was considered by some to have strong connections with Margaret Thatcher (Kiernan, 1986 in Miller, op cit.). However, despite Government and other interference, *Death on the Rock* went ahead and proved that journalistic integrity still exists in some quarters, on the subject of Northern Ireland.

However, the Press coverage of Gibraltar, left a lot to be desired. An eyewitness, Carmen Proetta, had told *Death on the Rock*, that Mairéad Farrell and Danny McCann, had had their hands up in surrender when they were shot. The British newspapers began a campaign against Proetta, the day after the programme was shown (Miller, 1991,87).

The articles written by various newspapers told of her husband's prison record and their support of Spanish claims to Gibraltar. She was also described in a number of newspapers as the director of an escort agency. The Sun was particularly vociferous on this subject with its headline of April 30, 1988 "The Tart of Gib" (Ibid., op cit.). All these allegations were false and as a result of judicial action, six national papers apologised and paid damages to Proetta. At the inquest on the shootings Proetta was



also described in derogatory terms. She was described in terms of the clothes that she wore with particular reference to her “split skirt”( *Telegraph*) and her “black stiletto heels”( *Daily Mail*), which were quite irrelevant to her evidence (Ibid., 92). The Gibraltar shootings were indicative therefore of both good and bad elements in the British Media. The makers of *Death on the Rock*, and indeed those journalists who went on strike in protest at Government interference in the *Real Lives* programme, demonstrated that there is a more responsible attitude among some media personnel, concerning Northern Ireland. However the Press despite their lack of restrictions, have been in almost total support of the British Government. It will be interesting to examine whether this trend still exists regarding their coverage of the Lee Clegg case, and if so to what extent.

# Human Interest Stories in the Press

A feature of British media coverage of the conflict in Northern Ireland is the tendency to report incidents in terms of human interest,

“ concentrating on the experience of individuals rather than of groups or classes, and dramatising the single event rather than looking at the background ”

( Curtis,1984 : 10)

This is a component of the wider tendency to decontextualise events and deny them a political character. This leaning towards the reporting of human interest aspects of stories was manifested in the coverage of the deaths of Lord Louis Mountbatten and Grenadier Captain Robert Nairac in the late 1970s.

Lord Mountbatten's death on August 27<sup>th</sup> 1979, received enormous coverage; much more than the combined coverage that was given to the deaths of the 20 other IRA victims killed on the same day ( Mountbatten's grandson, their boatman and 18 soldiers bombed in Warrenpoint, Co. Down ). Mountbatten's funeral received extensive coverage which had 'strong ritual overtones' as he was seen as "symbolising goodness, civilisation and the British nation at its mythic best " ( Curtis 1984, 112 ).

Mountbatten was highly respected for being a soldier, a hero, a noble, a statesman and a family man. The controversies that emerged throughout his career were ignored and *The Observer* went as far as to say that

“ the touch of hubris in his nature was combined with so many glorious qualities that even the gods should forgive him ” ( *The Observer*, 2/9/1979 )

Captain Nairac was kidnapped and killed by the IRA while working under cover with the SAS in Armagh in 1977. Nairac became overnight the ultimate hero who was ‘executed ’ and so sacrificed his life for his country. *The Daily Mail* described Captain Nairac as

“ a genuine hero straight out of the pages of the Boy’s Own paper ...tough, intelligent, always anxious to be at the centre of the action ”( *The Daily Mail*,17/5/1977 )

The focus taken by the British Media in reporting Nairac’s death was one“ which interprets the British Army presence and fighting in Northern Ireland as unquestionably legitimate ” ( Webster,1980, in Curtis, 1984, 113)

Webster goes on to suggest that an alternative perspective could see Britain’s position in

Northern Ireland as colonial, could highlight Nairac's membership of the SAS and could stress his background as an indication of the British Army's class prejudices. (Ibid.)

This emphasis on human interest stories as exemplified in the above mentioned cases is an element of the Official Discourse on terrorism which

“ emanates from within the state and is further elaborated by intellectuals engaged in the propaganda war against ‘terrorism’ ” (Elliot et al., 1983 : 265 )

The Official Discourse and its human interest aspect can be seen to still exist in British Media coverage of the Northern Irish conflict, 20 years after the events described previously. In those 20 years little has changed, as can be seen through the examination of the coverage of Lee Clegg's imprisonment and release in the British Newspapers. Clegg's wife and child and his parents are the constant focus of the vast majority of the material that appears in the British Press.

*The Daily Mail* of January 22, 1995 contained an article on page 1 entitled **“Our broken marriage, by wife of jailed para”**, written by Suzanne O'Shea. In this, Amanda Clegg

describes how her marriage and hopes have been destroyed by her husband's imprisonment. She describes Clegg as sensitive, unbiased and devastated at killing Karen Reilly. Amanda Clegg also describes her struggle to survive on income support, and her lack of money to spend on visiting her husband in Wakefield Prison. She mentions her son Joshua and her pain at wondering what might have been.

This article succeeds quite well at attempting to evoke sympathy for Clegg and his family. This is achieved especially through his wife's references to the loss of her marriage. She says "All I ever wanted was a loving husband and a happy family life. I thought I had found it when I met Lee. We had all sorts of plans for our life together, but they will never come to anything now because of a mistake that happened in a few seconds."(Par.3)

This article is typical of the human interest format as it dramatises Clegg's personal experiences and those of his family. It does not explain the background to the shooting, and so, has no hope of ever questioning Clegg's presence in Northern Ireland.

Lee Clegg's son Joshua has been featured in many articles in the media campaign to free his father. *The Daily Mail* of January 24, 1995 contains an article, again by Suzanne O'Shea,

entitled **Wish you could be here too Daddy**, which describes Joshua Clegg's third birthday party which was celebrated in his father's absence. The article seizes on the fact that the child's father is absent :

“ (his mother) asked him if he was going to make a wish, but he didn't understand. If he did, there is no doubt what it would have been - to have Daddy there beside him.” (Par. 2)

Such coverage attempts to create, in the reader, sympathy for Joshua Clegg, and so blur the facts behind his father's imprisonment. O'Shea describes how Joshua asked to speak to his father on a photographers mobile phone and also relates Clegg's message on his son's birthday card : “ To a very dear and wonderful son, Joshua, I long to see you again. I miss you and love you so much. All my love forever, Love you, Daddy ” (Par.5)

*The Daily Mirror* article of the same date treats of Joshua Clegg's birthday also and is written by Joe Gorrod. It is entitled **An unhappy birthday for Para's boy**. Gorrod tells readers :

“ he (Joshua) wasn't even born when para private Lee Clegg opened fire on what he thought was a terrorist car and ended up with a life sentence for the murder of Belfast teenager Karen Reilly ” (Par.1). This brings out the fact that Joshua Clegg is suffering because of an event that happened even before he was born. This again takes the focus away from the fact that

his father was imprisoned for murdering an innocent woman.

*The Daily Express* and *The Sun* of March 9, 1995 both cover the visit received by Clegg from his wife and son. The Express article was written by Kathryn Lister and entitled **“Joshua gave his daddy a big hug and we wept” - jailed para Lee Clegg has emotional visit from wife and son.**

The article attempts immediately through its headline to evoke sympathy for Clegg. The main idea behind the article is again that Joshua Clegg is an innocent victim of the case. He adores his father despite the fact that he is in prison, the implication being perhaps that he should not be in prison. The article opens with :

Bouncing with joy, jailed paratrooper Lee Clegg’s most loyal supporter proudly came to visit him yesterday ” (Par.1)

Lister goes on to say that “it was the first time the curly- haired three-year-old has met his father Lee since an appeal to release the paratrooper failed in January ”(Par.4)

This style of writing gives the reader a mental picture of Joshua Clegg and thus is inclined to evoke sympathy. This is also true of such phrases as “Joshua grinned and skipped along...” (Par.6) and “...he ran straight to his daddy and gave him a big hug.” (Par.7)



In this article Amanda Clegg tells again of her shattered hopes :

“All I ever wanted was a loving husband and a happy family life. I thought I had found it when I met Lee. We had all sorts of plans for our life together, but they will never come to anything now because of a mistake that happened in a few seconds.” (Par.22)

This statement is remarkably similar to the one that she gave on January 22, 1995, to *The Daily Mail*. *The Sun*'s article of the same date is written by Antonella Lazzeri, and is entitled **“Excuse me Mr. Policeman...why can't my daddy come home with me ?” - Plea by jailed Lee's son**. This headline evokes the idea of Joshua Clegg's lack of understanding of his father's situation. He is again portrayed as the innocent party in the entire affair. The article describes Clegg's pain at not being able to play with his son and depicts him as a sensitive family man :

“He burst into tears as tiny Josh sat on a rocking horse, and pleaded ‘come and play with me Daddy’” (Par.9)

Lee scooped Josh up in his arms. He was crying because he was so happy to be able to cuddle his son. ”(Par.14)

This emphasis on Clegg's sensitivity, is perhaps to imply that a man like this could not have

deliberately killed Karen Reilly.

The coverage of the day of Clegg's release was also presented by a number of newspapers in terms of his son's joy and his own opportunity to be a father. *The Daily Mirror* of that date contains an article written by Patrick Mulchrome and Jeremy Armstrong entitled **Chaos hits Ulster as Para Clegg walks free after 1430 days... 'I'm off to see my dad'**. The article also has two sub headings, **Now he can be a real dad** and **Tears and fury over Trooper**.

The reunion between Clegg and his family is prominent here - of 30 paragraphs here, three deal with the reaction to the release, three describe the appeal process, two describe the reason why he was jailed and one the broader context of the Tory leadership contest. Joshua Clegg is the main focus :

“ ..(he) proudly declared : ‘ I'm off to see my dad ’ ” (Par.1)

“ ..a tearful reunion with the father he has never seen outside prison walls..” (Par.2)

“ ‘my daddy's out ’ screamed Joshua as his mum broke the news ” (Par.5)

“Joshua just went mad-he was turning somersaults. At last Lee can become a real dad.”

(Par.21)

The sub article **Now he can be a real dad** continues in the same way :

“ Amanda said ‘I’ve longed for the day when Lee would be able to do all the normal things a father does - take Josh to the park and play in the sunshine’ ”(Par.2)

*The Sun’s* article **COME HOME DADDY** of the same day also concentrates on Joshua

Clegg :

“ The tough squaddie burst into tears when little Joshua leapt into his arms shouting ‘Daddy, Daddy, you can come home now!’ ”(Par.2)

“... Amanda wept as she described the moment the blond youngster hugged his father for the first time as a free man ”(Par.3)

“ Josh was ecstatic..he belted across the room and threw himself into his arms, crying ‘Daddy, Daddy, I love you ’ ”(Par.5)

Lee Clegg’s portrayal as a devoted father has the effect of distracting from any questions that the article could have asked about the validity of his release, which occurred so early in his sentence.

The human interest aspect is also covered with regard to Clegg’s mother. Wynne Johnson receives a considerable amount of coverage, a practise which again attempts to create a

sympathy for Clegg's family and obscures the reasons behind his sentence. Sean Rayment's article : **Million sign up for Clegg** in *The Daily Mail* of January 27, 1995 describes Wynne Johnson's delivery of a petition containing a million signatures, to Downing Street.

“ Lee's mother Wynne Johnson, 51, said she was ‘overwhelmed’ by the response to her son's plight” (Par.7)

“as she prepared to leave, a police officer outside took her hand and said ‘please tell your son that all the officers on duty at Downing Street wish him all the best of luck ’”(Par.8)

Clegg's mother is also featured in *The Sun* article of February 14, 1995, which is entitled **Army chop will break my boy Lee**. Chris Pharo describes how :

“The mum of jailed paratrooper Lee Clegg last night begged the Army not to kick out her son, saying ‘ it will break him’ ”(Par.1)

Harry Cooke in *The Daily Mail* of March 13, 1995 heads his article **Mother's tears at Clegg jail parade**. This item treats of a VE Day parade by Army veterans for her son.

“ the mother of paratrooper Lee Clegg yesterday wept outside the jail where he is serving a life sentence ”(Par.1)

“She brushed away tears..” (Par.3)

“ ‘It was so very moving’ said Mrs. Johnson, ‘I never expected anything like this. I was overwhelmed and overjoyed that so many people, who have never even met Lee should support him in this way ’ ”(Par.4)

*The Sunday Express*, in an article by Alistair McQueen, at the end of June 1995, again talks about Clegg’s mother. **Stop my son’s agony pleads Clegg’s mother** describes how Wynne Johnson :

“ pleaded with Sir Patrick Mayhew to end her son’s prison torment ”(Par.1)

She refers to her son as “my boy ”(Par.3) and describes his treatment as “inhuman and disgusting”(Par.4). This article also describes the breakdown of Clegg’s marriage and shows a picture entitled ‘Happier Days’ of Amanda Clegg and her son Joshua.

*The Daily Mail* of July 4, 1995 features Clegg’s release and presents **I thank God for my family’s love** which describes the reunion between Clegg and his mother :

“ the two of them stood with their arms tightly wrapped around each other, oblivious to the Army personnel who surrounded them. It was the most rapturous reunion I have seen and most people wept. But Wynne remained dry-eyed for a long time because she has had to keep her emotions locked up for so long that she is unable to let go”(Par.1-2)

*The Daily Express* of the same date also focuses on Wynne Johnson :

“ Lee Clegg stood silently hugging his mother, Wynne, as tears rolled down their faces...He clung to his mother, patting her gently and murmuring words of comfort.”(Par.2-3)

“White-haired Wynne, trembling with emotion, dabbed at her eyes.”(Par.15)

“ ‘My hopes have been raised so many times, only to be dashed. I can hardly believe it has happened and he’s here’ she said”(Par.19)

*The Daily Mail* of July 5, 1995 contains **Cleggy comes home** by Linda Lee Potter. She writes :

“Yesterday morning Lee Clegg’s mother Wynne and his stepfather Jack went to church in the small Yorkshire town of Richmond. They both knelt down to say a silent prayer of gratitude that Lee could finally restart his life..”(Par.1-2)

Potter describes a celebration in her hotel room the previous night and tells of how :

“Wynne couldn’t sleep and stayed up ‘til nearly dawn talking about the momentous experience of the previous 24 hours”(Par.4)

The language used by Potter create a sympathy for Clegg, his parents and his family :

“ the tears trickled down Wynne’s face”(Par.8)

“..he said ‘We’ve done it Mum’ and it was like as though we hadn’t had all that heartache and torment ”(Par.13)

“They’ve lost too much that can never be regained...” (Par.15)

“Wynne has anguished over so many things during the past few bitter years ”(Par.18)

“ ‘I’m frightened of being relaxed. I’m worried something else is going to happen ’ ”(Par.23)

A strong theme of the human interest coverage of the Lee Clegg case is the sense that he was a British soldier, merely doing his duty, and so should not be in prison. This echoes the coverage of the death of Lord Mountbatten, whose controversies were overlooked because he was seen as a loyal soldier whose sense of duty outweighed his faults. *The Sunday Express* of January 22, 1995 features an article entitled **From Para to scapegoat**. This article states quite strongly that Clegg is not a murderer and dismisses the incident as understandable :

“..(he) fired four bullets to protect a mate at an Ulster roadblock and two car thieves were killed”(Par.2)

The author does not even entertain the possibility that Clegg may have been in the wrong. It discards the House of Lords decision that the fourth shot was illegal as “utter, scandalous

balderdash”(Par.6)

As far as the author is concerned :

“ Lee Clegg (who) was just 21 when he fired ... was just another soldier doing his duty on the streets of Belfast ”(Par.10)

The implication is that Clegg’s age and his position as a soldier doing his duty should excuse his actions.

*The Daily Mail* of January 27, 1995 (**Million sign up for Clegg**) refers to Clegg’s letter to *The Daily Mail* in which he thanks readers for their support. This again Portrays Clegg as having a strong sense of duty to his country :

“ ‘ I will not waver in any way, but will uphold the honour of a professional soldier’ ”(Par.17)

Sean Rayment, when referring to the delegation to Downing Street, also describes three veterans of Arnheim and thus creates a link between Clegg and World War II veterans who are held with considerable esteem. One veteran describes Clegg :

“ ‘He was trained as a lion and was merely carrying out his duty. He did not commit murder.

He was reacting to the way he was trained ’ ”(Par.19)

This strategy is a very interesting one as it creates the link between the Northern Ireland



conflict and World War II, despite the fact that the British State and indeed the British Media do not recognise that the conflict has any political character, least of all that of a war.

*The Daily Mail* of February 9, 1995 features an article by Harry McCallion, an ex Paratrooper entitled **Morality and the men who are trained to kill**. This gives an account of McCallion's training in the Parachute Regiment. He tells us that :

“aggression more than any other quality is prized by Paras ”(Par.2)

He goes on to say that after his six month training period, he wanted :

“nothing more than a rifle, a bayonet and an enemy”(Par.6)

In the course of the training the recruits were :

“made to bellow ‘For the right to kill, we must suffer’ ”(Par.7)

Despite the presentation of the more brutal aspects of the Parachute Regiment, the overwhelming theme of this article is that this brutal training is an excuse for Clegg's actions, as he did what he was trained to see as his duty :

“It was, quite simply brainwashing of the most basic and brutal kind ”(Par.9)

McCallion also writes that, aside from aggression :

“..two other qualities were instilled in us : discipline and comradeship ”(Par.10)

These admirable qualities are intended perhaps to again excuse the aggression that all Paratroopers hold. According to McCallion :

“We would fight and die for one another ”(Par.120

This echoes previous coverage that tells of Clegg firing to protect a colleague. McCallion justifies this as being an intrinsic value of the Parachute Regiment. He admits that they are not best suited to Northern Ireland yet he portrays their actions as being heroic and excusable:

“ the Parachute Regiment has had its own private war with the IRA ... whole areas are seen as hostile...In such emotionally charged circumstances, when a member of a battalion is killed or wounded...they react in the way they have been taught, by attacking their enemy.”(Par.16)

McCallion concludes by saying :

“when paratroopers stray, their actions, while inexcusable, should at least be understandable.”(Par.20)

Again this is intended to create an understanding and a justification of Clegg’s actions.

The previously mentioned *Daily Mail* article of March 13, 1995, by Harry Cooke - **Mother’s tears at Clegg jail parade** also portrays Clegg’s sense of duty and links him to World War II

Veterans :

“(his mother) joined a VE day parade of old soldiers, incensed at her son’s conviction....”(Par.2)

“ ‘He will shut himself in his cell at 8.38 tonight to observe his own two minutes silence. He is very proud of all those who gave their lives defending King and country’ ”(Par.10)

*The Daily Express* of March 14<sup>th</sup> 1995 contains an article by Derek Hornby - **Clegg must stay in jail**. This describes Clegg’s “proud message of defiance”(Par.2). He is quoted as saying :

“ ‘I will not let you, the public, down while we continue the fight for what is right. I am proud to serve you all as a member of Her Majesty’s forces’ ”(Par.8)

*The Sun* of June 6, 1995 describes Clegg’s preparation for freedom in **I’m praying for freedom** by John Kay :

“Jailed Para Lee Clegg dusted off his uniform last night and prayed that he will today walk free wearing it...”(Par.1)

Clegg’s attention to the maintenance of his uniform is frequently mentioned and implies again a proud sense of duty ;

“...his coveted red beret is neatly brushed, his full dress uniform pressed and boots shined.

Proud Lee... has had the uniform in jail since he was sentenced to life”(Par.8-9)

According to the article :

“ He is still a soldier, his dearest wish is to wear it when he is set free”(Par.10)

Again this is intended to instil in the reader, a sense of respect for Clegg’s duty and loyalty to his country.

*The Daily Express* of the same date also describes the same details, in **Clegg prepares his march to freedom**, by Nicholas Assinder and Harry Cooke :

“ ..the khaki Parachute Regiment uniform with the blue and white wings has been carefully pressed. His parade boots have been polished to a sergeant-majors perfection.”(Par.7)

The authors of these article evidently place more importance on the state of Clegg’s boots than on the reasons why he is in prison.

The coverage of Clegg’s release in the newspapers of July 4, 1995 again makes a number of references to his career as a soldier and his sense of duty. *The Times* features an article entitled **Clegg reunited with his family and regiment**, by Paul Wilkinson. *The Times* is a little more subtle than some other newspapers, at portraying Clegg in a glowing light, yet it still does manage to achieve this nonetheless :

“ In a statement handed out by an Army press officer, he expressed delight to be free, and happiness to be returning to his soldierly duties.....He stood ram-rod straight posing for the cameras ”(Par.10)

However *The Times* does suggest the possibility that Clegg may not remain a soldier, which is something that some other newspapers are reluctant to acknowledge :

“He said he hoped to resume his military career. There was no military uniform...”(Par.10)

“The Army Board is expected to decide whether he will remain a soldier, within the next month.”(Par.11)

*The Daily Mail* of the same date, in **I thank God for my family’s love** states that :

“..the tragic times are over. Lee Clegg is no longer a prisoner but a soldier and today he will be back in uniform...”(Par.3)

“Even in beige slacks and a blazer, it was obvious that he is a soldier ”(Par.5)

Clegg’s sense of duty again is mentioned in *The Daily Mail* of July 29, 1995, in an article entitled **Clegg can soldier on** by Sean Rayment. This describes the decision to keep Clegg in the Army, and his joy at the decision :

“Private Lee Clegg was granted his dearest wish yesterday, when Army chiefs told him he could stay in the Parachute Regiment ”(Par.1)

“It means that Private Clegg, who has kept himself extremely fit, could now join the elite P Company, responsible for selecting future Paratroopers ”(Par.3)

The article goes on to discuss the fact that Clegg’s future in the Army was uncertain, but they quote a “military source (who) said ‘For many senior officers this would not have been a difficult decision. It is now accepted that Clegg was only doing his duty.’ ”(Par.6)

We are not told who this ‘military source’ is, or what rank the hold, if any.

The issues concerning Clegg’s family life and his military career are the ones most often referred to by the British Press. Most journalists reported the shooting of Karen Reilly and Martin Peake in terms of Clegg merely doing his duty, and they give little or no coverage to Karen Reilly’s family and their feelings. The emphasis on Clegg’s sense of duty was so great that hardly any of the articles reviewed mention the fact that Clegg’s unit made a model of the shot-out Vauxhall Astra that Peake was driving and displayed it as a trophy in their barracks. The articles give very little background to the imprisonment of Clegg and so have no

possibility of ever questioning the British presence in Northern Ireland. Clegg, like Mountbatten and Nairac is portrayed as a hero and his actions are excused and dismissed as dutiful.

With regard to coverage of the IRA and Sinn Féin, the British Media take quite a different focus, and rarely portray Republicans in terms of their membership of a family, or their sense of duty. This was illustrated most clearly in the *Real Lives* controversy in the late 1980s. This centred around a documentary made by the BBC which was titled 'At the edge of the Union' which was an account of the lives of DUP member Gregory Campbell and Sinn Féin member Martin McGuinness. The programme portrayed McGuinness and Sinn Féin as being legitimate politicians. However, the scene that provoked the biggest reaction was one that showed McGuinness sitting at home with his children.

"To portray McGuinness as a rational human being who lived in many deeply familiar and ordinary ways was beyond the pale of acceptable coverage."(Miller, 1994, 38).

The programme came at a time when issues in Northern Ireland and media coverage in general were at the top of the British Political agenda. Margaret Thatcher (then Prime Minister) was asked by a *Sunday Times* reporter to give her opinion on televising an

interview with the IRA chief of staff. (McGuinness allegedly held this position for a time.)

Thatcher's comments were critical as were those of two BBC governors who were unaware of the programme. The publication of an article about the programme in the *Sunday Times*, led to it being viewed by the governors who then banned it. This resulted in a crippling 24 hour strike by journalists, on the day that the programme was to have been screened.

This situation brings out the sense of awareness held by the British Media and Establishment, of the importance of media strategies such as human interest stories. The portrayal of a Sinn Féin member as a 'family man' was abhorrent and was seen to rationalise the republican movement. Conversely, the Press went to great trouble to depict Lee Clegg in such a light.



Northern Ireland  
'a place apart'

A theme that reappears regularly in the course of the coverage of the Clegg case is that of Northern Ireland being 'a place apart'. The British State and the British media deny the conflict a political character; the paramilitaries are seen merely as being unruly mobs of warring factions. The state is seen as benign and is up against the terrorist who is seen as being

“the polar example of the extremist, a fanatic who lies beyond the pale of the comprehensible rational politics of a liberal democracy” (Elliot et al:266).

The British Press also criticise the Northern Irish justice system and the Northern Ireland Office. There is a real sense, within the coverage, that the Northern Irish system is good enough for its own citizens but not for a British soldier.

*The Daily Mail* of October 19, 1994 prints an article by Sean Rayment, entitled **Alone with his anguish - convicted of murder he fiercely denies, the only soldier in an Ulster jail**. This tells Clegg's version of the events that led to his imprisonment. Rayment's opening paragraph tells the reader that while: “IRA prisoners, who enjoy a host of privileges are allowed to serve out their sentences close to home, Clegg

languishes in Ulster's Maghaberry jail, where he is treated like a common convict"(Par.1).

Rayment seems to be attempting to evoke sympathy in the readers and does not even question the fact that perhaps Clegg could be seen as a common convict. The article attempts to portray Northern Ireland as a 'no-mans-land' that is so abnormal that Clegg's actions can be excused.

"It started as just another tense but routine patrol on the violent streets of Ulster"(Par.2)

"..the intelligence briefing they received...stressed the need for vigilance. Terrorists were operating in the area, they were told"(Par.6).

"..as their armoured vehicles slowly passed through the reinforced steel gates of the heavily-fortified base, they prepared themselves for possible ambush. The threat of rocket attack was always high at this point."(Par.7).

This type of reporting immediately encourages the reader to think of Northern Ireland in terms of the abnormal. The implication is, perhaps that the conditions of supposedly constant threat justify the actions of soldiers. Rayment continues :

" ..They burst out, taking up fire positions in any spot that would offer cover against a sniper."(Par.8).

He describes the approach of Peake's car as follows :

"..he saw a Vauxhall Astra screech to a halt. He watched while another soldier approached it cautiously. Suddenly the engine roared into life and the car sped forward..."(Par.12).

Rayment relays that such incidents were common, but that soldiers had believed that they could fire if life was in danger :

"The charges sent a shiver down the spine of every soldier serving in the province. There had been several instances when soldiers opened fire at cars that had crashed through roadblocks injuring troops in the process."(Par.21).

Rayment is very critical of the fact that Clegg's sentence was to be spent in Northern Ireland:

"Clegg meanwhile is the only soldier serving a sentence in Ulster. He is locked up in the same prison as Brighton bomber Patrick Magee."(Par.31).

*The Sunday Express* article of January 22, 1995 - **From Para to scapegoat** - also brings out this sense of Northern Ireland as a place apart, in which Lee Clegg has been 'abandoned'(Par.1). The author refers to Reilly and her friends as 'car thieves' :

“..two car thieves were killed.”; “teenagers out on a thieving spree..”(Par.2-3).

This dismissal of the victims as such implies that their lives were worth little, and also gives the picture of Belfast as being overrun by thieves and crime. The article goes on to say that :

“Lee Clegg was only 21 when he fired. He was just another soldier doing his duty on the streets of Belfast. Like the rest of his mates, he never knew where the next IRA snipers bullet was coming from. Nor if the bullet had his name on it.”(Par.9).

This article places the emphasis on the fact that Clegg was only 21. However, the author omits the ages of the two people shot by the Paratroopers - Peake was 17, and Karen Reilly was 18. This fact apparently does not deserve a mention in the article.

*The Daily Express* of January 23, 1995 includes an article by John Ingham , entitled **Murder Law may change over soldier Clegg case.** This relays the review of the charge that sent Clegg to prison. Ingham writes :

“Clegg, 26, is serving life for shooting the passenger of a stolen car which smashed through a roadblock in Belfast in September 1990.”(Par.7).

“ The Law Lords accepted Clegg had set out with no intention to murder and instead was trying to maintain law and order”(Par.13).

This description of a stolen car 'smashing' through a roadblock, and the need to maintain 'law and order' perpetuates all the time, the idea that Northern Ireland is different, dangerous and irrational.

*The Daily Express* of the same date contains a commentary by Philippa Kennedy which describes the discharge from the Army of Clegg's colleague Christopher Aindrow who was also involved in the incident. Here Kennedy criticises the Northern Irish Courts :

“ ‘Aindrow seems as if he too has had a rough deal from the law’ Private Clegg’s solicitor told me ; ‘Aindrow’s conspiracy conviction was based on the evidence of a police constable who changed his story four times and a gypsy who had just been released from prison after a five year stint for assault on the police’ ”(Par.4-5).

Kennedy goes on to say that the presiding judge :

“sat alone, because of the difficulty of finding non-sectarian judges in Belfast (and) decided that the policeman’s evidence was ‘not so flawed that (he) was obliged to withdraw it.’ ”(Par.6).

George Jones, Colin Randall, Richard Saville and Jon Hibbs, write an article entitled **Rifkind joins fight to free Private Clegg**, in *The Daily Telegraph* of January 24, 1995.

The authors write :

“Authoritative...sources said that Mr. Rifkind...believed that there were now valid grounds for Sir Patrick to exercise his administrative powers to order an early release.

These included the probability that if the case had been tried by a jury - instead of by a judge under Northern Ireland’s special judicial system - Pte Clegg would not have been convicted of murder..” (Par.5-6)

*The Daily Express* of January 28, 1995 contains an article by Philippa Kennedy entitled

**The moment I pulled the trigger.** In this, Lee Clegg gives an account of the events surrounding Reilly’s and Peake’s deaths. This article is very much in the same framework as the previous ones, and Northern Ireland is portrayed as being ‘beyond the pale’ of British normality. This gives the idea that perhaps Clegg’s actions should be excused :

“It was cold and dark on the Upper Glen Road, one of the main routes used by the IRA to bring arms and bomb-making equipment into their own Republican stronghold of West Belfast”(Par.4).

“(They were) ordered to be on the alert for hidden explosives which could be detonated from a distance..”(Par.5).

Kennedy goes on to describe the events following the shooting and mentions that :

“..the case came to trial in a Diplock court, where the judge sits without a jury...”(Par.50).

This implies that the Northern Irish Judicial system is not legitimate, yet Kennedy does not question the sentences received by paramilitaries in the same courts.

*The Daily Telegraph* of the end of June 1995 contains **Injustice is done**, which criticises the Law Lords decision to reject Clegg’s appeal. The article is again quite dismissive of the deaths of Reilly and Peake :

“..a patrol...fired upon a speeding car in Belfast, killing two teenage joyriders..”(Par.1)

The article also gives the feeling of Northern Ireland not being good enough for a British soldier :

“The Governments apparent willingness to abandon a young soldier who has been sentenced for an act committed while on duty on the dangerous streets of Northern Ireland is disgraceful”(Par.3)

The implication is again that Clegg’s actions could be excused because he was doing his duty in a place represented as being a war zone.



Philippa Kennedy, in *The Daily Express* of June 6, 1995 writes about **Why Private Clegg should be freed**. In this article, she refers to :

“the car which roared through an army checkpoint on a dark night in 1990”(Par.1).

She quotes a character in the film *A Few Good Men* who describes soldiers as being “men who stand on walls to protect us while we sleep”(Par.5).

This gives the impression that the citizens of Northern Ireland are under constant threat 24 hours a day.

Alistair McQueen in *The Sun*, also of June 6, 1995 writes about a **New blow to Clegg freedom**. The author tells that the decision whether or not to free Clegg was taken, but that he had not been told what that decision was :

“The news came in an unsigned letter from the Northern Ireland Prison Service faxed to Clegg”(Par.3).

The inclusion of this irrelevant detail implies a lack of efficiency on the part of the Prison Service, who did not tell Clegg in person, or even sign the letter faxed to him. McQueen also quotes Clegg’s solicitor :

“ ‘Loyalist and IRA terrorists know their fate while a British soldier does not’ said Clegg’s angry lawyer Simon McKay yesterday. ‘He is coping well but it is very difficult

for him. This is another example of the Northern Ireland Office's crass mishandling of the situation."”(Par.7).

This article gives the impression of the Northern Ireland Office being inept and deliberately ‘abandoning’ Clegg.

*The Daily Telegraph* of July 4, 1995, the day after Clegg's release, ran a sizeable article entitled **Clegg release condemned in Ulster**, written by Ben Fenton. This article succeeds in giving the views of all involved, including Karen Reilly's family, but it fails to be unbiased, as it paints a very persuasive picture of Northern Ireland being a place apart,

“..plumes of smoke rose from republican areas of west and north Belfast..”(Par.8),

“..two trucks lay on their sides at right angles to eachother, each belching black smoke and trailing streams of flaming petrol that flowed down the gutters.”(Par.10),

“..gangs throwing stones and bottles..”(Par.11),

“Gangs of youths wandered the streets for much of the day in defiance of a heavy RUC presence. Children as young as seven ran screeching with delight between burning vehicles, their faces sooty from the smoke.”(Par.16).

*The Times* of the same date, also describes the events on the day of Clegg's release.

Nicholas Watt writes :

“..rioters rampaged through nationalist areas of Belfast and Londonderry, setting fire to buses, lorries and vans.”(Par.2),

“Police had to wear flak jackets for the first time this year...as protesters threw stones at RUC Land Rovers and chased officers along the Falls Road.”(Par.3).

This portrayal of Northern Ireland as a place apart, can be seen therefore to be quite prevalent in the British Press coverage of the Lee Clegg case. Northern Ireland is, according to these descriptions, constantly ruled by terror and irrationality. The coverage fails to take account of the fact that ordinary everyday events continue and vastly outnumber the violence and controversies. This representation of Northern Ireland is perhaps an attempt to justify Lee Clegg's actions and to deny the paramilitaries any political motivation in their activities. Such coverage paints a picture of the British Army as a benign force of rationality. This portrayal of Northern Ireland is one that has been prevalent for some time. The images that the media portray are those of marches, riots, soldiers and gunmen, as opposed to ones that depict mundane events or joyful occasions (Ziff, 1991, 191). The way in which political events are divorced from everyday existence adds to the decontextualisation of events and leads to a disjointed

view of the situation (Ibid., op cit.). Ziff claims that this leads to people's disassociation from the Northern Irish conflict. They believe that it is 'not their problem'. The idea that Northern Ireland is completely consumed by violence is one that is quite simply not true. In actual fact, the majority of incidents occur within the Belfast area. More than 50% of killings carried out by the security forces, have been in the city of Belfast (O'Leary and McGarry, 1996, 9). Similarly, over 68% of killings by Loyalist paramilitaries, and more than 36% of killings by Republican paramilitaries have also happened in the city (Ibid., op cit.). As regards the representation of Northern Ireland as being dangerous, more civilians die there, each year, as a result of road accidents, than in the 'Troubles'. It is also interesting to note that some would point out that the number of people that die in homicides in other major cities is greater than the number of people that die in the Northern Irish conflict (Ibid., 12). The contradiction that emerges here is that the British Government tends to highlight these comparisons in order to 'play down' the political character of the conflict (Ibid., 12-13). However, the British media manage to 'play up' the conflict and portray the North as excessively dangerous and irrational.

# The Semantics of the Northern Irish Conflict

An important point to note in the British Print Media coverage of the Clegg case, is the way in which certain words and phrases are used to reinforce the legitimacy of the British State, and to deny paramilitary activity any political character. The use of such words and phrases by journalists attempts to portray different groups in different ways. Roger Fowler (1991) would insist that this is not a deliberate process as this would render the reader too passive(Fowler,1991, 41). However, on analysing some of the material, it is difficult to imagine that the writing style was unconscious in its portrayal of the different groups in Northern Ireland.

*The Sunday Express* of January 22, 1995 contains an article entitled **From Para to Scapegoat** and is very interesting in its use of language. The headline and its reference to a 'scapegoat' immediately paints Clegg as an innocent victim. In the opening paragraph the author asks :

“What kind of people have we become that we can abandon a British soldier, yet watch IRA terrorists slink smirking out of jail, after huge chunks have been knocked off their sentences ?”(Par.1).

The word 'abandon' is very emotive and gives the impression that Clegg, through no fault of his own, has been forgotten and is nothing less than a martyr. The image of the IRA 'slinking' and 'smirking' again denies a political motivation to their actions. The idea that they have had 'huge chunks' taken off their sentences is very likely to incense readers, however we are not informed how sizeable these 'chunks' are. The author goes on to say that :

"Lee Clegg should never been charged, but he became a pawn in a dirty political game. Are there no sewers we won't wade through to appease the IRA ?...Our government may be willing to crawl on their hands and knees to please Sinn Fein, but I'm damned if I will. The idea of a British soldier being made into a sacrificial goat sticks in my gullet..I'm with Private Clegg. Every inch of the way. If some of our appeasing politicians had half his fortitude we would not now be waving white flags at the IRA who are confident that they have us over a barrel."(Par.13-14, 17).

The image of Clegg as a 'pawn' again transfers any blame from him to politicians and implies passivity on his part. The portrayal of the State 'wading' through 'sewers' is a way of debasing the IRA and associating them with being the lowest of the low. The terms 'appease', 'crawling on hands and knees', 'waving white flags' and 'over a barrel'

are ones which are quite reminiscent of Nazism - some historians describe the policy of appeasement of Hitler as having contributed to his domination and ultimately to World War II (Isaac, M.L.R., 1971:151). Because of this the very word 'appeasement' is one that is likely to evoke emotion in many British citizens. The image of a sacrificial goat is one that awakens images of death and bloodshed on the part of innocent people. It has Biblical connotations and is quite a powerful image.

*The Sunday Express* of January 22, 1995 contains a piece by Graham Bell, Charles Lewington and Jon Salmon. The headline **Top Tory shares stage with IRA mouthpiece as scapegoat Para languishes in prison cell** is again a very powerful one.

The description of Sinn Féin Vice President Martin McGuinness as a 'mouthpiece' is a very dismissive one. The idea of Clegg as an innocent is again brought out in the use of the word 'scapegoat' and the image of Clegg 'languishing' is again quite evocative of innocence and abandonment. The article, in its opening paragraph describes McGuinness as being a "former IRA warlord". This term is one that is often given to combatants in Developing World conflicts and is one that is associated with uncivilisation and bloodlust. The article goes on to say that :



“...campaigners seeking Private Clegg’s release will see Tory fraternising with Sinn Féin as an act of betrayal...”(Par.6).

The term ‘fraternising’ is one that may lead readers to see the government as bowing to Sinn Féin. The theme of betrayal is one that is quite strong in the coverage of this case and this is again echoed on the next page where the article is continued under the headline **The final betrayal**. The image of betrayal is a powerful one which may again create sympathy in some readers for Clegg.

*The Guardian* of January 24, 1995, in its commentary contains an article by Hugo Young entitled **A soldier sacrificed in the moral haze of Northern Ireland**. The headline itself speaks volumes about the authors views. The term sacrifice again comes up and evokes images of selflessness and duty. The ‘moral haze’ in question is linked very much to the idea of Northern Ireland as a place apart. Young writes :

“That night, the prime object of patrol in this city of terrorists was car joyriding. As one car crashed through a checkpoint Clegg shot to stop it...”(Par.4)

The image of a ‘city of terrorists’ and a car ‘crashing through a checkpoint’ is one that implies lawlessness and irrationality. However Young fails to mention that the checkpoint in question was not a physical one but was a group of soldiers moving along

a stretch of road and stopping cars at any point. It is quite interesting that the character of the roadblock has not been examined as this is an important point in the case. The image portrayed of 'joyriders' crashing through a physical checkpoint is one that is quite powerful, as it portrays the teenage occupants of the car as being deliberately lawless. The media does not explore the possibility that they may not have realised that the soldiers were present, and so may have panicked when the patrol emerged to stop the car. Returning to the article, Young again brings out the theme of sacrifice further into the article :

"In short, Clegg must rot in prison as a stake in the poker game that may go on for years between Sir Patrick Mayhew and Mr. Gerry Adams."(Par.8)

This implies that Clegg is merely a victim of a personal dispute between the two men, as opposed to a person found guilty of murder within the wider context of a fragile peace process.

*The Daily Express* of March 14, 1995 contains **Clegg must stay in jail** by Derek Hornby. In this Hornby describes how Clegg was 'devastated' by the delay of his sentence review.(Par.1). The author tells of his 'proud message of defiance'(Par.2), and portrays Clegg as an innocent man bravely bearing his sentence. His family are described

as being 'bitterly disappointed' and Hornby describes the 'outcry' (Par.3), over his conviction. This implies that the entire public opinion is united in support of Clegg. He describes Clegg's solicitors comment on the delay :

"The most nauseating feature is that this has come from a department of our own Government, not as a result of pressure from Sinn Féin or any other source."(Par.16).

This again paints the Government as being inept and as continuing to 'betray' Clegg.

*The Daily Express* of June 7, 1995 contains **Desperate Clegg : Put me out of my agony** by Nicholas Assinder and Harry Cooke. The headline of this article immediately attempts to portray Clegg as a victim through the use of the words 'desperate' and 'agony'. The authors describe that Clegg :

"..begged: 'For pity's sake, can somebody please tell me what is happening to me ?' He made his desperate plea after Ministers refused to tell him if he is finally to be set free from his life sentence...'I cannot concentrate. I am on tenterhooks - every minute seems like an hour' said the soldier from Wakefield Prison, where he has already served three years."(Par.1-2, 4). Again this makes Clegg out to be the victim. The authors go on to quote Clegg's solicitor :

“ ‘This morning he was looking at the sunshine of freedom - now he is looking at nothing. We could be waiting for a few hours or an age.’ ”(Par.11).

Again the language used here is expressing sympathy for Clegg.

*The Daily Mail* of June 19, 1995 features a very interesting article by Sean Rayment, entitled **Keep out, Kennedy** which describes U.S. senator Edward Kennedy’s letter to Sir Patrick Mayhew, which warned against releasing Clegg without an amnesty for Republican prisoners. Rayment describes Kennedy’s letter as :

“an attempt to sabotage the release of Paratrooper Lee Clegg.”(Par. 1).

He describes how Kennedy’s ‘interference’ left Clegg ‘distraught’(Par.3)

The author describes Kennedy as “the Sinn Féin - supporting Massachusetts senator” and tells the readers that he has been “dogged by scandal since he left the scene of a fatal car accident at Chappaquiddick in 1969.”(Par.6) - a point which seems hardly relevant to the subject under discussion. Rayment continues on to quote the MP for Canterbury - “ ‘To draw parallels between Private Clegg’s case and that of bloodthirsty IRA murderers is obscene’ ”(Par.8).

The author is obviously extremely anxious to discredit Kennedy, in order to flaw his contribution to the argument about Clegg’s case.

*The Sunday Express* of the end of June 1995 contains **Stop my son's agony, pleads Clegg's mother**, by Alistair McQueen. This article describes Clegg's 'prison torment' and tells of how his mother 'pleaded' with Sir Patrick Mayhew to release her son.(Par. 1).

McQueen quotes Wynne Johnson :

“ ‘I ask all those who sent coupons calling for Lee's release to write to Sir Patrick protesting at his treatment of my boy’” she said. ‘It is inhuman and disgusting..’”(Par.3-

4). The words used by Clegg's mother are quite strong and again reinforce the image of Clegg being abandoned and betrayed. This article also contains a quote from Clegg's solicitor :

“Lawyer McKay said ‘I've never seen him so low. He feels the Government is playing cat and mouse with him. His treatment is not just inhuman, it's barbaric.’”(Par.21).

The word barbaric is especially worth noting here - it is one that portrays the State as being uncivilised and primitive.

*The Daily Mail* of July 4, 1995 contains **Ulster streets ablaze as jailed Para is freed**, written by Sean Rayment, David Williams and John Deans. The very headline of this piece portrays through its use of language, the idea of Northern Ireland as a place apart.

This is echoed in the opening paragraph as the authors describe the scenes that greeted the news of Clegg's release :

“Hijacked cars blazed on the streets of Northern Ireland last night as violence erupted in protest at the freeing of Private Lee Clegg.”(Par.1). the use of the word ‘erupted’ suggests that the incidents occurred without a context, yet it is likely that the North’s Nationalist population felt that they had a valid grievance. The authors go on to say that “RUC assistant chief constable Bill Stewart said a high degree of orchestration was involved in the hijackings, burnings and lootings, and prominent Sinn Féin members were present at some incidents”(Par.6). However, the ‘prominent Sinn Féin members’ were not named, and one has to wonder if this is completely accurate.

This immediately suggests that the Sinn Féin were responsible for the disturbances.

Karen Reilly receives scant mention in the Press coverage of the Clegg affair. In the material selected for analysis with regard to the use of language, she is referred to in a very dismissive way, using such words as ‘joyrider’ or ‘car thief’(*Sunday Express*,22/01/95; *Daily Express*,07/06/95). The table below compares the words and

phrases used to describe Clegg, Reilly and Peake and Sinn Féin or IRA members in the newspapers that have been analysed in this section.

Description of :	<i>The Daily Mail &amp; The Mail on Sunday</i>	<i>The Daily Express &amp; The Sunday Express</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>
Lee Clegg	Private Lee Clegg, Paratrooper Lee Clegg, the 26 year old Paratrooper, The soldier..., distraught,	a British soldier, Private Lee Clegg, abandoned, he is no murderer, just another soldier, a pawn, a sacrificial goat, a British Paratrooper, defiant, only 21, devastated, in agony, on tenterhooks, looking at nothing, prison torment, inhuman treatment, pain and frustration, doing his duty, the young Para.	A Soldier sacrificed, Private Clegg, ..of the Parachute Regiment, Clegg remains in jail for life, Clegg is certainly a victim,
Karen Reilly Martin Peake	a girl joyrider whose car crashed through a Belfast checkpoint, a teenage joyrider,	a teenage girl who was a passenger in a stolen car., 18 year old joyrider Karen Reilly, a teenage joyrider, 18 year old Karen Reilly, a stolen car in which she was a passenger, Karen Reilly, two car thieves, out on a thieving spree, they deliberately ran an army roadblock, the joyriders' car.	a car crashed through a check-point, one of the occupants, joyriding in Belfast,
Sinn Féin or IRA members	terrorist prisoners, IRA prisoners, bloodthirsty IRA murderers, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, top Sinn Féin figure Martin McGuinness, prominent Sinn Féin members were present,	IRA mouthpiece, IRA warlord, IRA atrocities, IRA terrorists slink smirking out of jail,..huge chunks off their sentences, IRA snipers bullet, terrorist getaway cars, Are there no sewers we won't wade through to appease the IRA?,..crawl on hands and knees to please Sinn Féin.	Mr. Gerry Adams

Figure No 7.1



The use of certain types of language in the coverage of the Lee Clegg case is therefore quite interesting. "In its use of language and interpretation of events, the media helps to condition the way that the battle against terrorism is perceived."(Taylor,1996, 2).

Language is far from being neutral, in fact according to functionalist linguistic theorists such as Labov and Halliday, the nature of language is closely related to the demands we make of it and the needs that it is required to serve. (Fowler,1991, 32-33) Fowler concludes that ideology is already imprinted in the available discourse, and he states that

"linguistically constructed representation is by no means a deliberate process, entirely under the control of the newspaper. The newspaper does not select events to be reported and then consciously wrap them in value laden language which the reader passively absorbs, ideology and all. (Ibid,41).

It is correct of course to say that the reader will not passively absorb the material presented. In chapter I have already discussed the differing effects that media products can have on different people. However, from analysing some of the above material written about Lee Clegg, Karen Reilly and the Republican Movement, I find it difficult to accept that it was written from a neutral perspective and not 'wrapped in value laden language'.

# Alternative Discourse

The vast majority of material reviewed up to this has been overwhelmingly biased towards the official line. Very few of the articles have challenged the State interpretation of the 'Troubles', or have reported the information in a neutral unbiased way. However, there was a small amount of coverage of the Lee Clegg case which was opposed to the pressures caused by his release, and which presented some of the details surrounding the shooting of Karen Reilly in a less than favourable light. It would be impossible to attempt an accurate study of the coverage of this case without acknowledging the existence of this material.

*The Times* of January 24, 1995 contains **The Clegg Affair** which dismisses Clegg's actions as being "the product of adrenaline, rather than malicious intent"(Par.2).

However, despite this the article goes on to say that :

"..the government must not abdicate its responsibilities to answer public fears about Private Clegg. First, it must be made clear that he is not, as he alleges, the victim of a conspiracy to appease Nationalist feelings in the Province....Equally it is absurd to suggest that the law lords have a vested interest in the Politics of Ulster. Their decision was a sound reflection of the law."(Par.5).

These points are not acknowledged elsewhere in the material under analysis.

*The Guardian* of January 25, 1995 carries **The high price of instant justice** which portrays Lee Clegg's position in a fresh light -

“He is very probably a victim of the situation in Northern Ireland. So, more lethally and conclusively is Karen Reilly whom his patrol shot dead at a West Belfast checkpoint four years ago. And so in myriad ways stretching across the contorted contours of a quarter of a century of conflict, are thousands of others...all of whom think that they deserve special understanding for their predicament...”(Par.1).

The author sympathises with Clegg to a certain extent, yet succeeds in placing his situation in the context of the suffering of all the victims of the conflict. The article goes on to inform us that :

“Private Clegg is only the second British Soldier to be convicted of murder in a 25 year period in which the security forces have killed upwards of 300 people, some of them terrorists, but many not, including a number of children.”(Par.2).

This is quite an interesting point that is not taken up by any of the Tabloid newspapers.

The author also compares the campaign of Lee Clegg to those of groups like the

Guilford Four And Birmingham Six :

“The contrast between the readiness with which Pte Clegg’s case has been taken up at the very highest level and the years of hostile disbelief which faced Republican campaigners on behalf of their victims of miscarriages of justice is massive.”(Par.2).

Again this article is the only one to present this aspect of Clegg’s campaign. The author concludes the piece by insisting that :

“Those who campaign his case...need to be very careful that Pte. Clegg’s release is not won at the expense of a far greater loss.”(Par.3).

*The Independent* of January 25, 1995 contains an article entitled **Justice and Private Clegg**, which is also a good deal more cautious in its discussion of Clegg’s situation :

“(Karen Reilly’s) memory demands that the case of Lee Clegg is decided not by a wave of public sentiment, but by truth and the needs of justice...The problem is that many of the Clegg supporters want him to be released whatever the evidence shows.”(Par.1-3).

The author goes on to say that Clegg should be released if new evidence comes to light proving his innocence, but not before, : “Karen Reilly was killed by a bullet in the back when she was a threat to no one....Defending the forces of law and order at all costs does poor service to law and order itself.”(Par.7).

The article does fall in to the trap of referring to Northern Ireland in melodramatic terms such as 'bandit country'(Par.4), yet overall, it succeeds in being much more neutral in its stance on the case.

*The Sunday Times* of January 29, 1995 contains an article by Liam Clarke entitled **Bitter history of aggression in Private Clegg's battalion**. This piece is very critical of Clegg's unit - 3 Para, and paints a worrying picture of its activities in Northern Ireland and in the Falkland War in the early 1980s. Clarke writes :

"The soldiers of 3 Para..boast of being the most feared battalion in the British Army, with a reputation for violence that has struck fear in to enemies from Borneo to the Falklands. But in Northern Ireland, they have often also struck fear into their friends...In a series of violent incidents, the battalion has reinforced its reputation for brutality. Even within barracks, its behaviour has seemed loutish and callous."(Par.2).

This interpretation of the Parachute unit is quite unusual in the British newspapers, who usually paint Clegg and his colleagues favourably.

The author continues :

"On February 26 1990,...members of 3 Para shot a joyrider...in the neck, claiming he tried to ram them. Police present did not bear out the account...Weeks later a joyrider

did ram a patrol, killing a para. In August 1990 a patrol went into the Republican Lenadoon estate armed with clubs, and beat five civilians senseless. Four soldiers were fined £450.”(Par.10-11).

Clarke continues this description of 3 Para’s brutality with an account of the aftermath of the shooting of Karen Reilly :

“To commemorate the ‘kill’, other paras erected a cardboard model of the bullet-riddled car in their mess.”(Par.12).

Clarke outlines a number of other incidents involving Clegg’s unit and then concludes the article by maintaining that the Parachute Regiment is “..unsuited to the sensitivities of policing Northern Ireland.”(Par.23).

This article is a rather refreshing change to the majority of material written on Clegg and his battalion’s activities in Northern Ireland.

*The Guardian* of June 23, 1995 contains David Sharrock’s article entitled **Where justice lies bleeding for decades**, which brings out quite strongly the tabloid idea of Northern Irish justice being not quite fit for English citizens. Sharrock writes :

“Congratulations to The Daily Mail for exposing the inadequacies of Northern Ireland’s non jury Diplock Court system to Middle England in a searing leading column this week.

Missed the deadline by a mere 23 years, but better late than never...At the Mail's offices in Kensington High Street, they can almost hear the cheers from the Maze Prison.

Justice on trial - they can all relate to that in Northern Ireland. Sorry the Mail's point is somewhat different : 'Paratrooper Lee Clegg is an *Englishman* denied the most basic right to *English* justice : trial by 12 men and women..'. To paraphrase : the quality of justice in Northern Ireland is so unreliable that it is only fit for the natives."(Par. 1-5).

This is a much more honest interpretation of the campaign to free Clegg, than usually appears. It is doubtful that the tabloids would be so vociferous if Lee Clegg was a Northern Irish citizen, of either tradition.

*The Guardian* of July 1995 contains **An unsuitable case for martyrdom**, which is subtitled *The freeing of Private Clegg is a political and dangerous act*. This is again quite strong in its criticism of the way in which the case was handled.

"It is hardly surprising that his release on licence is seen by so many in Northern Ireland as proving that there is one law for the security forces and another for the Paramilitaries.

It is not surprising because that's exactly what it does prove. No republican and no



loyalist murderer would have had their cases considered so sympathetically throughout the whole legal process.”(Par.3).

This statement is very different in outlook from the material written in some of the tabloid newspapers, which celebrated the release as the implementation of justice.

This theme is echoed in another article in *The Guardian* of July 4, 1995. Kevin Toolis writes **A private on parade** and opens with :

“The release of Paratrooper Private Lee Clegg was an unmitigated disaster whose full costs will be paid out in human blood and wasted political opportunities. The Tory Tabloids and The Telegraph may be crowing over their great triumph; but their words and the words of the Government ministers and Tory grandees, sound very different to Irish ears.”(Par.1)

Toolis is quite strong in his opinion of British justice :

“After two years, the British soldier who killed a 17-year-old Irish girl by shooting her in the back is free. If Karen Reilly was British, Clegg could have expected to serve 12 years. The implicit message is clear cut: to the British state, the life of an Irish teenager is equivalent in value to one sixth of a British life. One Brit equals Six Paddies.”(Par.2).

Toolin also brings out the importance of the Clegg case in relation to a very delicate peace process :

“Whether intentional or not, the decision to release Clegg is a striking blow to the peace progress and the (albeit limited) Irish faith in Britain’s commitment to serious negotiations...The republican movement has little to show for calling off its gunmen...And then we have the blatant, hypocritical release of Clegg.”(Par.7).

The author is also critical of Britain’s position and activities in Northern Ireland :

“So what is the Government playing at? What is the conceivable political benefit in openly insulting the views of every single Irish politician by releasing Clegg? Is there some strange mechanism whereby the prospects for peace are strengthened by ignoring, and then humiliating, the Taoiseach John Bruton on this issue?...the policy of Her Majesty’s Government is pursuing in the province of Ulster is a policy of war.”(Par.8-10).

This article is unusual in its especially strong criticism of the of the release of Clegg and of the actions of the British Government in Northern Ireland. It provides the reader with much more to think about with regard to the entire subject, than many of the other newspapers.

This article and the others mentioned above correspond very much with what Elliot et al call the Alternative Discourse. This alternative viewpoint challenges the Official Discourse in two ways.

“First they question whether the state lives up to its democratic and non-violent ideals. Second, alternative spokespeople question the official strategy of repressing and exorcising terrorism, advocating instead strategies of political and social engineering designed to diffuse the violence and tackle its causes.” (Elliot et al, 1983,266-267).

The articles reviewed above can be seen to fit into the above category because of their questioning of the State line and their support of the Republican effort at a cease-fire.

The alternative viewpoint presented in the above material tends to give the readers a little more credit for the ability to make their own decisions on the Clegg case. It is a more responsible representation of the Northern Ireland situation, but unfortunately makes up the minority of the British Press coverage on the ‘Troubles.

# Discussion and Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether bias existed in the British Press coverage of the Northern Irish Conflict. With regard to the way in which the conflict and its participants were portrayed in the coverage of the Lee Clegg case, there is certainly evident, a bias towards the British State's viewpoint. Through the use of various strategies of reporting, the British Press attempted to depict the British Government and Security forces as being above reproach. The emphasis placed on the human interest element of Clegg's imprisonment was considerable. The implication behind this seemed to be that a 'family man' could not have committed murder in cold blood. There was very little material describing Karen Reilly's family and their views. This may have been a deliberate omission, as to portray her as somebody's child or perhaps somebody's sister would be likely to generate sympathy for her and her family. Karen Reilly was faceless and often nameless in the coverage, without any grieving family or friends.

The representation of Northern Ireland as a 'place apart' was a mechanism to excuse the actions of the Security forces. The idea that the North is irrational and excessively dangerous was used to explain why Clegg shot Karen Reilly when she was not a threat to his unit. The coverage places emphasis on the fact

that he and his colleagues felt that they were in constant danger in a 'hostile' area, and so were only doing their duty when they killed Reilly and Peake. The various articles do not take account of the fact that, comparatively, Northern Ireland is a reasonably safe place.

All of these portrayals are delivered through the use of certain words and phrases that attempt to evoke certain emotions in readers. Language has been, at times, used as a very powerful weapon in the 'battle for hearts and minds' that is waged over Northern Ireland.

The way that the British media have acted in relation to Northern Ireland is perhaps a reason why the conflict has lasted for almost thirty years. The portrayals of Republicans have changed little since the early days of the 'Troubles', and this bias against Republicans is often directed against all Nationalists, including those who abhor the methods that the IRA use to promote their 'cause'. In fact such views are sometimes held about all Irish people, whatever their tradition. As long as such views are held by the media, and therefore by the public, it is difficult to imagine that the conflict will be resolved.

It is however necessary to acknowledge that some British Media personnel exercise more responsibility than others in their portrayal of the parties involved in the conflict. This is a positive trend, yet it needs to be strengthened. One of the most surprising points about the nature of the British Press coverage of Northern Ireland is that the Press are not censored in the same way as broadcasters are, yet Press coverage is much less challenging to the Government, than broadcast coverage. However the Press seem to operate voluntary censorship in a much more forceful way than other media organisations. The problem with such censorship is that

“...it can deaden the imagination of the people. Where there is no debate, it is hard to go on remembering, every day, that there is a suppressed side to every argument. It becomes almost impossible to conceive of what the suppressed thing might be. It becomes easy to think that what has been suppressed was valueless, anyway, or so dangerous that it needed to be suppressed”(Rushdie, 1991,39).

The Media portrayal of Northern Ireland will possibly have this effect. It may well deaden people's imagination and make them overlook the possibility of an alternative view. If this happens there is not ever likely to be a resolution of the

conflict, and all that can ensue is intolerance and suspicion. To sum up, in the words of Orson Welles... *“Happy endings depend on stopping the story before it’s finished”*.



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