



THE CULTURAL REPRESENTATION OF FALKLANDS WAR ON BRITISH TELEVISION

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Abstract

Although the Falklands War was one of the shortest conflicts in the world's history; it had extensive effects on the British society and culture which is still controversial in some ways. Particularly, the cultural impacts were much more substantial. Furthermore, in conjunction with the opportunities of technology, apart from the other wars in the past, television brought the reality of the war to homes and people's lives. There is also little doubt that Margaret Thatcher was in favour of using television's power in order to influence the public in some ways whose reputation and confidence were boosted with the success in the Falklands War.

This research will attempt to assess the television as an illusion or a tool in order to determine these cultural and remarkable effects to the whole of the society as well as the people. Furthermore, the study will focus on the language of transcription from the television to the people seem to be the most essential tool to inspire the society. Besides, there is little doubt that framing the Falklands War on the television offered the opportunity to show war's effects on society and the culture of the British people.

Keywords: Margaret Thatcher; Falklands War; British Television Culture.

I. The historical background of television broadcasting in Britain

Gould: ... I think there must be something very seriously wrong with our communications, and we are living in a nuclear age when we are going to have minutes to make decisions, not hours.

Thatcher: I have indicated what the facts are, and would you accept that I am in a position to know exactly when they reached London? Exactly when the attack was made. I repeat, the job of the Prime Minister is to protect the lives of our boys, on our ships, and that's what I did('Nationwide' of the BBC television programme, 24th May of 1983).

Although, today, in the 21st century, media studies have an ascending tendency to recognize the impact of the mass media on the society, there has been still a lack of analysis to assess. According to Collins' inquiries regarding this restriction, three main points were reached; "the absence of the media studies in the UK higher education, the agencies which foster the talent and the migration of the intellectuals in the 1970s from the UK"(Collins, 2015, 1-2). On the other hand, just as in the world's history, the twentieth century was a scene for the television's development process and becoming a part of the nation's routine. Particularly, in Britain, the importance of this machine goes further due to the homeland of this invention.

Apart from radio, television marked a new epoch amongst the broadcasting as well as the cultural impacts in the British society. While the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) was the foremost in the 1930s, from 1955, therefore, British television broadcasting was constituted by two services, the BBC and Independent Television (ITV) (Turnock, 2007, introduction). Furthermore, Turnock stated the appearance of commercial television in the mid-1950s was "clearly a pivotal moment" in the expansion of the television (Turnock, 2007, 3). In 1982, these three chain rings, BBC1, BBC2 and ITV linked with the new channel called Channel Four.

Prior to this multiplicity of the preference about the channels, BBC was the essential transmitter for the British society. Particularly, following the Second World War, BBC reached the summit about its popularity amongst the people. Nevertheless, this purity began to change by the people who noticed the spirit of broadcasting in order to achieve the whole of the society and lead them for their advantages. According to Curron J. and Seaton J: "The change was not brought about by public pressure, but by a small group within the ruling Conservative Party. It was opposed by bishops, vice chancellors, peers, trade unions, the Labour Party and most national newspapers."

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In 1955, along with the establishment of the new channel ITV, the reign of the BBC was shaken up. ITV brought about “a revolution, it has been claimed, because it challenged the complacent pre-war conservatism of the BBC” (Curron J. & Seaton J., 2005, 158). Furthermore, a rivalry naturally started between the two channels in broadcasting as well as the audiences. Immediately afterwards, as the phrase goes the public was divided to watch television like the newspaper readers. The preferences were various such as the programmes’ content, old-new fashion. Moreover, “originally intended as a political counterweight to what was seen as the BBC’s red ‘bias’, ITV was vulnerable to political pressure” (Curron J. & Seaton J., 2005, 167).

Along with the main channels BBC1, BBC2 and ITV, Channel Four was established in the 2nd of November 1982. While this new channel completed the triangle’s missing part, according to Hobson, the progress of the channel can be described in two sentences: “If Channel 4 were to be described in one sentence it would have to be seen as ‘Jeremy Isaacs’ Channel’. Those who worked at the channel worked towards his ideas and ideals and it was his influence, personality and philosophy which determined the way that the channel progressed” (Hobson, 2008, 20).

Research between the 1950s and 1970s, “which seemed to indicate that the media had little or no independent political effects, largely concentrated on the effects on public opinion—rather than on any possible impact, more indirectly, on institutions” (Kuhn, 2005, 10). Just like the cultural and social preferences of the audiences, naturally the channels started to affect the voters’ behaviour in the 1970s. Still, both the press and the channels were both the factors for the parties in order to regulate the voters for their own benefit. Particularly, the broadcasting affected the working class’ voting behaviour. The tradition has given rise to two arguments: “first, that the media, and in particular broadcasting, affected working-class habits by replacing communalistic leisure patterns with atomistic ones; and second, that broadcasting eroded communitarian class values, replacing them with pseudo wants and needs” (Kuhn, 2005, 11).

Above all, television gave the politicians and the parties the opportunity to influence the public directly without any device to use. During the Falklands War in 1982, the broadcasting of the war on the television was the processor of showing this direct influence and its aftermaths. According to Kuhn, “Presidentialism’ is, of course, a growing feature of British political campaigns and never more so than in the 1983 election” and he states that

“The sincerity machine—which allowed Mrs Thatcher to look at her audience directly without putting her head down; the tasteful decor of the Conservative press conference room; the careful arrangement of meetings where members of the unemployed were unlikely to attend or heckle—were all aspects of this new development. Mrs Thatcher constantly appeared against jolly and active visual backgrounds, micro-chip factories, fish and chip lunches, and mud in real English fields” (Kuhn, 2005, 15).

II. The broadcasting history during the Falklands

Falklands War could not be properly reported from the front due to the geographical distance, military secrecy/censorship, technological limitations, there was no direct TV transmission and there were no photographs for the first 54 days of the 74 day war. (Imperial War Museum website, ‘Media and War, The battle for hearts and minds’)

Prior to research for the broadcasting of the Falklands War in television, the most common question needs to be asked: “Why the Falklands War is seemed ‘the worst reported’ war since the Crimean War?” Were there any specific reasons for that kind of broadcast, like the politicians’ own benefit for this broadcasting, especially in television?

However, there is still a lack of a certain answer; this decision came from the censorships, the use of the visionaries, uses of the emotions of the audiences without neutrality and the literacy of words like ‘Gotcha, Yomp, and Rejoice.’ Moreover, the aims of the Thatcher’s government tried to win the support of the public by awakening the patriotic emotions of the audiences. Additionally, “The spot is the packaging,” wrote a market researcher in *Advertising Quarterly*, “the product inside the package is an audience” (Curron J. & Seaton J., 2005, 176). As distinct from the newspaper and radio reporting, television made the difference on using the visuality first.

During the Falklands War, BBC stood in the centre of the broadcasting the real facts of the war. Two programmes in particular “incurred Conservative wrath: the first was the magazine ‘Newsnight’ whose nightly analysis of events was, for many Conservatives, too ‘even-handed’” (Walters, 1989, 381). The second focus for disapproval was “an edition of Panorama which explored the views of the few Conservative and Labour MPs who had questioned the necessity for a military solution to the conflict” (Walters, 1989, 382). Moreover, the Ministry of Defence hold the control of the press and the television broadcasting. However, BBC did not get on with Conservative governments in its history, and also M. Thatcher was not in favour



with the existence this corporation, she insisted to use its power in order to influence the public in some ways. While she was using the visuality of TV, the literacy of the reporting and reporters' language were also vital for her. *The Sun* referred to the BBC's coverage as "penknife stabs against our forces" and Mrs Thatcher was annoyed at the Corporation's even-handed coverage of the war, preferring it to use the more jingoistic language that it had used during the Second World War (Thatcher on BBC).

At the time of the Falklands War, "the BBC was criticized by Conservative MPs and by right-wing tabloid press for not being supportive enough of 'our' side" (Philo, 1995, 203). Alan Prothore, Assistant Director-General at the BBC from 1982 to 1987, "gives his own account of the type of news which would have pleased the critics (Philo, 1995, 203)":

"Their ideal for the 9 o'clock news would have been a man in uniform backed by the Union Jack. The signature tune would have been replaced by the National Anthem and it would have been a kind of Ra, Ra, Ra news bulletin. It would really have been the dirty Argentines and the prouf of British - which is of course, is...farcical - and I am not exaggerating too much when I describe it that way."

(Speaking on World in Action, 29 February 1988)

"At the heart of this was Peter Snow, who every night conducted a narrative of the day's events at his huge studio battlefield with warships and other props of war to illustrate what had happened that day. He was master and commander of telling the story of a war happening half a world away. It was one of Peter's finest hours, and a large audience made a regular nightly date with the programme to get the Snow story of the day" (BBC news on 21 January 2005, 'Falklands War').

While on the spot Peter Snow reporting the news from Falklands, Alisdair David Gordon Milne who was the BBC's director general designate, points out "a unique aspect of this war on a distant, limited battlefield" (Ware, 1982, 7). That meant the vitality of sending films, broadcasts, the reports and showing the facts on television. Moreover, while BBC tried to maintain the quality level of the broadcasting, the aims of the governors had some pressures on it during the Falklands War and aftermath, like the resignation of Alisdair Milne in January 1987.

ITV was the second channel during the Falklands war which had different policies from the BBC which started broadcasting in 1955. Curron J. and Seaton J. argue that "while BBC had more 'broad sense', ITV can be called as a more regional bands' channel. More recently a far more subtle case has been advanced which is not so crudely anti-commercial. This claims that ITV was rather an energizing, populist force which gave expression to working-class culture" (Curron J. & Seaton J., 2005, 167). As in advertising, "the institutional structure of ITV was significantly and deliberately different from the largely London-centric and metropolitan structure of the BBC, which had been criticized in the Beveridge Report" (Thussu, 2007, 37). During the Falklands War, particularly ITV news was watched by most of the audiences. In 25th of April 1982, ITN was watched by 17.2 million audiences (Thussu, 2007, 37) "which have a unique record of a war in the table of the infotainment British style: non-fiction programmes in the top-ten." Philo states that "on HMS Hermes, Michael Nicholson of ITN and other journalists were so annoyed by the conduct of the military authorities that they sought to prefix their reports as 'censored'; but he word was itself censored" (Philo, 1995, 82).

BBC and ITV found the television's power that "the oxygen of publicity" for all sides in dispute problematic for, as Schlesinger says, "to report on matters adverse to the army is particularly difficult for the broadcast media given their relationship to the state" (Stewart & Carruthers, 1996, 155). According to Johnson and Turnock, 'the Conservative Government's initial response to broadcasting in the broadcasting Act 1980 left the BBC and ITV unchanged, and instead extended the IBA's responsibilities to include the provision of a fourth channel (Channel Four)" (Johnson & Turnock, 2006, 26). It had also been argued that "the minority-based rationale of Channel 4 had a number of origins; perhaps the most important was the experience of even the most distinguished and 'marketable' producers and directors that it was impossible to work, in Britain, outside the BBC or ITV companies" (Curron J. & Seaton J., 2005, 158). Moreover, "the 1980 Broadcasting Act gave this new channel a mission, one of culture, innovation and special attention to ethnic minorities" (D'Haenens L. & Saeys F., 2007, 321). However, Channel Four had flexible principles for broadcasting literacy and Thatcherian demand during the Falklands War; it was just established in 1982 in order to include all the audiences. Thus, the Falklands War news was mostly delivered to British people with the censorships, restricted and late by BBC and ITV.



III. After the Falklands War

When the Falklands War ended after the seventy-four days with the British success against Argentina on the islands, the influence of the war on the British society was much considerable than the Argentinians. Particularly, it had massive impacts on the culture and consciousness of the people who did not know about a war or even the geographical place of the Falklands Islands. It had been stated that “the Franks Report and subsequent debates in the House and the press reports and the publication of several Falkland books kept the issue of the war well to the forefront throughout the spring of 1983” (Gould, 1984, 44). Furthermore, as the phrase goes, the Falklands War made people to think about a live war, political strategies of political parties and politicians and resist to them in some ways, like songs, cartoons, films or reflect the emotions of the people on the TV programmes.

Beside the role of the Falklands War in re-building of the British culture, television preceded representing the war and reflecting it for the whole of the British audiences. On 24th of May in 1983, the TV programme ‘Nationwide’ of BBC grabbed a slice of history in television history and brought a housewife and the president Mrs Thatcher together in order to discuss the most crucial event of the Falklands War, ‘the Sinking of the Belgrano’.

Mrs Gould’s interest on the Falklands islands started when she was a student of Geography in Cambridge University. Particularly, she became aware of the urgency of the order for the Sinking of the Belgrano and with her husband’s encourage, she decided to write to the programme ‘Nationwide’ on BBC which meant ‘direct confrontation’ by these ‘On the Spot’ programmes (Gould, 1984, 51). Peter Kellner, political editor of the New Statesman “opened his piece by stating that the highlight to the General Election for him came at 6.40 one summer’s evening during the campaign when Mrs Diana Gould, a housewife in Cirencester, cross-questioned Mrs Thatcher on the sinking of the General Belgrano” (Gould, 1984, introduction). The first question of her to Thatcher was: “Mrs Thatcher, why, when the Belgrano, the Argentinian battleship, (the Belgrano was in fact a cruiser) was outside the exclusion zone and actually sailing away from the Falklands, why did you give the orders to sink it” (Gould, 1984, 57).

As the phrase goes, the conversation between Mrs Gould and Mrs Thatcher transformed to a discussion. While Mrs Gould was insisting on liability of the ‘Sinking of the Belgrano’ under the geographical facts, Thatcher continued to defence herself by using the language of patriotism. However, BBC stood in a neutral line; it was broken at the end of the discussion. Ms Lawley who was the anchor of the programme tried to calm down the agitation by Thatcher’s side but that was not enough for Thatcher supporters to blame the BBC after the programme. Besides, after the programme Mrs Gould wrote that: “I understood from a phone call some days later from ‘Nationwide’ that Mrs Thatcher was very upset indeed with the programme to me and the presenters, and repeated what she had said to me, that such questioning of a Prime Minister could happen in a democracy” (Gould, 1984, 60).

Along with influence of the programme on both sides, the audience of the programme on TV was impressed by this ‘ordinary’ housewife who was too brave to declare her thoughts and announced the reality for the ‘Sinking of the Belgrano’. As Tam Dalyell states this influence: “But I vividly remembered canvassing that May evening in the Linlithgow Constituency, to be told door after door; Did you see yon woman about the yon ship with Thatcher on the telly just now? You should ha ‘seen her’. She was great. Had Thatcher in some tizzy. ‘Yon woman’, who had made such an electric impression on my constituents, was Mrs Diana Gould.” (Gould, 1984: 8) Moreover, “it was Mrs Gould who established in the popular mind the impression that the Sinking of the Belgrano, at best, was ‘not cricket’.” (Gould, 1984, 10) On the other hand, “much more important, however, is the question of why Mrs Gould’s historic clash was not followed up. It amounts to a flagrant dereliction of duty on the part of the media.” (Gould, 1984, 9)

After this cultural and social event, the representation of the Falklands War on the television proceeded with the consciousness of the public. Firstly, the Falklands Play by Ian Curteis which was commissioned by BBC was issued as a radio play, broadcasted in 1986 and then was featured on the television in 2002. Despite making heavy cuts, Curteis defines the radio play “fulfills my objectives”. (The Telegraph, ‘Banned Falklands play goes on the radio’, 29 November 2001) Moreover, Peter Goodchild who was the Head of Plays wanted Mr Curteis to make some changes on the play. Curteis responded to this desire for the changes that: “I am not an employed scriptwriter. I am a playwright, who owns the copyright in his own work and is responsible legally and morally what he says...Mr Goodchild’s proposals would radically have altered the nature and motives of key decisions of the War Cabinet, would still have been transmitted as my work and my opinion.” (Brandt, 1993, 142) However, he opposed to protect the neutrality of the play; Mrs Thatcher was seemed as humane, self-sacrificing and patriotic president.



Another significant and debated drama on the subject of the Falklands war is "Tumbledown" (1988), the real life story of Lieutenant Robert Lawrence, who was paralysed during the war. The story of the film was told from the language and the war life of one veteran soldier, eye-witness of the Falklands War. Charles Wood tried to scene the reality of the influence of the war to the veteran soldier into the civil life. As distinct from the political desires of the government or the rivalry with the Argentinians, it showed the real life of a soldier which addresses the heart of the audience.

At this point, the question is essential to be answered: Why did the people mind the Falklands War news or films?

IV. The cultural impact of the Falklands War through television and its aftermath

According to A TV news case study, for three months millions of British television viewers watched hundreds of hours of news on the Falklands crisis. (Falklands Extra, A TV news case study, January 1983) In every part of the social and cultural life, the Falklands War had huge deep impacts on the people who were one of the witnesses of the war. While some of them behaving as 'patriotic' and cherishing the liberation of the Falkland Islands, some people preferred to interrogate the war and create kind of resistance ways. Songs, the organizations, memorials of the soldiers, the books which reflected the real stories of the war and television programmes, films were some tools in order to express the awakening and being aware of the war culture.

The Falklands War was a crucial point in the British cultural history which worked as a resistance or contestation. Specifically, Landy argues that "Gramsci's preoccupation with the nature and impact of cultural production places him alongside other contemporary critics who have in the last decades stressed the importance of understanding canonical, popular and mass cultural texts, including the role of media." (Landy, 1994, 4) As Gramsci argues, "No social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed within it still find room for further development movement...A society does not set itself tasks for whose solution the necessary conditions have not already been incubated." (Landy, 1994, 6)

Television naturally created a consciousness society with the Falklands War as a communication tool. As is in the example of Diana Gould's conversation with the Prime Minister Mrs Thatcher, people emphasized themselves with the real players of the war and lived the reality with the videos and witnesses of the war. After the programme Mrs Gould wrote that: "A number of letters I had received stated that their writers had always voted Conservative but felt they could no longer do so because of the way in which Mrs Thatcher's government had allowed us to become engaged in such a war and in particular they deplored the loss of life caused by the Sinking of the Belgrano." (Gould, 1984, 68) which showed the influence of television to the opinions' of the audiences. On the other hand, "people who had never known where the Falkland Islands were, knew nothing of their history, or of the conflicting claims to ownership were now determined that our forces should 'go down there' and teach the Argies a lesson." (Gould, 1984, 26) Besides, these people 'behave' as patriotic and voted for the Conservative Party in the election of 1983 that saved 'their' country and 'their' boys.

As is in the Falklands War case, politicians tried to make and influence the audience's thoughts by television. However, some people received it directly without any interrogation, some amount of the people preferred to create their own point of views for the Falklands War and its aftermath. Crisell argues "for the politicians, the problem is that because TV is so 'realistic' and is modern and ubiquitous; it has become for many people the yardstick of cultural and intellectual absorption: they are unaware of the limitations from which it suffers." (Crisell, 1997, 154)

Conclusion

Television includes the 'reality' and the 'unreality' inside. The audience give the decision for it and choice to watch. As the phrase goes, from the first time of its broadcast, television bewitched the people due to its facilities. From news to the entertainment programmes, it contained all the colours of life.

On the other hand, some events of life are critical like wars and people cannot able to evacuate from them. At that point, during the Falklands War and its aftermath television played a key role between the audience and the fact. While, the war events were showing on the television, they were also rumoured between the people just like the previous wars' heroic stories. Furthermore, it had a profound influence on the people's opinions and thoughts who watched it or the neutral people who were available to direct.

The politicians, especially the Conservative government were aware of this direct communication. Notwithstanding, they used their power in order to stimulate the people by their own opinion. However, BBC and ITV tried to use their own principles while broadcasting, the tools of the limitation was used by the



government like censors. Besides, the language of broadcasting was needed to be changed in order to awake the British people's patriotic feeling.

Even if, the culture is moral, it constituted and can be exchanged and received by the people. It contains music, books, films, documentaries and television culture. People read the Falklands War veterans' memory of diaries; sang the war songs and framed their feelings towards the films and documentaries. By all of these, the Falklands War left the nation a conscious culture as an inheritance which is still protecting by the same people. As is widely known, the Gallipoli Wars in the First World War was a crucial and circle intention for both Australians and Turkish people to create their own identity and culture. Although, this nature was made by mouth and history, the television records gave the opportunity to develop it by its own way. Hence, the representation of the Falklands War on the television directly linked to the British culture.

By a profound irony, the war zone has been relocated from the Falklands to Brixton and the inner cities; Walsh concludes that, "British war films treating the Falklands depict a country very different from the unified motherland represented in Coward's and Lean's 'Second World War Classic' [In Which We Serve] (1942); in place of the earlier images of a common national purpose, Thatcher's England has seemingly generated its antithesis, a divided culture and polarized society." (Korte & Schneider, 199, 17)

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