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THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In recent years the importance of linguistics has been changing: it has become one of the most important means of influence on audience [11, 97]. It's well-known that mass media is one of the means of communication in society which is connected with its development. Different mechanisms of the influence on mass consciousness, principles of effective organization of political communication have been recently researched. Politics is directly realised through speech. Professionals have the only task to fulfil is to make political communication more effective. One of the main reason that influences the framework of political texts is mass media, which is connected with all the forms of public consciousness. At the very end of the XXth century mass media has become "the forth power", the most delicate art, key mechanism, which provides the politicians' responsibility before the auditorium of the listeners and speakers [9,136].

Though in great Britain the usage of mass media as an instrument of the influence on citizens started at the very beginning of the XXth century, the term "mass media" appeared in the newspaper "Times" only in 1965. There are different definitions of the term "mass media". Some linguists consider that it includes printed media (newspapers, magazines, books), electronic media (radio, TV, films) (Warren K., Agee) [1,6]. Others think that mass media includes such industries of creating and spreading information as newspapers, magazines, advertising, photo and cinema industry, public relations, audio and video, TV, book printing (Weiner R.) [17,2]. The third definition proves that mass media is the collective term which involves TV, radio, cinema industry and press (David Crystal) [5,18]. The most spread is the fourth definition. According to it this notion includes printed mass media (newspapers, magazines) and electronic (radio, television) (Bill Mascull) [10,1-2]. We consider that the best definition is the following: mass media is the organisation of creating and canals of spreading information for mass auditorium.

The influence of the mass media is effective on all levels of political system. The relationships among people, institutions may be changed due to mass media. The best example of the importance of mass media is the activity of the parties. Communicative strategies, which are used in political discourse are connected with mass media technologies and strategies. Today political discourse may be called as mediated discourse as political activity depends on mass media greatly. "The worst thing you can do as a politician is believe it when the press says it likes you" [10,4]. But from other side the politicians simply slave mass media.

The main aim of the article is to analyse various branches and the role of mass media in the formation of political discourse in Northern Ireland. Analysis of the role of the media

in the recent history of Northern Ireland has tended to focus on two different but related issues. First, considerable attention has been paid to the degree of support which the British, Irish and international media, whether willingly, unconsciously or under duress, have given to particular political actors, such as the British government or the IRA. Among those who believe that media coverage from outside Northern Ireland has been influential during the course of the Troubles, there are two rival schools of thought [2,116]. The first of these has concentrated on what is regarded as the manipulation of the media by successive British and, to a lesser extent, Irish governments. It is argued that the propagandist activities of the British government in particular have been important, and unacceptable, factors in the persistence of political crisis. The second rival school of thought has emphasized the use made of the media by the perpetrators and supporters of paramilitary violence. According to this perspective, the real propaganda victories have been won, not by the democratically elected governments, but by the terrorists. Despite the obvious differences between these two approaches, both share the view that media coverage of the politics of Northern Ireland has actually contributed to the problem.

Another alternative view of the role of the media in Northern Ireland argues that media coverage from outside in fact has had little impact on the political situation. It is argued that the integrity of the local quarrel rises above media manipulation. Instead, it is suggested that the local media in Northern Ireland have played a significant part in supporting the rival perspectives around which the politics of division have been centred. Whichever of these general approaches one favours, there can be no denying the extent of media coverage of Northern Ireland or the amount of access to the media which the people of the province enjoy. It is doubtful if any other part of the world has attracted as much sustained media attention as Northern Ireland has done since the late 1960s. Although the number of broadcasters and journalists actually based in the province declined as the Troubles persisted, particular moments of crisis and high drama continued to be accompanied by increased media attention. Certainly the people of Northern Ireland could have no grounds for complaint about the levels of interest shown by the international media, although they were frequently uneasy about the quality of the analysis which resulted from that media interest. In addition to having the experience of the media coming to them, Northern Irish people also had access throughout the Troubles to a wide range of media output. In terms of quantity, the province has been, and remains, exceptionally well served by the various branches of the media.

Three local daily newspapers, the *News Letter*, the *Irish News* and the *Belfast Telegraph*, can be said to have a quasi-national status in that they are read throughout Northern Ireland, as is the locally produced *Sunday Life*. There is also a plethora of more genuinely local papers which serve smaller communities. In addition, all of the English national papers are widely available as are their counterparts from the Irish Republic and the Glasgow-based *Daily Record*. As for television, satellite channels are increasingly popular and viewers throughout Northern Ireland are provided for by the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Northern Ireland service as well as the Independent Television Authority's Ulster Television (UTV). With special aerials, viewers are also able to watch the two channels produced by the Irish Republic's Radio Telefis Eireann (RTE) and in a few eastern locations, Scottish television programmes can be seen. Similar patterns occur in the availability of radio programmes, with local and national (both

British and Irish programmes), from both the public and private sectors, being widely available. Local radio stations include those of BBC Northern Ireland, Belfast Community Radio, Cool FM, Downtown Radio and the Irish language Radio na Gaeltachta. Overall, therefore, it is no exaggeration to suggest that the people of Northern Ireland have greater access to media output, in all its forms, than any other group of people in either mainland Britain or the Republic of Ireland. It should also be noted that throughout the 25 years of the Troubles, the people of Northern Ireland were particularly news conscious.

This is scarcely surprising given that they were living in a part of the world whose problems generated so much worldwide media attention. Inevitably, the local population were eager to watch, read and listen to the various ways in which their problems were being assessed by the representatives of the media, both local and international. To some extent, therefore, interest in media output was part of a wider desire to engage in debate about the political situation. At a more mundane, but no less serious, level people also turned to the media to hear about ways in which their day-to-day routine might be adversely affected by the Troubles. For example, they would listen to radio news reports for information about bomb scares and traffic disruption or about what was happening in another part of their city or town or even at the other end of their street. It would be naive in the extreme, however, to imagine that during the Troubles the media simply acted as objective communicators of information. In fact, many of those who have studied the media's involvement in Northern Ireland have argued that journalists and broadcasters have been themselves political actors rather than detached observers. On the one hand, there are those who suggest that sections of the media have served the interests of the British state by acting as channels for the dissemination of government propaganda. It is generally accepted that this has not necessarily been the result of conscious decisions made by media executives. Rather, it is claimed, pressure has been put on the media to ensure their support for government policy.

According to this view, the media have been restricted in what they have been able to say by a number of factors. These include the economic context of media production, indirect censorship through intimidation and the threat of legal sanctions, direct censorship and, finally, self-censorship especially at the senior management level of certain media agencies. In general, it has been argued that there has been a concerted effort on the part of the British state to incorporate the media into its national security strategy and specifically its fight against terrorism. Consequences of this policy have included the banning, censorship and delays in showing of over 100 television programmes about Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1993 and, it is claimed, the loss of British broadcasting's reputation for independence and fairness [3,27]. In addition, it is said that the British state has also been guilty of using the Northern Ireland Information Service to misrepresent the facts of the political situation under the spurious pretext of protecting human lives and the national interest. This strategy, however, has not been without its ambiguities, since governments have sought to combine an interest in highlighting the significance of terrorist violence in the creation of Northern Ireland's economic problems with a desire to convince the outside world of the relative normality of life in the province.

It is ironic that the most blatant attempts by the British and Irish governments to interfere with the work of the media were a response to the view that the real winners in terms of propaganda were the paramilitaries, particularly the Provisional Irish Republican

Army, and not the governments themselves. According to this alternative perspective, while there is no denying the importance of the media in the conflict, the oxygen of publicity which sustained terrorism was far more significant than any amount of media manipulation by successive governments. Responding to that challenge, both Irish and British governments adopted policies of direct censorship [18,103]. RTE, the Irish national broadcasting service, was set up as a public authority under the Broadcasting Act of 1960. Section 31 of the Act allowed Ministers responsible for communications to prevent the broadcasting of material which would be likely to promote or incite crime or would tend to undermine the State's authority. In 1972, the political implications of Section 31 were made more explicit with the introduction of a ban on broadcast interviews with representatives of Sinn Fein and of any organizations proscribed in Northern Ireland. One obvious difficulty with this ban lay in the fact that viewers and listeners in the Irish Republic continued to receive programmes broadcast from the United Kingdom where such interviews were still permitted. This anomaly was removed, however, on 19 October 1988, when the British government imposed a similar ban to that operating in the Republic. This broadcasting ban was empowered by the terms of the 1981 Broadcasting Act and, therefore, required no parliamentary debate for it to become operative. The Northern Ireland Notice, issued by the then Home Secretary, Douglas Hurd, outlawed the broadcasting of speeches by and interviews with representatives and supporters of proscribed organizations [16,38]. This was intended to be enforced even if the individuals in question were addressing issues not directly related to violence. Some qualifications were made to the ruling. For example, special dispensations were made for the purpose of election campaigns.

In general, however, the net result was the increasingly bizarre sight of representatives of Sinn Fein and other organizations appearing on television with their words being spoken by actors. The conflict in Northern Ireland has carried with it a great challenge for the mass media in Great Britain; the main representative of which, the BBC has been a paradigm of objective information, at least from the presuppositions of liberal philosophy. According to liberal theory, freedom of expression and free information constitute a guarantee for the democratic process. Some liberal philosophers even mention the transparency of public management as the fundamental factor which differentiates democracy from other political systems.

In the practice, the British mass media took a very biased, partisan and reductionist position, particularly in the 80s. In the case of Northern Ireland there have been a deep information gap. From the beginning of the conflict, the mass media identified public interest with the interest of the government. In the daily practice of news broadcasting numerous cases of censorship (from clear cases of outright prohibition to lighter forms of informative self-caution) and elimination of political analysis entirely necessary for the understanding of the conflict took place. The most evident effect of this process was that public opinion was devoided of the necessary information in order to be able to participate in the debate about the best form to resolve the conflict. Daily broadcasting analysis showed little relation with the specific feature that the conflict in Northern Ireland has clear historical and political origins. The majority of the news reproduced had violence as the main protagonist.

Commissioned by UNESCO, Philip Elliott produced a study about the news coverage on the Irish conflict. The results were that only one third of the news had something to do with stories which developed information related with the political aspects of the conflict: 72% of TV news covered the topic of violence and issues related with the maintenance of law and order [6,7]. The information about Northern Ireland did not prioritised only violent actions, but, at the same time, these actions were presented completely out of context. The news reporting of these acts placed very little emphasis on anything unrelated to the immediate human tragedy caused by the event. All hint of analysis was conspicuous by its absence. Another of the recurrent features in the analysis of the information related to the Irish conflict is that the complex framework within which the different actions fit encompassing the violence against the state and state violence as well as sectarian violence have been consistently misrepresented. The mass media were principally worried with the violence carried out by groups opposing the government. The mass media condemned the violence against the state without batting an eyelid.

However, they placed little effort in the analysis of the complex factors that generate it. A British intellectual pointed out that by reading the press in 1988 it was difficult to believe that a conflict was still going on in Northern Ireland. Around that period, the decontextualized and partial representation of violence reached the point of denying even the existence of political conflict. The 90's brought about a different vision from the part of British mass media. Well before the negotiations began, they radically changed their position. At the beginning of 1994, the Irish Republic's government lifted its ban and the old anomaly was reversed with viewers and listeners in Northern Ireland now able to hear the voices of members of proscribed organizations so long as they had access to RTE productions. The lifting of the ban in the Irish Republic was viewed with suspicion by Unionists and even by members of the British government who may have felt that their Irish counterparts were pushing ahead too quickly with plans to bring Sinn Fein into the political fold.

The problem was, however, that the British were now seen in the eyes of the rest of the world, and especially by the government of the United States as being engaged in a policy of censorship which changes in the Irish Republic appeared to indicate was neither necessary nor desirable. Moreover, the increasingly cunning ploys by the broadcast media to circumvent the ban in Britain were creating a farcical situation. In response to these considerations, and more significantly to the PIRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994, the British government lifted its ban on 16 September 1994 [7,13]. Although they welcomed this policy development, many broadcasters in Britain as well as many media analysts believed that the British state would continue to interfere with programme making and reporting of the situation in Northern Ireland, albeit with less recourse to direct censorship. Other restrictions on media freedom, it was argued, were still in place although the political context had changed so dramatically after the paramilitary ceasefires that it became less likely that the British government would continue to regard media coverage of Northern Ireland as constituting a potential security threat. It is undeniable that the British and Irish governments have both interfered, directly and indirectly, with media coverage of Northern Ireland. Whether this was absolutely necessary is another matter. While media spokespeople may have exaggerated their own capacity to provide fair and objective analysis, the politicians may well have overestimated the power of the media to

influence public opinion. There is little evidence, for example, that British or, indeed, international coverage of the Troubles had a significant impact on the views of people in Northern Ireland itself. Most Northern Irish people formulate political views on the basis of numerous factors and their reaction to media output, regardless of its aim, is more or less predetermined.

What remains to be discussed, however, is whether or not locally produced media output is one of the factors which contribute to the formation of political opinions. Given the range of media output available in Northern Ireland, it is inevitable that some people will have been influenced by views expressed in programmes and newspapers produced outside the province. For example, some people may not even read local newspapers or watch locally produced television programmes. The overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland, however, are likely to read at least one local paper and watch news programmes produced by Ulster Television or BBC Northern Ireland. To what extent, then, have the local media played a role in the political conflict?

In fact, both television companies have acquired a substantial reputation for impartial reporting of events in Northern Ireland. Given that they aim to appeal to members of both of the major communities, this is perhaps scarcely surprising. For whatever reason, however, these companies cannot be said to have fuelled the divisions in Northern Ireland, although of course they have been forced to operate under the same conditions which, some have argued, have restricted the role of the British media in general. Whether locally produced newspapers in Northern Ireland deserve a similar reputation for relatively objective news coverage is another matter. Northern Ireland's local press can be divided into two separate categories - the quasi-national dailies together with the *Sunday Life* on one hand and, on the other, the more truly local papers available widely only in the districts, towns and communities which they are intended to serve. Only the quasi-national publications are available throughout Northern Ireland. Given the problematic political status of the province, to describe these papers as national is inevitably contentious. In the context of the United Kingdom as a whole, the papers might be regarded as provincial. However, if one accepts that Northern Ireland is a distinct geopolitical entity, then these papers clearly serve a quasi-national as well as a provincial role [15,102]. This description applies notwithstanding the fact that the papers themselves are not read by all or even by a majority of people in Northern Ireland.

The fact is that although the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *Sunday Life* are read widely by members of both communities, the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* are important elements in nationalist and unionist civil societies respectively. This situation has been transformed to some extent with the appearance of a free edition of the *News Letter* delivered to many homes throughout the greater Belfast area, including those of Catholics. It remains true, however, that the *News Letter* is bought almost exclusively by Protestants and the *Irish News* by Catholics. The *News Letter* was founded in 1737 and is the United Kingdom's oldest surviving newspaper. Although published in Belfast, it is sold throughout Northern Ireland and even in other parts of the historic province of Ulster. The religious or political identity of the readership can be discerned from various elements of the paper's content. For example, announcements of births, deaths and marriages which are printed in the *News Letter* mainly concern members of the Protestant population. The activities of the Protestant churches are commonly reported. The paper pays considerable attention to news

items which confirm the difference between Northern Ireland and the rest of the island of Ireland. Thus, stories about Ulster traditions, the development of Orangeism and life in Northern Ireland during the Second World War are common. The *News Letter's* coverage of sport concentrates on those activities which are dominated by Protestants although not necessarily exclusive to them. Gaelic games, played almost exclusively by Catholics, receive little or no attention, a situation which has remained unchanged despite the fact that the paper's free edition now finds its way into Catholic homes. Finally, the editorial policy of the *News Letter*, while by no means uncritical of Unionist politics, has consistently espoused the Unionist cause. In a variety of ways, therefore, the paper has played its part in confirming Unionist attitudes and values.

The *Irish News* was first published in 1855. Like the *News Letter*, it is produced in Belfast but sold throughout the nine counties of Ulster. Although the paper has endeavoured in recent years to broaden its appeal, the main emphasis is still on those aspects of life which highlight the presence of a distinctive Catholic and Nationalist community in Northern Ireland. Personal announcements concern Catholics. Sports coverage, although extensive and relatively varied, pays special attention to Gaelic games and even when the focus shifts to non-Gaelic sport, a Nationalist perspective is still apparent. For example, coverage of Scottish association football tends to be concentrated on the activities of Celtic Football Club, founded by Irish Catholics in Glasgow and drawing the bulk of its support to this day from Scots with Irish roots. The *Irish News* also pays a great deal of attention to Irish culture and to events associated with the Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, its editorial policy, although consistently opposed to republican violence, has always supported constitutional Nationalist aspirations [13,87]. In a variety of ways, therefore, the paper gives important support to an Irish Nationalist view of the world and, specifically, of the political situation in Northern Ireland.

The character of the other quasi-national daily paper, and also of its sister publication, the *Sunday Life*, differs markedly from that of the *News Letter* and the *Irish News*. The *Belfast Telegraph* was established as a Unionist newspaper in 1870. Its political origins are still testified to by the fact that far more Protestants than Catholics would insert items in the paper's personal announcements columns. In terms of readership, however, the *Telegraph* has been increasingly successful in making an appeal to members of both communities. This has been achieved by way of a combination of a moderate editorial policy and widespread coverage of relatively non-controversial news stories. In fact, the paper devotes more space to entertainment guides and general advertising than to potentially divisive issues [4,237]. Even the *Telegraph's* coverage of sport has been expanded over the years to take account of the interest of many of its readers in Gaelic games. This is accompanied, however, by extensive news about rugby, cricket, association football and so on. Far more than the other dailies, the *Belfast Telegraph*, and also the *Sunday Life*, would appear to be primarily concerned with financial success which means doing nothing which might alienate potential advertisers and readers from either community. Its owners clearly believe that the paper's economic future is best secured by a continued widespread appeal. As a result, the *Telegraph's* editorial policy is directed towards the middle ground of politics in Northern Ireland and seeks to exclude neither community from its concerns.

In addition to the quasi-national Northern Irish press, the local newspapers which many people read are intended to serve much smaller areas. There are around 50 such local papers in Northern Ireland. Most localities are served by at least one of them and, in areas where both traditions are well represented, it is likely that there will be a paper which caters for members of each. Furthermore, if one community is clearly in a minority, thus making a separate paper an unviable commercial proposition, a paper intended primarily to serve a neighbouring area will carry material which is relevant to that minority [14,157]. The overall effect ensures that even people sharing the same geographical space are kept apart in terms of local newspaper preference. Local news printed in the papers will either be of relevance only to members of one community or will be presented in such a way as to make the coverage acceptable to them. As a result, a sense of group identity is strengthened by these local papers. It would be preposterous to suggest that the owners and editors of Northern Ireland's local newspapers are responsible for the divisions in their society. It is undeniable, however, that their papers, through the choice of stories which are published and even the use of language to tell these stories, give voice to the rival perspectives of the two communities and, as a consequence, give added strength to these perspectives in the eyes of those who hold them. Therefore, local papers as well as the *News Letter* and the *Irish News* have helped to reproduce sectarian attitudes and in so doing they have become complicit in the maintenance of the politics of division.

The role of the media in the recent history of Northern Ireland raises numerous questions. How one views the debate on censorship, the concept of the oxygen of publicity and various related issues will ultimately depend on how one views the political problems of the province. Of course, opinions on these problems can be influenced by the media themselves. But the extent to which any branch of the media can actually alter people's beliefs is greatly limited by other factors, including the existing views of the audience. Paradoxically, however, the local media, particularly the press, have played an important role in helping to form these beliefs and, thus, in the creation of formidable obstacles to other propagandist strategies. As long as Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland continue to support the existence of separate newspapers for their respective communities and these papers continue to reinforce radically different attitudes, deep divisions in society are likely to persist regardless of how much the wider media seek to influence the situation and governments endeavour to manipulate the media.

Summary

The article deals with the analysis of the role of the mass media in the formation of political discourse in Northern Ireland.

Key words: mass media, political discourse, mediatized discourse, direct censorship, indirect censorship, selfcensorship, a deep information gap.

Аннотация

В статье анализируется роль средств массовой информации в формировании политического дискурса в Северной Ирландии.

Ключевые слова: масс медиа, политический дискурс, медиазованный дискурс, прямая цензура, непрямая цензура, самоцензура, глубокий информационный пробел.

Анотація

У статті аналізується роль засобів масової інформації у формуванні політичного дискурсу в Північній Ірландії.

Ключові слова: мас медіа, політичний дискурс, медіазований дискурс, пряма цензура, непряма цензура, самоцензура, глибока інформаційна прогалина.

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