

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Remembering Bloody Sunday 50 years on: A textual analysis of Bloody Sunday anniversary coverage

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Abstract

On January 30, 2022, Northern Ireland observed the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. On that day in 1972, the British Army opened fire on a group of unarmed protesters in Derry, killing 13 and wounding an additional 15. Bloody Sunday was a pivotal moment during the 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles, a day widely considered a ‘watershed in British-Irish history’. And while 50 years have passed since this dark day, Bloody Sunday remains vivid in the collective memory of the small country. Considering the cultural and social significance of Bloody Sunday, I sought to answer a simple yet deceptively complicated question: does this still matter? In pursuing this answer, I aimed to understand how journalists and news outlets chose to mark and remember the anniversary in their January and February 2022 coverage. First, I present an overview of Bloody Sunday and its historical role as a catalyst for the three decades of the Troubles. Then, I review relevant memory studies literature in order to understand the role that commemorative news media play in the process of remembering in conflict and post-conflict environments. I then introduce my three research questions and methods before finally discussing the results of my analysis. I found that Bloody Sunday continues to be invoked against British colonialism, that key details of the day remain contested even now, and that the press presented Bloody Sunday as part of a globalised narrative of war-time atrocities.

Keywords: Bloody Sunday; Northern Ireland; collective memory; social memory; anniversary journalism

Introduction

On January 30, 2022, Northern Ireland observed the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. On that day in 1972, the British Army opened fire on a group of unarmed protesters in Derry, killing 13 and wounding an additional 15 (Aiken 2015). Bloody Sunday was a pivotal moment during the 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland known as the Troubles, a day widely considered a ‘watershed in British-Irish history’ (Pöttsch 2012). And while 50 years have passed, Bloody Sunday remains vivid in the collective memory of the small country as well as in Ireland and Britain.

I aimed to understand how journalists and news outlets chose to mark and remember the anniversary in their January and February 2022 coverage, with special consideration taken regarding the ideological and geographical positionality of each outlet. First, I present an

overview of Bloody Sunday and its historical role as a catalyst for the three decades of the Troubles. Then, I review relevant memory studies and communication literature in order to understand the role that commemorative news media play in the process of remembering in conflict and post-conflict environments (Herron and Lynch 2006). I will then introduce my three research questions and methods before finally discussing the results of my analysis. I found that Bloody Sunday continues to be invoked by the press against British colonialism, that key details of the day remain contested even now, and that the press presented Bloody Sunday as part of a globalised narrative of war-time atrocities.

Literature review

Bloody Sunday

Bloody Sunday is widely considered a moment of no return in Northern Ireland's Troubles. Prior to Bloody Sunday, recruitment efforts into paramilitary groups had slowed, particularly in Derry (Herron and Lynch 2006). Derry had adopted a stance of non-violent protest to anti-Catholic discrimination, a different tactic than was taken in the neighbouring city of Belfast. After Bloody Sunday, however, this attitude of peace was quelled and recruitment into the Irish Republican Army (IRA) soared, ushering in some of the most violent and turbulent decades in the country's history and effectively ensuring that there would be no 'going back' on the Troubles.

Bloody Sunday occurred on January 30, 1972. On this day, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) organised a peaceful march to protest the newly enacted policy of imprisonment without trial in an attempt to prevent paramilitary attacks before they happened. This practice is known as internment (O'Neill 2017). And while Stormont (the Northern Irish government) had outlawed all civil rights demonstrations, the NICRA organisers promised a peaceful afternoon, going so far as to gain assurance from the IRA that they would not get involved in the demonstrations (Herron and Lynch 2006; Irish Independent 2022). Soon after the march began, however, soldiers from the British Army began to shoot into the parade of peaceful protestors and kill indiscriminately. Thirteen people were killed and an additional 15 were wounded as a result.

Bloody Sunday was met with global outrage and an international demand for an explanation from the British government (Herron and Lynch 2006). As a result, in 1972, Britain set up an inquiry headed by Lord Widgery which became known as the Widgery Report. The report declared that those who had been killed on Bloody Sunday were armed members of the IRA and that the British Army was shooting in self-defense. However, although the Widgery report was initially touted as proof of protestor guilt and complicity in their own death (Herron and Lynch 2006), it was eventually condemned a 'whitewash' (Sharkey 2022). The Widgery inquiry accepted only 14 out of 450 available witness statements and of these, almost all accepted witness testimonies were military accounts (Herron and Lynch 2006). In response to the public outcry in the following decades, along with escalating paramilitary violence and nationalist protest against the methods and results of the Widgery report, Britain eventually launched a second inquiry in 1998 known as the Saville Inquiry (Conway 2003; Drohan 2018; Sharkey 2022). In 2010, the decision from the Saville Inquiry was handed down and exonerated all victims of Bloody Sunday, declaring that 'the British Army fired first' rather than in self-defense. Former Prime Minister David Cameron issued a formal and public apology on behalf of Britain, echoing the language of the Saville report, and stated that the actions of the British Army on Bloody Sunday were 'unjustified and unjustifiable' (BBC News 2010).

This apology from Cameron was initially met with praise from Bloody Sunday families who had fought for decades to clear the names of their murdered loved ones. However, in

2021, former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson proposed a blanket amnesty for all British Soldiers involved in the Troubles, including those implicated in Bloody Sunday (BBC News 2021). Further, while several soldiers were identified and initially charged with murder for acts on Bloody Sunday, all charges have been dropped due to inadmissible evidence presented in court. Families and advocates for Bloody Sunday victims remain in limbo, lobbying for justice on behalf of their loved ones and their city.

Performing contested memory in Northern Ireland

Rolston (2010) writes that Northern Ireland is ‘cursed with a surfeit of history’ (p. 285). But Northern Ireland has not only a surfeit of history but a surfeit of what Conway (2009) and others have called ‘difficult pasts’ (p. 398). Conway writes that ‘narratives of the past, difficult or not, are mobilised in the construction of identity story-lines at an individual and collective level and find concrete expression in various artefacts and practices of commemoration’ (Conway 2009, 400). In a ‘post’-conflict environment like Northern Ireland, history remains contentious, multitudinous, and conflicting.

Because of the legacy of a difficult past combined with the cultural tradition of collective remembering, performing collective memory is common in Northern Ireland, with both Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist communities conducting annual parades, commemorations, and memorialisation rituals (Evans and Tonge 2017). As Conway (2009) notes, commemoration that happens in such difficult landscapes often take one of two forms – ‘a multivocal one in which a shared object gives expression to different meanings of an event and a fragmented one involving different temporal and spatial commemorations speaking to divergent publics’ (p. 398). Bloody Sunday commemoration straddles both of these frameworks.

In this contentious and shifting mnemonic environment, the lines between official and vernacular memory are complicated (Bodnar 1992). As Bodnar notes, what gets remembered and by whom is ultimately a result of larger power dynamics as well as temporal ones. Time matters in memory (Conway 2009). After Bloody Sunday, victims and eyewitnesses were subject to a now condemned smear campaign by the British government (Eastwood 2022). During this period, official memory belonged to the testimony of the British Army. After the results of the Saville Inquiry were handed down in 2010 however, victims and survivors were cleared of any wrongdoing, flipping the narrative and relinquishing the ownership of official memory to Bloody Sunday victims. Such a flip, however, is not so easily incorporated into the dominant narrative and mnemonic habits are not easily abandoned. Even still, the lines between official and vernacular memory remain blurred in Northern Ireland and a multiplicity of conflicting memories continue to fight it out among the pages of newspapers and popular media (Glassberg 2001).

Theoretical framing

Postmemory and prosthetic memory

Of primary concern for scholars studying the legacy and formation of social memory is the extent to which memories are transmitted down to younger generations and out to wider society. Here, Hirsch’s concept of postmemory (2008) and Landsberg’s (2004) prosthetic memory are useful. Their conceptualisations of the fluidity of memory redefine memory as something inherently social and *transmissible* regardless of proximity to first-hand memory.

Hirsch’s postmemory refers specifically to the phenomenon experienced by second generation survivors of the Holocaust and their relationship to their parents’ memories. She

writes that postmemory is ‘a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a consequence of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove’ (p. 106). Hirsch cites Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* as the catalyst for the conceptualisation of postmemory. In *Maus*, Spiegelman inserts himself into the memories of his father – a Holocaust survivor. He does this through creative storytelling where, through drawing his father’s memories as if he himself were there to remember, he literally writes himself into Auschwitz, drawing memories of the camps despite having been born after his father’s liberation.

Hirsch argues that these ‘memories’ that Spiegelman has are different from his father’s firsthand memories but are no less authentic. ‘Of course’, she writes, ‘we do not have literal “memories” of others’ experiences ... of course no degree of monumentality can transform one person’s lived memories into another’s’ (p. 109). However, ‘postmemorial work...strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures...which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone’ (p. 111). Postmemory keeps societal memory alive by acting as the connecting mnemonic tissue between generations.

Landsberg (2004) similarly engages with memory transmission. She calls these transferred memories ‘prosthetic memories’ (2004). Prosthetic memories are authentic, despite their distance from firsthand memory, because of their experiential nature. Landsberg writes of what she terms ‘transferential spaces’ – spaces ‘in which people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which they themselves did not live’ (2004, 113). Like Hirsch’s postmemories, prosthetic memories bridge the gap between firsthand experience and history. Through mass mediated spaces, ‘in which people are invited to enter into experiential relationships to events through which they themselves did not live...people may gain access to a range of processual, sensually immersed knowledge that would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means’ (2004, 113). I will now turn to the primary forms of mass media which act as transferential spaces of Bloody Sunday memory – anniversary journalism.

Communication, memory, and anniversary journalism

George (2019) writes that ‘a communication perspective on public memory considers our understanding about the past as developed through an exchange between storytellers (or producers of messages) and listeners (or audiences) that happens within a particular historical moment and culture and through particular media’ (p. 14). Storytellers range from the vernacular to the official and convey memory through media (see Bodnar 1992). An immediate concern for communication scholars is the way that collective memory contributes to narrative formation and sustainability (see Zelizer 1995). That is, communication scholarship asks why some memories stay, why others fade and how these cyclical processes survive through generations.

Within communication scholarship, the intersection with memory studies has developed substantially around the concept of anniversary journalism – typically newspaper and magazine coverage which acts as a retrospective for a specific past event. Scholars have argued that anniversary coverage is a way for both journalists and readers to make meaning of a past as well as to assign it moral or civic value. This makes sense considering the outsize role that journalism has had in adding stories to the national historic zeitgeist. Leach and McKenney (2012) write that ‘anniversary coverage serves as a lens through which to examine the past’ and that it accomplishes this examination in two ways’ (p. 104).

First, anniversary coverage provides a retrospective of an outlet’s own coverage. On anniversaries, journalists can evaluate what they did right and what they did wrong in

their initial reporting. Second, anniversary coverage allows for the solidification of memory into history. By reprinting certain testimonies, photos, and perspectives, anniversary coverage condenses a collection of memories and packages it as historical fact. Thus, as Leach and McKenney continue, the public remembers the past *through* the press: ‘for those readers who were not present at the time, [anniversary journalism] grants awareness of the event, helping them feel what it was like; for those who were present, anniversary coverage transports them back to the key date they lived through’ (p. 104, see also Sonnevend 2016).

Applying a memory studies lens to the anniversary coverage of Bloody Sunday can reveal how journalists, as public historians, choose which parts of the past to bring to the forefront of the public mind and which parts to shed off. Further, as journalists interview representatives of the community, news coverage reflects, in part, the emotions and memories of the community. This process is not straightforward. Rather, how the community remembers Bloody Sunday varies widely. This process of disagreement is what Zerubavel (1996) calls a ‘mnemonic battle’. He writes that ‘as we develop a collective sense of history, we do not always agree on how a particular historical figure or event ought to be remembered’ (Zerubavel 1996, 295). In this way, news coverage not only reveals facts about the past but also the contested details, the battle on the page.

Research questions

News outlets do not need to look far for ways to spark public memory on days of great national significance in Northern Ireland. However, cohesive and agreed upon memories of the country’s past are rare, and there is no truly agreed upon version of history within the country’s sectarian landscape (Barton and McCully 2010). For this reason, news media must tread carefully on days like the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Considering the lack of agreed upon history, the culture of memorialisation in Northern Ireland, and the role of news media as transference spaces of memory, I asked three questions regarding news coverage of the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday:

RQ1: How did news media choose to cover the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday?

RQ2: How did the coverage differ between three ideologically distinct news outlets?

RQ3: How did news coverage draw on collective memory in their coverage?

Method

To answer these questions, I conducted a textual analysis of all Bloody Sunday 50th anniversary coverage in three major news outlets. The *Derry Journal* was chosen because it is the local paper of the city that experienced Bloody Sunday and can thus provide a unique perspective on how the news media closest to the event interpret its significance 50 years later. The *Irish Independent*, based in Dublin, is one of Ireland’s most widely read newspapers. As an Irish paper reporting on Northern Ireland, the *Independent* offers a perspective from the Republic of Ireland which has historically and politically supported the republican fight for Irish unification. Finally, articles from the BBC’s Northern Ireland desk were also analysed. In contrast to the *Irish Independent*, the BBC, with its headquarters in London (though its Northern Irish desk is based in Belfast) will represent a British perspective. The British government has provided longstanding support for loyalists in Northern Ireland who are committed to remaining part of the United Kingdom. I selected these two outlets because they straddle the line between foreign and domestic coverage. To be Northern Irish is to exist in three contradictory states simultaneously. To ignore the

role that Irish and British media have played in the narrative construction of Northern Ireland would be both limiting and incomplete. This is exemplified by the attention given to both Irish and British politicians during the series of commemorative and anniversary events that took place during the time of data collection, as will be discussed in the findings.

All news items, which included articles, photo essays, and landing pages for audio and visual stories, were gathered through the websites of each outlet. I included news items which were published between January 1, 2022 and February 28, 2022, including coverage of the anniversary ceremonies which took place on January 30, 2022. Once gathered, I coded all articles using NVivo and a modified grounded theory approach, creating and modifying categories throughout the coding process (Walsh *et al.* 2015). This two-month period yielded a total of 121 news items: 58 items from the *Derry Journal*, 38 from the *Irish Independent*, and 25 from the *BBC*. Of the *BBC* news items, 17 of the coded news items were landing pages for audio or visual stories and 8 were feature articles.

I recognise that the number of articles from the *BBC* is small compared with those from the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent*. However, this disparity in coverage between the British and Irish outlets is itself worth analysis. Finally, it should be noted that outlets like the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent* are more likely to include editorials in their coverage than is the *BBC*. Again, however, it is worth noting that these decisions to include or exclude editorials also sheds light on how each media outlet views their duty to cover, frame, and ultimately remember Bloody Sunday. Further, using anniversary coverage from the *BBC* was critical because of the influential media presence that the *BBC* held during the initial coverage of Bloody Sunday. As will be discussed in the findings, other outlets utilised original *BBC* coverage as part of their own anniversary stories. In this way, while the *BBC* made up the fewest number of articles as well as the fewest number of editorials, their importance in the media landscape of the Troubles and of Northern Ireland and its relationship with the United Kingdom cannot be ignored.

Findings

I found three unifying themes in the anniversary coverage. These themes include the continuing emphasis on British guilt, contested and conflicting memories and news narratives, and the presentation of Bloody Sunday as part of a globalised narrative of war-time atrocities. I will now discuss each theme in detail.

Editorial voices from the grave: British guilt and the fight for justice

It is perhaps obvious that coverage of Bloody Sunday would include ample references to Britain. Throughout the coverage, all outlets acknowledged the role the British Army played in Bloody Sunday. However, in many articles, particularly in the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent*, blame for the British Army and Government went beyond biographical facts. In these interviews and included excerpts from speeches at Bloody Sunday commemorations, remembering Bloody Sunday offered an opportunity to remind their audiences of Britain's sins:

People Before Profit T.D. Bríd Smith said: 'The British establishment always tries to portray the conflict in Ireland as some kind of war between two tribes and itself as the awkward piggy in the middle trying to keep us apart. However, Bloody Sunday in particular shows that it arose from a *cold-blooded decision* by the British establishment to suppress the mass movement for civil rights, the result of which was absolute carnage throughout the North. The Parachute Regiment was sent to

Derry, not to keep two warring factions apart, *but to conduct a massacre and break up and intimidate a mass movement*'. – *Derry Journal* (Mullan 2022d, emphasis added)

This strong language not only implicates the British Army and Government in Bloody Sunday but explicitly claims that the actions taken by the Army were not an accident and were intentionally and consciously facilitated by British officials. This illustrates a key function of invoking memory which is to 'press the past into the service of present aims' (West 2002, 212). Rather than remembering Bloody Sunday as a day in the past, where bad actors in an old regiment broke rank, this language implicates a present-day Britain. This was emblematic of coverage in the *Derry Journal* and in the *Irish Independent* but not in the *BBC*. And while the *BBC* did not always shy away from condemnation of the British Army, the explications that Bloody Sunday was a cool and calculated attack were absent from *BBC* coverage.

This finding is consistent with past literature which examines the mnemonic effects of Bloody Sunday anniversary coverage. As Herron and Lynch (2006) found in their analysis of 1972 coverage of Bloody Sunday, the use of the photos of Bloody Sunday victims 'are not just acts of commemoration or of mourning, but are in fact *critical interventions – acts of persuasion* – in the campaign to persuade the British Government to establish a full and proper Inquiry into the circumstances of the killings' (p. 60, emphasis added). Two things are worthy of note here. First, Lynch is describing the use of photographs used specifically in parades and other place-based commemoration rituals. However, as Lynch notes throughout his analysis, the line between press and public demonstration is often blurred, particularly in Northern Ireland. Photos which originally appeared alongside the names of the dead in newspapers immediately following Bloody Sunday became ways for the public to both uphold the legacy of the victims as well as to campaign for justice and a public reckoning from the British government. Second, the present analysis did not include photographs but instead focused on rhetoric within anniversary coverage. And yet the ways that the past is invoked for present political purposes is similar to those articulated by Herron and Lynch (2006). Throughout the years, coverage of Bloody Sunday has always been deployed as a tool for justice against the British government in at least some capacity.

Beyond the language used to rally against the British government, language regarding the actual killing done on Bloody Sunday varied between news sources and, in some cases, within a single source. One of the words most frequently invoked to remember Bloody Sunday was 'murder'. In one article, the *Derry Journal* utilised an excerpt from the memoirs of Father Daly, the priest in the iconic Bloody Sunday photo waving a bloody white handkerchief and administering Last Rites to dying protesters:

Jackie Duddy's body was brought to the hospital. John Bierman of the BBC asked me to do a television interview...In that interview, I described what I had seen as murder. Bloody Sunday cast a long and enduring shadow. – *Derry Journal* (The Newsroom 2022b)

This testimony is illustrative of the reliance on high-profile survivors as lay experts. Here, the lines between official and vernacular memory blur. While Father Daly could be considered an official because of his role in an influential organised religion (the Catholic Church), the *Derry Journal* relied on his hybrid identity both as a priest and as a victim, as 'one of us'. Further, as Father Daly died in 2016, the use of his interviews and firsthand accounts acts as what Herron and Lynch (2006) refer to as '*prosopopeia*, in which the absent or dead implore the living into action' (p. 60). Father Daly's testimony does not diminish in death but rather gains additional rhetorical power as it is deployed,

through an editorial decision by the *Derry Journal*, as a call to make sure his words and his insistence that Bloody Sunday was an act of murder remain relevant to present-day conversations around justice and Bloody Sunday memory.

While the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent* invoked language and testimony which highlighted the ongoing fight for justice for Catholic/nationalist/Irish communities, the *BBC* used different language and testimony. The *BBC*, for the most part, avoided using ‘murder’ and ‘massacre’, opting instead for more passive language:

Thirteen people died after members of the Army’s Parachute Regiment opened fire on civil rights demonstrators. – *BBC* (*BBC News* 2022)

Thirteen people were shot dead when soldiers opened fire on civil rights demonstrators in Derry on 30 January 1972. – *BBC* (McBride and Wilson 2022)

However, there were exceptions:

Mr. Justice McAlinden said ‘there was no justification whatsoever’ for the attack on Mr. Bridge. He described the shooting as ‘a callous, hideous attack on an unarmed civilian who was simply protesting about the shooting dead of a 17-year-old’. – *BBC* (*BBC News* 2022)

And while the *BBC* was more likely to use less incriminating verbiage when it came to the acts of the Army on Bloody Sunday, they did occasionally include firsthand memories which highlight instances of cruelty perpetrated by the Army:

As he was being taken away for medical treatment another paratrooper was said to have informed him: ‘You’re finished.’ – *BBC* (*BBC News* 2022)

I am cautious to suggest that such instances signal a transformation in the mnemonic battle of Bloody Sunday staged in the press. However, the contrast between the passive language of the first two examples of *BBC* coverage with the two examples highlighted just above is notable and future analysis of *BBC* coverage of Troubles anniversaries will be enlightening. Rather than illustrating the more traditional split between Catholic/nationalist/Irish and Protestant/loyalist/British coverage, the *BBC* Bloody Sunday coverage could be seen as displaying a shift in how the British press presents itself to the British public regarding matters of Northern Ireland.

References thus far to British officials from the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent* have been almost exclusively negative and, in some cases, particularly unforgiving. One notable exception regards memories of former Prime Minister David Cameron’s formal apology in 2010 on behalf of the British Government (*BBC News* 2010). Here, I identified two interpretations of Cameron’s apology highlighted by the press: one as an entirely positive memory and one as a hopeful memory left unfulfilled in the fight for justice. In both instances, past memories are invoked for the purpose of reflecting on and envisioning possible futures between Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Britain.

Mentions of Cameron’s apology drew on firsthand memories of watching the live broadcast in 2010. Sturken (1997) writes that the ‘photographic image [is] a receptacle of memory, the place where memory resides’ (p. 20). When a historical event is encountered through a visual image, such as a live news broadcast, the significance of the memory becomes tied to the image itself. For some interviewed about Cameron’s apology, the significance of the memory was tied to the spectacle of the television broadcast:

The British prime minister, David Cameron, also spoke on live broadcast. When he began, a great hush fell on the Derry crowd. As he continued, we all broke out in spontaneous applause. Strange indeed, for a British PM to be cheered on the streets of Derry. – *Irish Independent* (Sharkey 2022)

In this case, Cameron's apology is remembered by an Irish publication as transcending the British-Irish divide altogether. It is also remembered as a 'flashbulb memory' – 'memories of the circumstances in which a person learned about a newsworthy public event' (Watson and Chen 2016, 1016, citing Hirst and Meksin 2009). In this way, the memory of David Cameron's televised apology stood out against the blur of other televised Troubles-era memories. It was something special.

Not all memories of Cameron's apology glowed with fondness, however. Or, rather, the memories of the significance of the apology were overshadowed by the reality of present-day conditions faced by the Bloody Sunday families in Derry:

It is devastating to think that nobody is going to be held to account. All those words that David Cameron said – 'unjustified and unjustifiable' – that was just words. Now they are all going to walk. – *Derry Journal* (Mullan 2022a)

This example is significant because it creates a bridge between memories of the past and experiences of the present. Here, the first two examples of memories which place Cameron's apology in high esteem are subdued, changing the narrative of the memory in light of the years that followed. While the past 50 years have remembered Cameron's apology fondly, the next 50 might not. If Cameron's words existed as flashbulb memories of hope at one time, their light has now dimmed.

The excerpts used in this section all served to highlight the prevailing sense that Bloody Sunday remains unfinished business. These memories – from Father Daly's memoirs to individuals' memories of watching Bloody Sunday news on television – are useful in keeping the fight of Bloody Sunday victims and families at the forefront of relations between Northern Ireland, Ireland, and Britain. I will now turn in more detail to the ways in which these memories and others are made more complicated by their contested and conflicting nature.

Contested memories and the three deaths of John Johnston

Some Bloody Sunday coverage differed so dramatically that outlets offered entirely separate versions of historical events. This is significant because, as 50 years have passed since Bloody Sunday, inherited memories in the form of both postmemory and prosthetic memory will become the primary form of memory in the following years. As firsthand witnesses of Bloody Sunday die, it will matter how memory is recorded. This section will highlight examples of contested memory, postmemory, and prosthetic memory in order to understand how the press creates Landsberg's transferential spaces. In these transferential spaces, readers are offered several versions of Bloody Sunday to remember.

Deciding who 'shot first' on Bloody Sunday was the key question which preoccupied two independent inquiries and haunted the families of the victims for decades. However, despite the formal absolution of the protesters and an official acknowledgement from David Cameron that the British Army 'fired first' (BBC 2022), some of the anniversary coverage would suggest that this question was still on the table. This played out most vividly in the decision on which details of the historical day to highlight. Consider this paragraph from the BBC:

After prolonged skirmishes between groups of youths and the Army, soldiers from the Parachute Regiment moved in to make arrests. Just before 16:00 GMT

[Greenwich Mean Time], stones were thrown and soldiers responded with rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon. At 16:07 GMT, paratroopers moved to arrest as many marchers as possible. At 16:10 GMT, soldiers began to open fire. – *BBC* (McBride and Wilson 2022)

Here, the violence of the British Army is secondary – quite literally in that it appears second in the excerpt – to the phrase ‘prolonged skirmishes between groups of youths and the Army’. This language is a far cry from initial British coverage 50 years ago. However, such language can be interpreted as prolonging the now officially debunked narrative that victims of Bloody Sunday were terrorists or in some way instigated the attacks against them. Herron and Lynch (2006) cite a *Daily Mail* editorial published the day after Bloody Sunday in 1972: ‘those who died were not martyrs to Civil Rights (though last night they were being promoted as such). They were terrorists, or fodder for terrorists’ (p. 70). And so while the tone and tenor has changed in the press, there is still blame placed upon the Bloody Sunday dead from the British press even now.

In contrast to this implication of blame in the *BBC*, the *Derry Journal* promoted a starkly different narrative:

The victims were blamed. The media got hold of the story. The army press releases and the briefings went on. They were blamed for being victims. Like, somehow or other, it was their fault they were there and shot dead by soldiers. – *Derry Journal* (Ní Chanáin 2022)

Here, we read what feels like a direct response to the type of narrative just seen in the *BBC*. That is, while the *BBC* leads up to the shots fired by the British Army with a mention of the ‘prolonged skirmishes’, the *Derry Journal* seems to ask ‘who cares?’

Perhaps the most contested memory which appeared in the coverage regarded the so-called 14th death of Bloody Sunday. On Bloody Sunday, 13 people were shot and killed. One man, however, John Johnston, was shot and wounded on the day and died several months later. However, accounts of when and from *what* he later died vary widely in all three outlets:

BBC – The names of the 13 men killed, and of John Johnston, who was wounded on Bloody Sunday and died six months later, were read out during the event. – *BBC* (McBride and Wilson 2022)

Derry Journal – Each of the children carried a white rose in memory of the 14 boys and men shot dead by British soldiers in Derry’s Bogside on January 30, 1972. – *Derry Journal* (Ní Chanáin and McDaid 2022)

Irish Independent – Another man shot by paratroopers on the day died four months later.

While many consider him the 14th victim of Bloody Sunday, his death was formally attributed to an inoperable brain tumour. – *Irish Independent* (McCurry 2022)

In these three examples, we find three different versions of John Johnston’s death which are incompatible with one another, despite each being invoked by the press as reliable, historical fact. In the *BBC*, Johnston’s death is put at six months after Bloody Sunday and is written about in such a way as to suggest his death was related to Bloody Sunday. In the *Derry Journal*, Johnston is not named but his death – the 14th – is framed as having occurred on the day of Bloody Sunday and in the same manner as the 13 other deaths. It is only in the *Irish Independent* that we see Johnston’s death – placed at four months after Bloody Sunday rather than six – as having occurred outside the influence of Bloody Sunday entirely. Here, it is a brain tumour and not a British Soldier who killed Johnston.

If, as Landsberg argues, media creates transference spaces whereby memory is passed down to younger generations and out towards those who did not experience an event, then conflicting media narratives pose a problem for collective memory. The three deaths of John Johnston are more than an oversight and require more than a simple correction. Each printed account of Johnston's death is a symbolic lynchpin for the collective memory of Bloody Sunday. Depending on the account, he is either a martyr or a survivor who is no longer alive to share his memories. Such inconsistencies ultimately reveal the ground yet to cover in creating a cohesive memory around Bloody Sunday.

Bloody Sunday as globalised narrative

Another hallmark in the anniversary coverage was the way in which Bloody Sunday was placed alongside other instances of global atrocity. These references to other atrocities ranged from connection to other Troubles-era violence to British colonial violence in other countries to human rights atrocities in entirely different geopolitical contexts. Connections to these and other global narratives were printed exclusively in the *Derry Journal* and the *Irish Independent*.

The *Derry Journal* in particular focused on connecting the dots between Bloody Sunday and other Troubles-era tragedies at the hands of the British military. Several instances of more localised comparison focused specifically on the Ballymurphy massacre, a series of killings by the British Army which took place in Belfast in August 1971 (Burke 2015):

The bond of friendship that exists between the Bloody Sunday families and the families of Ballymurphy and all those who are fighting for truth or acknowledgement for what happened to their loved ones is an example of the healing power that justice and the fight for justice has in our society. – *Derry Journal* (Eastwood 2022)

As we march, we will remember also the other victims of the same Parachute Regiment, in Ballymurphy five months before Bloody Sunday and on the Shankill Road eight months afterwards. – *Derry Journal* (Mullan 2022c)

Here, a chain of solidarity is extended between Bloody Sunday families and Ballymurphy Massacre families. These families are narratively connected by their memories of the past and by their 'fight for justice' in the present. This chain of memory and solidarity is extended in the second excerpt. Ballymurphy is evoked alongside not only Bloody Sunday but also the killing of two men on the Shankill Road in Belfast in 1972 (McCann 2015). This strategic use of historical memory creates a timeline which advances the cause of justice-seeking families across Northern Ireland. For those holding the memories of lost ones to Bloody Sunday, the Ballymurphy Massacre, and the killings on the Shankill Road, there can be no justice for one without justice for all.

The *Irish Independent* also called upon the Ballymurphy Massacre:

These same paratroopers had already gotten away with murder. They had gone on a shooting spree in Ballymurphy the previous August. All those killed, including a Catholic priest and a young mother, were plainly innocent. No one had been called to account.

Senior officers maintained the fiction that their soldiers fired in self-defense. This cover-up was obscene. – *Irish Independent* (Sharkey 2022)

Here, memory is invoked to draw a direct line between the paratroopers involved in Bloody Sunday and those involved in Ballymurphy. This is the most explicit connection made between the two events in any of the newspapers. Here, it is not only that there

is a symbolic connection between the two families based on persecution by the British Army more broadly. Rather, this quote directly implies that the same men were responsible for both atrocities. It was indeed the same Parachute Regiment involved in both massacres. However, whether or not the same individual paratroopers were involved is irrelevant. Connecting the memories of the two families in this way creates a myth that is useful for the greater project of seeking justice.

In addition to Ballymurphy, other narratives of violence, particularly violence perpetrated by the British in other colonial outposts, were deployed. Such invocations took readers outside of Northern Ireland in order to, again, extend the fight for justice outward and to place it in a globalised context of solidarity. Two excerpts from the *Derry Journal* were particularly noteworthy:

[Bloody] Sunday was the blackest day for the name of the British Army since Amritsar [where hundreds of pro-Indian independence supporters were massacred in the Punjab in 1919]. – *Derry Journal* (Mullan 2022b)

The Leader asked ‘on what British military standard will be emblazoned this exploit, which now ranks, with Sharpeville [the slaying of dozens of anti-apartheid protestors in the Transvaal in 1960] in its horror?’ – *Derry Journal* (Mullan 2022b)

In these examples from the *Derry Journal*, the readers’ hands are held in order to link Bloody Sunday with massacres which took place in 1919 and in 1960, years which took place before Bloody Sunday and, in the case of Amritsar, before many of the victims of Bloody Sunday were born. Narratively, the stage was already being set for violence in Northern Ireland way back in 1919. Indian independence supporters in Amritsar are positioned by interviewees in the *Derry Journal* as symbolic ancestors to the fight against British colonial violence. Similarly, in Transvaal, the fight continues and another dot is added on the timeline eventually leading to Bloody Sunday.

Finally, the significance of Bloody Sunday was not limited to Northern Ireland or to the reach of British colonisation. Rather, Bloody Sunday was thrust by several accounts onto the stage of global significance:

Derry was forever changed by what people experienced and witnessed that day. ‘The city changed completely, it was our 9/11 moment.’ – *Derry Journal* (McDaid 2022)

In this example, Bloody Sunday is positioned alongside the atrocity of a country which does not share its colonial roots nor is there a connection with the United Kingdom. Rather, Bloody Sunday and 9/11 exist as two separate but equally traumatic instances of global atrocity. By extension, by saying explicitly ‘this was our 9/11 moment’, it can be argued that this interview labels Bloody Sunday as an act of terrorism perpetrated by the British Army. This interview was not the only reference to 9/11 included in the *Derry Journal*. Consider this small but noteworthy sentence:

The eagerly-anticipated new volume – entitled ‘On Bloody Sunday’ – is to be published by Monoray Books, an imprint of Hachette UK, which was responsible for ‘The Only Plane in the Sky’, the highly-acclaimed oral history of 9/11. – *Derry Journal* (The Newsroom 2022a)

This article promoted the 2022 book by Julieann Campbell entitled ‘*On Bloody Sunday: A New History of the Day and Its Aftermath by the People Who Were There*’. The inclusion of 9/11 here is particularly interesting, as it was entirely an editorial decision to include *The Only Plane in the Sky* alongside *On Bloody Sunday* where it was not necessary to do so.

This explicit linking between Bloody Sunday and other global atrocity is not unique to 50th anniversary coverage. Rather, it is a continuation of a mnemonic narrative tradition that began to emerge two decades earlier during the 30th anniversary commemorations. As Conway (2003) notes, this narrative shift was a distinct departure from the backwards-looking and ‘enemy-making “us” vs “them” motif’ that had come to define Bloody Sunday rhetoric and commemorative activity in the 1970s and 1980s. Further, this shift towards a more global narrative focused on human rights more broadly was an intentional decision by some of Bloody Sunday’s more important voices. When dedicating the permanent memorial to Bloody Sunday victims in 2002, Father Daly ushered in the 30th anniversary of Bloody Sunday by remembering ‘all those who have struggled, suffered, and lost their lives in the pursuit of liberty, justice, and civil rights’ (Conway 2003, 314). It is no coincidence that the official theme of the 30th anniversary was ‘One World, Many Struggles’ (Conway 2003).

By continuing to connect Bloody Sunday with the broader project of human rights across the world, 50th anniversary coverage steps into an ideological stream which ‘adds strength to a group’s claims to a certain interpretation of its past...[and] reflects the internationalization of “the Irish question” in recent years and the rejection of the notion that it is an internal problem to be dealt with by the British government alone’ (Conway 2003, 315). In other words, positioning Bloody Sunday as a global event both solidifies its position as an internationally significant traumatic event while holding the rest of the world accountable for righting the wrongs of British violence in Northern Ireland in the same way it has been held accountable for allowing other global atrocities to occur.

Conclusion

50 years after Derry’s darkest day, Bloody Sunday maintains a grip on politicians, the public, and the press as a day that must never be forgotten for the sake of future generations. This is the true legacy of Bloody Sunday as it unfolds in the pages of the press as well as in the lives of those in Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Five decades on and Bloody Sunday has not weakened as a call to action but rather has found a lingering foothold in the collective memory of the region – a collective memory which is being passed down by journalists to its rising generation of readers. Further, the global legacy of Bloody Sunday has been further cemented as a cautionary tale against international indifference towards modern regimes of colonial violence. In this way, memories of Bloody Sunday have come full circle. Memories of the past are invoked in the present for the security of the future both within Northern Ireland and beyond its physical and metaphorical borders.

The 50th anniversary coverage also highlighted how the impact of news narratives extend far beyond their daily coverage. Herron and Lynch (2006) write that the photos which originally appeared alongside the names of the dead the day after Bloody Sunday became the same photos used in commemorations, ceremonies, and memorials. In this way, the small, grainy newspaper photographs broke free and were ‘no longer constrained to mass cards or to the pages of newspapers...[but] began to move in and around the public sphere’ (p. 66). Similarly, the continuing attention paid to Bloody Sunday during its yearly anniversaries keeps it from being relegated to the annals of Troubles history and ensures that it remains a living, breathing, moving memorialisation. Anniversary coverage not only keeps the memories of Bloody Sunday circulating throughout Derry and Northern Ireland, it assigns Bloody Sunday new meaning and new questions to be pondered by younger generations regardless of how far away they are from the day itself. Bloody Sunday photographs – and, I add, all Bloody Sunday anniversary coverage –

provide ‘a memory trace of loved ones now distant and gone. But they also function in the public sphere as an apostrophic demand: “Do not forget what happened to us cruelly, and unjustly on that day”’ (Herron and Lynch 2006, 67). The cry to remember Bloody Sunday is one to remember, even now, the injustices of war and violence not only in Derry but across time and space.

It was the goal of this paper to demonstrate the ways in which this cry continues to ring out. This analysis, while adding to memory studies literature concerned with anniversary coverage of contested events (Herron and Lynch 2006; Kitch 1999; Larrosa-Fuentes 2018; Leach and McKenney 2012; Meyers 2002; Su 2012), fills a gap in analysis of Northern Irish news text. Such coverage is critical for understanding how and where the country’s recent violent past continues to linger in present society. Above all, this analysis concluded that, for Northern Ireland and Derry in particular, Bloody Sunday retains deep significance. Rather than being a day in the past to be remembered, much of the anniversary coverage of Bloody Sunday positions memory of the day as a call to action – for the justice of the families as well as for peace for future generations. Indeed, the pain from that day, and all the days it led to, remains deeply felt in Northern Ireland and should be taken seriously by the public and the press.

This paper has attempted to both categorise and theorise the 50th anniversary coverage of Bloody Sunday from three key viewpoints. It has offered up an interpretation of such coverage which places a heavy emphasis on the themes of justice, inherited memory, and globalisation. However, there are many areas that this analysis did not include that could provide fruitful opportunities for additional studies. First, this study only considered one local paper, the *Derry Journal*. And while this was done in order to consider a range of global perspectives, further studies could investigate how numerous local papers from other sides of the sectarian divide in Derry commemorate Bloody Sunday. Second, this paper focused specifically on the 50th anniversary coverage. And while some attention was paid to past anniversary coverage through the literature (see Herron and Lynch 2006), the field of both memory studies and Northern Irish studies would benefit from looking at how anniversary coverage has or has not evolved over the course of significant anniversary dates – for example, the 10th, 15th, 20th, etc., anniversaries. Finally, as noted in the methodology, this study did not meaningfully differentiate between journalistic styles. Future examinations of Bloody Sunday commemoration in British media could, for example, focus on outlets which provide more space for editorials and more in depth long-form journalism.

Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates the importance of news coverage, and especially anniversary coverage, in maintaining, preserving, and, crucially, extending collective memory down through time. By dedicating hours and pages to both the contested and agreed upon memories and testimonies of Bloody Sunday, all three newspapers engaged in the broader process of postmemory creation. These outlets, acting as Landsberg’s trans-ferential spaces, do Hirsch’s ‘postmemorial work...[and] reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures’ (Hirsch 2008, 111). This was demonstrated especially in the instances where past events continue to spur current campaigns for justice, as in the case of interviewees reflecting on the 2010 apology from David Cameron, his words now ringing empty in hindsight. In these moments, newspaper coverage acted both as a leger of the past and as a catalyst for future action – a cyclical process that seems to show no signs of stopping.

This postmemorial work is critical in turning mnemonic battles into political ones with material consequences. As illustrated throughout this analysis, it is the mnemonic work that changes policy, condemns insufficient governmental inquiries, and paves the way for justice. Anniversaries create convenient times for this work to be done, offering built-in commas for journalists and their audiences to pause and engage with these

collective memories. But anniversaries are not the only times when this mnemonic work is accomplished. Rather, anniversary editions can be seen as progress reports of how watershed moments have been memorialised in the interim. All media are transferential spaces for collective memory formation and preservation, and anniversary coverage throws this reality into a brighter relief. In an increasingly digitised and globalised world in which boundaries are almost entirely erased, anniversary coverage offers rare moments for societies to pause, reevaluate their collective memorialisation, and write it all down.

Data availability statement. All newspaper articles were located on the websites of the following news outlets: [BBC.com](https://www.bbc.com), [independent.ie](https://www.independent.ie), and [derryjournal.com](https://www.derryjournal.com).

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