

Socheolas

Limerick Student Journal of Sociology

Volume 5, Issue 1

'With a flag you lead men, for a flag, men live and die'. An Exploration of Media Representations of the Union Flag Protests in Belfast.

Kylie Gill

September 2013

**University of Limerick
Department of Sociology**

Available at <http://www.ul.ie/sociology/socheolas/vol5/1>

ISSN 2009-3144

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**‘With a flag you lead men, for a flag, men live and die’.
An Exploration of Media Representations of the Union Flag
Protests in Belfast.**

Kylie Gill

MA in Sociology
(Youth, Community & Social Regeneration)

On December 3rd 2012 Belfast City Council voted to limit the number of days the Union Flag would fly from Belfast City Hall. The vote and subsequent removal of the flag was met with an angry response from loyalists who saw this as an attack on their cultural identity. Throughout the following months protests were held throughout Northern Ireland on a daily basis, with a percentage of these sparking riots and clashes between loyalists and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Extreme violence was reported by newspapers worldwide. This article examines the media representation of these protests and the reactions of the protestors to those representations. My work is informed by Bennett (1982) who looked at the media as definers of social reality through the use of propaganda, moral panics and the deviant other.

Introduction

On December 3rd 2012 Belfast City Council voted to limit the number of days the Union Flag would fly from Belfast City Hall. Instead of the flag flying every day of the year, as it has it had since 1906, it would now be limited to a maximum of 18 days a year. The vote to remove the flag was backed by the council’s nationalist parties and the Alliance Party. It was strongly opposed by unionists who in the weeks leading up to the vote distributed 40,000 leaflets attacking the Alliance party and encouraging people to protest against the vote.

Naomi Long, the Alliance Party leader, accused the Unionist parties of trying to raise tensions throughout the East Belfast community in which she holds her seat (BBC 2012).

The vote and subsequent removal of the flag was met with an angry response from loyalists who saw this as an attack on their cultural identity. Throughout the following months protests were held throughout Northern Ireland on a daily basis, with a percentage of these sparking riots and clashes between loyalists and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). A subsequent media storm emerged around this unfolding story.

Media as Definers of Social Reality

The media has become both an essential and necessary part of the modern world, playing a significant role in society. However, does the media offer a true reflection of society or does it express its vision of society in a distorted way? To suggest that the media should be viewed as ‘definers of social reality’ is to imply that the events which they broadcast are signified to have a bearing on the ways in which we perceive the world and thus, on the ways in which we act within it (Bennett 1982, p.288). In reporting events the media give us certain frameworks in which we are to interpret them. Using various media techniques they shape our consciousness in a way that is socially significant. In these terms the media are not apart from social reality, inertly reflecting back societies image; they are a part of social reality, contributing to its contours and to the logic and direction of its development via the socially articulated way in which they shape our perceptions (Bennett 1982).

It was Stanley Cohen (1972) that discussed how societies are subjected to periods of moral panic. He described this as a condition, episode, person or

group becomes defined as a threat to societal values and interests. The mass media portray them in a stereotypical style; editors, bishops, politicians and other 'right-thinking' people man the barricades; and socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions (Cohen 1972, p.9). The media provides the most effective spark for the construction of moral panics, as well as being a way in which to convey them. The media are able to activate a moral panic around a particular issue, motivated by a suggestive dissatisfaction in society, because they selectively draw upon widely held values and provide a focus for current fear and discontent (Curran 2002, p.160). Moral panics are broadcast throughout the media excessively, and due to the sensations they create, they are a main selling point of tabloid newspapers. They sell papers, entertain readers and generate further news and commentary as the story unfolds. They create in your mind a picture of deviance and publicise public outrage about crime then offer a perspective on social control (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009, p.89)

By conveying a group of people within society as 'outsiders' or 'folk-devils', the media are able to strengthen our commitment to dominant social norms and thereby, create a climate of opinion supportive of the operations of societies law-enforcement agencies and of the extension of their powers (Bennett 1982, p.296). Waiton (2008) argues that the key themes within the sociology of moral panics remain relevant to understanding social anxieties. Society's values are changing, there is now a demand to overcome what Tony Blair described in the 1990s as a 'moral vacuum'. There is a reaction to issues of crime, concern about family and youths and significantly the issue of social control.

Priming in the Media

Priming is a media effect that activates public awareness of selected information elements that can be used to form an opinion on some issue. By building arguments along separate lines of consideration in presenting information on

issues relating to social, economic, or political beliefs, the media are able to influence public belief structure (Bennett 2010, p.146). Through their research on political priming Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p.72) found that by drawing attention to some aspects of politics at the expense of others, the media might help to set the terms by which political judgments are reached, including evaluations of political figures. They described priming as both “powerful and pervasive”. Johnson-Cartee observes that people are literally bombarded by televised public information, from which they select information to attend to and to evaluate. Therefore our news selection and attentions involves a personal judgement of saliency: Is this important to me personally? Does it concern me? (Johnson-Cartee 2005, p.22).

Media in Northern Ireland

Media images of Northern Ireland have been the subject of critical analysis by researchers since the early years of the ‘troubles’, with most agreeing that the media concentrate more on violence rather than the background information (Miller 1993, p. 63). The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has criticised media portrayals of Northern Ireland, writing that as most people rely for the media for information they are seeing Northern Ireland wrecked by violence, bitterly divided and socially regressive (Miller 1993, p.63).

By constantly streaming violence and trouble in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK and to the wider world, it is argued that the media are creating an unbalanced image that people who have never been to the country base their opinions on. The role of the media in the recent history of Northern Ireland raises numerous questions. Although we cannot say that Northern Ireland’s newspapers are responsible for the division within their society, it is undeniable that through their choice of stories and use of language they give a 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 (Bairner 1996).

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical frameworks provide a conceptual guide for choosing the concepts to be investigated, for suggesting research questions, and for framing the research findings (Strauss 2008, p.39). I adopted a political economy theoretical framework for this research, which locates the power of media in economic processes and sees economic domination as a primary factor in determining media messages. Its approach to the media acknowledges that gate keepers (editors, producers and journalists) and audiences may have choices and that they do make choices, but accepts that their choices are within certain parameters, given that the communication process is “structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources” (Golding and Murdock 2000, p.73). Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that media bias arises from the pre-selection of right-thinking people, internalised preconceptions and the adaption of personnel to the constraints of a series of objective filters they present in their propaganda model. Only news stories in line with elite interests can pass through the filters freely and receive full media attention. The model also explains how the media can reliably function when even a superficial analysis of the evidence would indicate the outrageous nature of many of the stories that receive generous publicity in the press and in the news (Herman and Chomsky 1988).

Methods

The first stage of my research involved the collection of newspaper articles focusing on the flag ruling and the subsequent protests. These were drawn from across three newspapers; The Belfast Telegraph, The Irish Times and The Irish

News. The articles were from 4/12/2012, the day after the flag ruling was passed, until 20/2/2013 which was the day I began my research. I was left with a final sample of 135 articles to examine.

The selection of research participants was informed by a purposive sampling strategy, which was implemented to provide my research with conceptual richness. Once ethical approval was received from the UL Ethics Committee I began to make contact with potential candidates. In total I conducted qualitative interviews with four individuals, three focus groups at protests and qualitative interviews with three politicians.

The final area of data collection involved me attending a protest. This was important to me as I wanted to gain first-hand experience of the events.

I then conducted a qualitative content analysis of the 135 newspaper articles and adopted a grounded theory method of analysis for the interview data. Having reached saturation point, where no further themes or categories were emerging, I ended up with a set of key categories that I believed characterized the event being researched (Creswell 2007, p.290). Due to word constraints I will only present the key findings in this paper.

Key themes evident in the sample of Newspaper Articles

The Economy – 37 articles

This theme was evident in the majority of my sample, focusing on a reported loss to the economy and providing estimated costs, such as; ‘£15.6 million cost of policing’ and ‘£3m lost in trade’ (Belfast Telegraph 8/2/13, 10/12/13). These losses on blamed on the loyalist communities, protesters, rioters and

paramilitaries who are refusing to stop the violence. The protests are reported as impacting massively on local retail and businesses, particularly in the city centre. One article refers to Belfast as a '*ghost town where staff outnumber punters*'. Justin Hyde, manager at Cruise clothing store, described the city as if '*someone had turned the lights out*' confiding that the store had lost tens of thousands of pounds in the month following the protests (Belfast Telegraph 18/12/12).

It is suggested that pictures of the rioting and related mayhem appearing on television screens around the world could cause a drop in tourism. Economist John Simpson argued that we need to appeal to tourists; he says "*if you were in London, Cardiff or Glasgow and thinking about a weekend away, you would certainly think twice about going to Belfast after seeing the news recently*" (Belfast Telegraph, 3/1/13).

Violence – 28 articles

The theme of violence was very evident in the sample of news articles, appearing in various forms, though it was mostly evident in relation to attacks on police officers. The articles primarily report the same instances; homemade and readily found weapons that have been used to attack and wound PSNI members. Reports of loyalists throwing "*petrol bombs, bottles and stones*" at police and attacking vehicles with "*hatchets, knives and sledgehammers*" (The Irish News 26/1/13, 29/1/13) during the trouble that flared following protests in the city abound in the media coverage sampled. Following reports of violence, the injuries of police officers are also described and documented, providing information on both injuries and treatment. The example below describes how police officers were injured, blaming the violence that erupted on the protesters following the Union Flag ruling.

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‘Fifteen police officers were injured - two of whom were hospitalised - after tensions boiled over into violence among the protesters when the motion was passed to only fly the flag on designated days’ (Belfast Telegraph 5/12/12).

There were also reports of threats to Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party politicians in the aftermath of the decision to remove the Union Flag from City Hall. The intimidation of politicians is reported as threats made via social networking sites to “abuse” and “harm” Alliance representatives and also to “smash-up” their East Belfast offices (The Irish News 3/1/13). The headline of one article makes reference to a sinister development as “*Sinn Fein and Alliance politicians have expressed alarm after being sent bullets in the post*”. Although the article makes it clear that no threats or notes were received with the bullets, Sinn Fein MLA Gerry Kelly is reported as saying that it was obvious the bullets were linked to the “*Union Flag protests*” which were being orchestrated by “*loyalist paramilitaries*” (The Irish News 20/12/12).

Finally, one article mentions “*police brutality*” via a direct quote from a tweet by the Progressive Unionist Party leader Billy Hutchinson who was reportedly seeking an urgent meeting with the PSNI following his own claims that people’s human rights were being abused. The author of that article counters this view with the argument that the - “*police have stood back for too long as roads have been blocked and illegal marches have taken place; the policing approach has been ‘softly-softly’*” (Belfast Telegraph 29/1/13).

Disruption to Everyday Life – 17 articles

The third key theme evident in my sample of article was that of the protests disrupting the smooth operation of everyday life. The main inconvenience and disruption reported throughout the samples is the blocking of main roads,

bringing '*rush-hour traffic to a standstill*' during the hour of '*6pm and 7pm*' in order to cause maximum disorder to the city (The Irish News 8/1/13, 18/12/12). There is a lot of emphasis on the use of Twitter and Facebook to bring '*Belfast to a standstill*', in a movement that has been dubbed '*Operation Standstill*'. (The Irish News 8/1/13). A number of events are claimed to have been cancelled due to the disruption of the '*ugly protests*'. The words '*community*' and '*cross-community*' are emphasised using capital letters in three articles. One article discusses how a '*COMMUNITY*' basketball event had to be cancelled, leaving the group of children '*upset*' and '*disappointed*'. The leader of the '*non-profit group*' explains how they encourage children to get involved to combat '*social issues such as sectarianism*' (Belfast Telegraph 20/2/13) One article provided the opinion of a Protestant woman who claimed to be disgusted with the protesters actions (Belfast Telegraph 21/1/13). Additional articles cover the early closing of schools and the cancellations of various bus routes all over the city. One piece focuses on an elderly man who was '*jeered at and taunted*' as he tried to pass protesters to get to visit his terminally ill wife. A GP was also prevented from visiting the home of a seriously ill cancer patient; being refused entry by the protestors even when he argued his cause with them. Interestingly the (anonymous) sources reporting these incidents are not mentioned or quoted (Belfast Telegraph 12/1/13).

Media Descriptions of the Protesters – 6 articles

Throughout the sample of articles I discovered that the media was mostly very careful not to say anything openly offensive about the protesters. There were some articles however that conveyed the average protester in a certain light. One example was of a woman who was in court; as well as documenting that the lady allegedly attempted to punch a police officer the journalist also adds that at her time of arrest she was in her pyjamas (The Irish News 19/12/12). Throughout the documenting of the violent protesters the media described the

protesters as ‘*mothers with young babies in prams*’ and ‘*youths*’ who jeered loudly at police (Belfast Telegraph 8/1/13). Sinn Féin Minister Jim McVeigh effectively stereotypes the protesters in the following statement

"When you see hundreds of masked men with scarves over their faces and draped in Union flags, it reinforces the point we made at the start that the flag is used to intimidate people" (Belfast Telegraph 22/12/12)

One journalist bluntly calls loyalists ‘*too thick*’ explaining that they fail to understand ‘that they had won the war and Ulster would be staying as part of the UK’ (Belfast Telegraph 20/12/12). Another article describes the protesters as being ‘*gullible*’ and ‘*exploited*’ by their unionist politicians (The Irish News 19/12/12).

Providing a context for the Protests – 1 articles

I found only one article in my sample that gave an elaborate insight into the reasons why the protests may be taking place. The author of that article states that the protests are a ‘*sign of a troubled community’s growing sense of disenfranchisement*’. The article includes the firsthand insight of a ‘*leading loyalist and community worker*’ Jim Wilson, who argued that it may only be a flag but people need to comprehend what it means:

“the intention was to take away our Britishness and the flag was not the first concession that the loyalist community has been forced to make” (The Irish Times 8/12/12)

The opinion of Progressive Unionist Party member John Kyle is also included; he speaks of a real sense of grievance, a feeling that his community has drawn the short straw. He connects the protests and anger to economic and social problems caused by politicians doing a poor job for working-class people, ‘*those with the least have received the least*’. Kyle also discussed the lack of

employment opportunities for young people today and the ‘culture of worklessness’, “*young people are going off to university, getting an education and life-experience, but kids from working-class communities don’t have that*” (The Irish Times 8/12/12).

Key findings from the interview data

The ‘real’ economic impact

All the protesters participating in my study argued that the protests did not have the impact on the economy that is implied by the media coverage. One protester, Ryan accused the papers of having no hard factual or economic evidence to show that the Northern Irish economy was damaged just as a result of the protest. He stated “*Belfast businesses cried long and hard in order to obtain damages, but the violence has stopped and business are still folding and figures are down – the recession?*” A number of my participants made reference to the recession being the real cause for economic difficulties being experienced in the city. John exclaimed,

“It was a double dip recession, what are they comparing these statistics to? Last Years? Then obviously spending is going to be down!”

Finally, Margaret argued that “*every city in the UK and Republic showed a downturn in figures due to the recession*”.

My participant from the Democratic Unionist Party remarked that during the protests Belfast City Centre was an unwelcoming dangerous place, and in the month of Christmas that perception severely impacted business generally and the hospitality sector more specifically. My participant from the Alliance party

agreed that the recession may have played a part in the economic losses over Christmas, but this was compounded by the damage caused by the flag protests. Finally, my participant from the Progressive Unionist Party agreed that while the protests may have negatively impacted the retail and restaurant businesses in Belfast over the Christmas period, these businesses would have been experiencing a down turn anyway due to the general state of the economy. This politician stated that while the protesters are being accused of damaging the economy “*some of the responsibility for that must rest on the shoulders of the politicians who insisted on pushing the matter through in the teeth of Christmas*”.

Interestingly, Angela explained that some people seem to be making money from the protests, with migrant workers turning up weekly to sell Union Jack merchandise and flags.

“Disgraceful, thugs, scum, hoods...?”

When the protesters were asked how they felt they were portrayed in the media the responses were all similar; “*disgraceful, thugs, scum, hoods*”. Mark believes that the media portrayal of the protesters wasn’t accurate. He questioned why being a protestant who is angry enough about the flag to protest means that you are stereotypically understood as being “*a hood from an estate, wearing a tracksuit and on benefits*”. In that context Lisa’s recollection of people arriving at the protests in Finaghy makes very interesting reading.

“I saw people coming out in this area that I’ve never seen out because they were so angry about it; doctors, teachers, nurses. It wasn’t all benefit thieves like it was made out to be!”

John perceived that there was a massive focus in the media on protesters being unemployed and on benefits.

“People kept saying they must all be getting DLA¹, benefit thieves, they can’t have jobs if they are protesting. But the protests were all organised for 6 or 7 o’clock, people are finished work by then”.

My participant from the DUP claimed that some within the media took the opportunity to portray the protesters as uneducated, working class parasites within the community, sneeringly using the term ‘fleg’ rather than ‘flag’ and attempting to demonise and denigrate those who shared a genuine grievance. He added that irrespective of this construction, some flag protesters gave away any moral high ground that they may have helped through their participant in violence and unlawful protest.

The protestor participants offered a number of views on why the media portrayed the protesters in such a negative light. Mark stated *“A lot of people think it’s because they (journalists) are Catholic, I think it is because they are middle class and they are looking down their nose at us”*. John explained that he believed that if the media convey the protesters as violent thugs who are being arrested and charged then it will discourage people from coming out and joining the protests.

“They are turning our own people against us...they are making loyalism a dirty word”.

My participant from the PUP elaborated on this viewpoint arguing that

“the media and middle classes were withering in their criticism of the protester, even though the same liberally minded elite would staunchly defeat people’s right to protest, unless of course, the protesters were uneducated working class loyalists.”

¹ Disability living allowance

My protester participants argued the media had not made a clear distinction between the protesters and the rioters. Angela said, “*we are all tarred with the same brush*”. Margaret agreed recalling an occasion when she was walking home from a protest and she was caught up in a crowd of teenager stoning the police, “*I kept shouting at them not to, because you’re playing into their hands. They give us all a bad name, but they were young and fiery and feisty*”. John claimed that the protestors have been demonised in the press and that the media brands every protester as a rioter because that is the story that is going to sell the most newspapers. When I recalled his question to Mark at the weekly Saturday protest he asked me to look around,

“Do you see any violence? Have you met any aggressive people? Look at how many police officers there are, there are no rioters here but in the papers tomorrow well that could be a different story.”

He had a point. During my attendance at the weekly protests I found the atmosphere calm and friendly, the protesters were happy to speak with me and share their experiences. For the hour they would stand around chatting waving their Union flags before gathering in a circle to sing *God Save the Queen* and head their separate ways.

Accurate Media Coverage?

The protesters believed that the majority of the media coverage was very inaccurate. I was recounted numerous stories of how reports had been sensationalised and completely fabricated. Lisa explained further,

“they said we wouldn’t let an old man past to get to the hospital to his dying wife, I was there that night and it didn’t happen. I know the protesters, they’re from my area and they would never have let that happen.”

Similarly Margaret recalled being at a protest at Robb's Road with around twenty other protesters

“an ambulance came and we moved to let it through, the next night in the Belfast Telegraph it said there were 200 protesters blocking the ambulances getting into the hospital. I'm an old woman myself, why would I do that or allow it to happen?”

Another topic that the protestor participants in this study continually brought up (and which they assured me that I would not find in any media coverage) was police brutality and provocation. Ryan told me that on many occasions he heard the PSNI riot officers using derogatory and inflammatory language such as *'hun bastards'* and *'orange bastards'* to peaceful protesters. George recalled a protest on the Newtownards Road where

“the police came and asked everyone to move up and everybody was moving, there were older people (like myself) who weren't walking as quick as others and they were coming along with their batons and hitting people on the back of the legs to get them to move quicker. It was brutality, pure brutality! We didn't read about that the next day!”

Each of the protesters interviewed recalled a time when police officers were too heavy handed. I asked whether this may have been due to other violence occurring nearby.

“No, I can tell you we were doing the white line protest one week and I was on the white line and a police man got off his bike and pushed me! I said would you push your mother like that and he called me a word I dare never repeat. There's no mistaking that I'm afraid.”

Angela argued that,

“They [the media] have made us out to be scum, they have allowed the police to beat us without reporting it, why do you think they would show anything from our point of view?”

My participant from the Alliance Party stated that they believed that the media portrayed the protesters negatively, criticising their lack of organisation and strategy and their overreaction to the flag ruling, an image that the respondent tended to agree with. My participant from the DUP agreed with the protesters views that without question the media covered the protests negatively. However he believed that the protests were negative, taking weeks before protesters adopted lawful white line pickets and resorting to violence which meant the credibility of the peaceful protest was damaged. Interestingly the participant from the DUP claimed that once the violence featured as a part of the protest on the first evening, all rational fears or concerns the unionist community had were overshadowed by the negative images and headlines. “At this point the argument was lost”.

The Reason for the Protests

While the protesters are protesting over the removal of the Union flag, many underlying issues arose during the course of the interviews, from a feeling that their British identity is being eroded to Sinn Féin using their majority in the Belfast City Council to change the balance of power in their favour. George told me that the flag is the number one priority, but the protests are also about a percentage of the protestant community not being represented at local government level, Stormont and above. Margaret adds to this viewpoint stating that,

“People are probably out there watching us on the news thinking we are crazy protesting over a flag, but it’s not just a flag. They keep talking about a shared future, but we keep making concessions. They are stripping our British identity bit by bit.”

My DUP participant gave an elaborate and insightful response to what he saw as being the underlying reasons behind the protests.

“Flags, symbols and emblems are revered, respected with our society. They may differ given the nature of our divided society but they are often attached to an emotional resonance for an entire community. When the decision to remove the Union flag was taken, it provoked an emotional reaction from the unionist community. Some felt their identity was besmirched, their fallen desecrated, their heritage eroded.”

Discussion

Overall the economy was found to be the most prominent theme evident with 37 sources from the sample of 135 articles. The second most common theme evident was violence which appeared in 28 sources. Johnson-Cartee (2005) suggests that our news attention involves a personal judgement of saliency: Is this important to me personally? Does it concern me? I would argue that media coverage which focuses on the economy will not only stick in the mind of the reader because it has been one of the prominent themes but also because it impacts the individual personally. It is reported that millions of pounds are being spent policing the protests, people are destroying property that has to be replaced and ruining areas in which these people live. This is tax-payers money, money that could be being spent on better health, education or housing. One article headline read ‘How Beast from East has cost us £10M’, the use of the word *us* appeals to the reader on a personal level emphasising the public money is being poured down the drain due to the protests. If we compare this research to Weaver, McCombs and Spellman’s (1975) study, we can see that the manner in which the media have reported on this issue allows the reader to engage with a stereotypical image of the protesters without providing any background context in order that we may develop our own informed opinions. This has the effect of alienating the protester and allowing the reader to feel no connection towards them.

McCullagh (2002, p.25) writes that the media place events in a context so the audience can understand them in certain ways. My data evidences a media portrayal of the protesters as “uneducated, working-class parasites” which was epitomised in the media’s derogatory use of the term, ‘fleg’. Moreover I would argue that by continually reporting stories relating to arrests, charges, disruption and violence the media are portraying a particular image of the protester. They are conveying to a reader, who may not witness the protests first hand, that this is the image of a typical protester. Cohen (1972, p.16) outlines that the media have long operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain ‘facts’ can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic. Cohen (1972) recognises that ‘folk-devils’ exist on the margin, in the sense of their positioning in cultural arrangements of space. The media in this sense are able to convey the protesters as outsiders by marginalising them and presenting them as, “thugs, hoods, from estates, and living off benefits”.

Looking once again at Bennett (1982) who writes that by conveying these people as ‘outsiders’ the media can strengthen our connection to the dominant social norms. I would argue as a result of conducting this research that the media have created a moral panic where a group of persons (the protesters) are defined as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen 1972, p.9). The media portrayals have constructed the protesters as being committed to the breakdown of society and destroying Belfast’s shared future to such an extent that other members of society wish to distance themselves from these ‘working-class parasites’. In effect the protesters are constructed and envisaged as ‘visible reminders of what we should not be’ (Cohen 2002, p.2).

Conclusions

This research has illuminated the power and control the media exerts over significant situations. In the case of the Belfast Union flag protests I would argue that the media has not offered a true representation, and by continuing to ignore the feelings of the protesters they are not able to convey to the audience the whole story. Throughout the flag protests the media has created a stereotypical image of the protester and branded the protest aggressive and pointless. I would argue that in this case what the media failed to do was to make a distinction between the rioters and the protesters.

One thing that has stayed with me throughout this research was a comment made by George,

“In army terms a team always ties their flag, if you get past and take their flag they lose, they have nothing left”.

For me this is the key to understanding the protests.

The media has become both an essential and necessary part of the modern world of today. However we should not accept that it can pick and choose how it reports an event, stigmatising an entire population in the process.

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