

## MAKING HISTORY Representing “Bloody Sunday” in Wikipedia

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**Abstract** – With web users increasingly taking on the role of producers/consumers (prosumers) of information, thanks to the technological affordances of social media, the representation of historical events may be subject to a number of centrifugal forces which allow virtually any and every user to have their say. Thus, while the academia, the traditional media, and other institutions have apparently lost part of their privileged positions as information content providers and source of monologic accounts, the patterns of negotiation and conflict inherent in any representation of events is foregrounded and made visible through the new media. It is against this background that the present article explores the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on the representation of particularly controversial events through platforms devoted to the sharing of User Generated Content like Wikipedia. More specifically, the article provides a detailed critical analysis of the Wikipedia entry for “Bloody Sunday”, through a reading of all subsequent revisions by individual users. The methodology consists in applying Critical Discourse Analysis to the revised versions which make up the so-called “history” of this specific entry. For each editorial change, the resulting version is discussed in terms of transitivity (processes, participants, circumstances) as well as intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Particular attention is devoted also to edits that lay bare strategies of (de)legitimation of in-groups and out-groups. The preliminary results of the investigation seem to suggest that the textual and discursive negotiation taking place in the history of this specific Wikipedia entry reflects – but also reconstructs, reshapes and to some extent re-enacts – the real-life conflict, and provides a case in point to reconsider the role played by new technology in making conflicting perspectives in the representation of reality visible and accessible worldwide.

**Keywords:** Web 2.0; Wikipedia; Critical Discourse Analysis; representation; Bloody Sunday.

*How long,  
How long must we sing this song  
How long, how long.  
(U2, “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, 1983).*

### 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the constellation of features that we currently associate with Web 2.0 has undoubtedly qualitatively changed the way people use web technologies (Warschauer, Grimes 2007, p. 2). Particularly significant is the role played by wikis as prototypical Web 2.0 tools, of which Wikipedia is the most popular application. By allowing real-time publication of individual content, apparently without any editorial revision, wikis have unleashed a number of centrifugal forces which have had as a consequence, among others, an increasingly dynamic merging of the otherwise apparently distinct functions of audience and authorship. Furthermore, the ability for users to edit and re-edit web pages actually displays the inherent instability of texts, while de-emphasizing the role of individual authorship. Wikis thus provide material evidence of the dynamic and inherently social nature of language, and allow discourse to emerge that is continually

negotiated and articulated through a community of users (Ray, Graeff 2008, pp. 39-40).

Such a complex relationship between author and audience is actually foregrounded in any Wikipedia article through what could be termed a hypermediacy effect. In any Wikipedia page, the graphic interface itself indeed lays bare the continual interrelation between author, reader and editor functions, and these otherwise separate roles are materially interconnected in one single entity: the trifold set of Article, Discussion and History which together make up a Wikipedia entry. The coexistence of such different – and yet complementary – forms of textuality as “article” and “discussion”, along with the correlate functions “read” and “edit”, combined with the possibility to re-view the “history” of each single article, does not only show the limits and fallacy of any unproblematized notion of individual authorship (Ray, Graeff 2008), but also allows conflicting perspectives in the representation of events to be visualized. As a consequence, the monologic appearance of the encyclopedia entry as a genre, exemplified at its best in its printed form, is turned by Wikipedia into a fluid multiple perspective dialogic object thanks to the technological affordances of the new medium.

This blurring of clearcut distinctions between authors and readers in Wikipedia is also related to the apparent end of any separation between consumers and producers, with the emergence of the new category of *prosumers* (Toffler 1981), a highly significant blend of the words *producer* and *consumer*. In the case of Wikipedia, it is therefore not only the distinction between author and audience that eventually fades out, but also the boundary between the two more comprehensive categories of those who produce knowledge content and the potential consumers (Bruns 2008), which has notoriously prompted concerns about lack of control and anarchy in the dissemination of information and knowledge.

The potential problems of lack of control and anarchy inherent in the technology itself, have been addressed by the Wikipedia community through a number of key features which are embedded in and allowed by the technology itself, and which have an effect at the level of the preservation of the generic integrity of Wikipedia as an encyclopedia. The very existence of a restricted number of Wikipedia users who have administrative privileges and can restore or lock specific articles when this is deemed necessary to counteract acts of vandalism, suggests that forms of power and control are extant even in the apparently anarchic realm of social computing practices. Secondly, the auxiliary wiki objects called “Discussion” or “Talk” pages which accompany each Wikipedia article, suggest that any communicative act in Wikipedia is subject to a continual peer review process based on genuine interaction.

Particularly interesting in the context of forms of control in Wikipedia is the so-called “History” flow. By saving cached files of previous content for each single entry, so that it can be reinstated in case someone erases or vandalizes the entire content of an entry, the Wikipedia community actually stores the whole process of creation of each single article, both in terms of its content and of its form. Each entry in Wikipedia thus becomes a palimpsest (Ray, Graeff 2008, p. 40), virtually including all possible versions of that entry, and the stages of each entry can be explored in a sort of backward journey into the creation of knowledge content by multiple users which is at the same time a journey into the text that actually makes that content visible and accessible. It is this palimpsest that this article aims to investigate patterns of negotiation and conflict in the representation of “Bloody Sunday”, a specific event in the recent history of Northern Ireland.

## 2. Aims and Methods

The revision history of Wikipedia pages has long attracted the interest of scholars, and has generally been studied in the context of Natural Language Processing to automatically assess the quality of individual articles, to shed light on the collaborating writing process as such, or as a source of information about re-writing patterns (Ferschke *et al.* 2013). Great interest has also been shown in the use of history flow to investigate the way authors with competing perspectives negotiate their differences (Viégas 2004). In the context of the present article the history of a specific Wikipedia entry has instead been used as evidence of a palimpsest of conflicting discourse representations of a controversial event,

In order to describe and evaluate the impact of the practice of collaborative writing on the representation of different perspectives on “Bloody Sunday”, an analysis of edits by individual users has been performed at different levels, page after page. More specifically, the present article aims to provide a detailed critical analysis of the Wikipedia entry for “Bloody Sunday”, through a reading of all subsequent revisions by individual users. The methodology consists in applying Critical Discourse Analysis to the revised versions which make up the so-called “history” of this specific entry. Each stage of editorial change has been analyzed with a focus on major changes, i.e. changes not simply involving correction of typos, format or other minor superficial changes. For each editorial change the resulting version is discussed in terms of transitivity as well as intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Particular attention is devoted also to edits that lay bare strategies of (de)legitimation of in-groups and out-groups.

The analysis of transitivity structures in particular, to use Fowler’s and Halliday’s terminology, gives the possibility to compare/contrast different speakers’ representation of events, i.e. choices in the conceptualization of reality, and its appropriateness as a means to provide insight into “ideological differences in Discourses of civil (dis)orders” has been convincingly shown in Hart (2014, p. 19). Transitivity is indeed “the foundation of representation” (Fowler 1991, p. 71), which entails the creation of what Chilton calls “discourse worlds” in terms of “who does what to whom” (Chilton 2004, p. 54). Therefore, special attention in the analysis has been paid to participants, processes and circumstances as indicators of a discursive representation of reality. In the present analysis, edits involving changes in the referents to participants in the represented world as well as to the processes that are attributed to them have been taken as evidence of changing perspectives by different Wikipedia users that might reflect different ideological views. In fact, while not explicitly political, the discourse situation in which the representation of Bloody Sunday in Wikipedia is embedded can by no means be considered as ideology free, or unbiased. It can instead be argued that, as any other representation, it is determined “by the ideological beliefs held by the persons involved in the communicative process and that those ideological beliefs determine a social representation – or discourse world – that is, at least partly, connected to the identity of the communicator” (Filardo Llamas 2010, p. 64).

Special attention has been also devoted to the ‘voices’ which each version intertextually/interdiscursively incorporates in its representation of the events, starting from the results of the two official reports by the Widgery tribunal and the Saville Inquiry. Finally, attention has been paid to emerging legitimation/delegitimation strategies in the texts. As Van Dijk (2006b, p. 126) has in fact convincingly argued, ideologies are organized by well-known ingroup-outgroup polarization, so that it is sensible to expect such polarization to be ‘coded’ in any text through (de)legitimation strategies. Assuming that legitimation is again achieved through discursive representations (Chilton 2004, p.

23), and that ideological discourse is mostly organized around a general strategy of *positive self-presentation vs negative other-presentation*, it has finally proved rewarding to investigate to what extent these strategies are at work behind the anonymity of textual interaction in Wikipedia.

### 3. Context and data

Before moving on to the analysis of single edited versions of the Wikipedia entry for Bloody Sunday, it is perhaps useful to briefly recall some context for the represented event and to introduce in more the data.

As is well known, Northern Ireland experienced a period of sectarian violence in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the so-called ‘Troubles’, which started at the end of the 1960s and apparently finished with the signing of the Good Friday agreement in 1998. It is in this period that the event since known as Bloody Sunday took place, when on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1972 thirteen civilians were killed by British Paratroopers during a protest march against internment without trial. The incident has notoriously been “a source of controversy for decades, with competing accounts of the events” (*Britannica*, online), culminating in the two antithetical official reports: the Widgery Report, which concluded that the demonstrators had opened fire triggering the reaction of the British Paratroopers, and the Saville Report which found that the British had shot first, without any justification, and that none of the victims had posed any threat to the soldiers.

It is of course not the purpose of the present article to provide extensive background on such controversial issues, neither to take sides in a conflict whose origins date back to the century-old opposition between two broad communities sharing the same territory. What is relevant to the present research is that such a controversial event is represented through language not only in the works of historians, in documentaries and in other richly-informed accounts, but also in texts which result from the possibility to share User Generated Content, as is the case with Wikipedia. It is precisely the palimpsest of voices underlying the final version of the Wikipedia article entitled “Bloody Sunday” that provides the data for this research.

As already said, in Wikipedia any article emerges in its final version over a period of years as the work of hundreds of authors through hundreds of edits. Needless to say that this kind of cooperating writing process has a varying impact depending on the disciplinary field. In an article called “Can History Be Open Source?”, Rosenzweig argues that “a historical work without owners and with multiple, anonymous authors is almost unimaginable” (Rosenzweig 2006, p. 37). And yet, the author acknowledges, history is probably the category encompassing the largest number of articles in *Wikipedia*, which prompts many a question about the reliability of the representation of historical events in the online Encyclopedia. Furthermore, in the decentralized process of “produsage” of Wikipedia there is no strong influential editorial board that makes a priori decisions on what counts as information worth being disseminated, nor is there apparent control over information content itself.

In order to maintain qualitative standards and generic integrity Wikipedians have however adopted a number of “Policies and Guidelines”. Among these, the most relevant for the purposes of the present article is the injunction to “avoid bias”:

Articles should be written from a neutral point of view [NPOV] [...] representing differing views on a subject factually and objectively.”<sup>1</sup>

Of course, this is not to assume that writing an article from an unbiased perspective is possible, since, Wikipedians concede, “people are inherently biased”. Indeed, as convincingly argued by Rosenzweig, “even if ‘neutrality’ is a myth, it is a ‘founding myth’ for Wikipedia much as ‘objectivity’ [...] is a ‘founding myth’ for the historical profession” (Rosenzweig 2011, p. 55-56). It comes therefore as no surprise that the number one topic of debate in the “Discussion” pages that accompany every Wikipedia article, is whether the article adheres or not to the NPOV policy. Of course, Wikipedia's official NPOV policy can by no means imply that “all the POVs of all the Wikipedia editors have to be represented”; rather, it is suggested, “the article should represent the POVs of the main scholars and specialists who have produced reliable sources on the issue”.<sup>2</sup> Along with this concern with neutrality, there is great awareness in the Wikipedia community about the very existence of particularly sensitive content areas which result in particularly unstable pages. This is the case of the category of “Controversial articles”, defined as articles that are “constantly being re-edited in a circular manner, or are otherwise the focus of edit warring or article sanctions”.<sup>3</sup> One such example is precisely the entry for “Bloody Sunday”, explicitly included in the list.

The Wikipedia entry for “Bloody Sunday” was created on 21st January 2002 at 11:21 and – at the time of writing – was last modified on 16 June 2016 at 12:47.<sup>4</sup> Over a period of almost 15 years, the page was modified 3,345 times by 1,487 users, with an average of 2.2 edits per user and a mean interval of 1.5 days between edits. Most of the edits were labelled as major changes (73.4 %), i.e. changes that go beyond formatting changes, grammatical improvement and uncontentious clarification. This last datum is interesting in itself since it clearly contravenes the explicit “editing policy” of Wikipedia which suggests to be cautious with major changes:

Be cautious about making a major change to an article. Prevent edit warring by discussing such edits first on the article's talk page. One editor's idea of an improvement may be another editor's idea of a desecration. If you choose to be bold, try to justify your change in detail on the article talk page, so as to avoid an edit war. Before making a major change, consider first creating a new draft on a subpage of your own user page and then link to it on the article's talk page so as to facilitate a new discussion.<sup>5</sup>

The thorny revision history of the “Bloody Sunday” article, which results from the practice of collaborative writing as well as from conflicting perspectives on the event, provides the data for the analysis carried out in the present work. The basic assumption is that subsequent edits by individual users may be taken as evidence of ongoing negotiation of conflict which reflects and re-enacts the real life struggle between opposing factions.

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Key\\_policies\\_and\\_guidelines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Key_policies_and_guidelines).

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Describing\\_points\\_of\\_view](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Describing_points_of_view).

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Controversial\\_articles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Controversial_articles).

<sup>4</sup> Data referring to the present author's last access on 30th June 2016.

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Editing\\_policy#Be\\_cautious\\_with\\_major\\_changes:discuss](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Editing_policy#Be_cautious_with_major_changes:discuss).

## 4. Analysis and results

For the purpose of the present article the first 500 edits since the article was created on 21st January 2002 at 17.38 have been manually analysed in terms of transitivity in order to focus in the first place on changes in the representation of the event in the article's earliest phase. Then all edits labelled as being specifically related to POV issues have been considered, to discuss the impact of any other change in terms of ideological implications and legitimation/delegitimation strategies.

### 4.1. The current version

In order to contextualize the analysis performed on the earlier versions, the opening section of the current entry (as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016) for Bloody Sunday can be used as a starting point :

Bloody Sunday – sometimes called the Bogside Massacre<sup>[1]</sup> – was an incident on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland. British soldiers shot 26 unarmed civilians during a protest march against internment. Fourteen people died: thirteen were killed outright, while the death of another man four months later was attributed to his injuries. Many of the victims were shot while fleeing from the soldiers and some were shot while trying to help the wounded. Other protesters were injured by rubber bullets or batons, and two were run down by army vehicles.<sup>[2][3]</sup> The march had been organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the Northern Resistance Movement.<sup>[4]</sup> The soldiers involved were members of the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment, also known as "1 Para".<sup>[5]6</sup>

The entry opens with a definition of Bloody Sunday through an identifying relational process which labels it as an “incident”, for which clear time (“on 30 January 1972”) and space (“the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland”) circumstances are given. The event is detailed in the second clause which indicates participants and processes through a congruent active form featuring the “British soldiers” as subject/actors of a material process (“shot”), and “26 unarmed civilians” as object/goal with attribute, in the context – again – of specific circumstances (“during a protest march against internment”). The following clauses provide further details about the victims, also including numerals and quantifiers. Finally two clauses specify the circumstances and participants in the event, by stressing on the one hand that “the march had been organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the Northern Resistance Movement”, and by reminding on the other that “the soldiers involved were members of the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment, also known as ‘1 Para’”.

The following paragraphs of this first section introduce the two main investigations held by the British Government: the Widgery Tribunal and the Saville Inquiry. These paragraphs appear to be fully referenced and intertextually incorporate voices from existing authoritative sources, in the form of footnotes:

Two investigations have been held by the British government. The Widgery Tribunal, held in the immediate aftermath of the incident, largely cleared the soldiers and British authorities of blame. It described the soldiers' shooting as "bordering on the reckless", but accepted their claims that they shot at gunmen and bomb-throwers. The report was widely criticised as a "whitewash".<sup>[6][7][8]</sup> The Saville Inquiry, chaired by Lord Saville of Newdigate, was established

<sup>6</sup> “Bloody Sunday”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1972)) [Last access 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016]. References in square brackets are in the original.

in 1998 to reinvestigate the incident. Following a 12-year inquiry, Saville's report was made public in 2010 and concluded that the killings were both "unjustified" and "unjustifiable". It found that all of those shot were unarmed, that none were posing a serious threat, that no bombs were thrown, and that soldiers "knowingly put forward false accounts" to justify their firing.<sup>[9][10]</sup> On the publication of the report, British prime minister David Cameron made a formal apology on behalf of the United Kingdom.<sup>[11]</sup> Following this, police began a murder investigation into the killings.<sup>7</sup>

The conflicting perspectives of the two investigations are not made explicit in the text but emerge in the representation provided. The Widgery Tribunal is said to have “cleared the soldiers and British authorities of blame” and “accepted their claims that they shot at gunmen and bomb-throwers”. Delegitimation of this investigation comes through intertextual reference to criticism expressed elsewhere, in the sentence “The report was widely criticised as a ‘whitewash’”, which verbatim reports the words used in two different sources.<sup>8</sup> The Saville Inquiry is instead presented in apparently neutral terms, even though the fronting of the clause “Following a 12-year inquiry” alludes to the longer time devoted to the enquiry as a guarantee of greater reliability of the investigations carried out, and hence of their results. The enquiry actually “found that all of those shot were unarmed”, “that no bombs were thrown”, and that “soldiers ‘knowingly put forward false accounts’ to justify their firing”. In more general terms, the representation provided in these few paragraphs seems to be balanced and objective, since it incorporates other voices and is indeed not dissimilar from the corresponding entry in the much more authoritative traditional *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.2. The first version

When reading the version so far discussed, the reader might not consider at all times that this is but the final – albeit temporary – version of the embryo entry created by the first user nearly fourteen years before. As it first appeared, the entry read as follows:

On Sunday January 30th 1972 twenty-seven people were shot by British soldiers during a civil rights march in the Bogside area of the city of Dery [sic], Northern Ireland. Thirteen of the victims were shot dead, with one further man later dieing of his wounds. The official [sic] army line was that their Paratoopers had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected IRA members. However, this is refuted by residents [sic] of Bogside who witnessed events, many of whom claim that the soldiers shot idiscriminatley [sic] into crowds, ot [sic] aiming at fleeing people and those tending the wounded. No weapons of any kind were found on the bodies of the dead, or any of the 60 or so arrested.<sup>10</sup>

This paragraph is a single Wikipedia user’s discourse representation of the events of Bloody Sunday, which any other user has had since then the opportunity to contribute to.

The opening sentence introduces the participants involved in their respective function of goal (“twenty-seven people”) and actor (“by British soldiers”) of a material process expressed in the passive voice “were shot”. In Critical Discourse Analysis, the

<sup>7</sup> “Bloody Sunday”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloody_Sunday_(1972)) [Last access 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016]

<sup>8</sup> References are to David Granville, “More ‘butcher’ than ‘grocer’”, *The Morning Star* (28 July 2005) and Nick Cohen “Schooled in scandal”, *The Guardian* (1 February 2004).

<sup>9</sup> “Bloody Sunday”, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bloody-Sunday-Northern-Ireland-1972>.

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)&oldid=241004](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody_Sunday_(1972)&oldid=241004) (21/01/2002 h.17.38) [Last access 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016]. Typos and other mistakes are in the original.

choice of representing an event in a passive clause with explicit reference to the actor is generally seen as a way to represent a negative action “as being accomplished by active, responsible agents, inevitably placed in end-focus position” (Van Dijk 2006b). As to the circumstances, those mentioned in this case clearly highlight two key issues: the place, a Catholic area in the city of Derry, and the time, during a “civil rights march” – two variables which, as we will see later in the revision history, are interesting foci of contention in the article.

The second sentence completes the information provided by introducing a more detailed representation of the goal (“*Thirteen* of the victims”), of the process (“were shot *dead*”), and further complements the clause suggesting “with one further man later dieing [sic] of his wounds”.

The third and fourth sentences introduce metadiscursive and interdiscursive elements by mentioning “The official [sic] army line” consisting in an alternative representation of the events, i.e. to present the action by the Paratroopers as a reaction to “the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs”. This last claim is immediately challenged in a clause – appropriately linked to the preceding by the contrastive conjunction “However” – which dismisses this alternative representation of the event by counterclaiming that “this is refuted by residents [sic] of Bogside who witnessed [sic] events”. The focus on the role of “residents of Bogside” as eye-witnesses who claim “that the soldiers shot *indiscriminately* into crowds, or *aiming at fleeing people and those tending the wounded*”, stressing again the sole responsibility of the British soldiers in the event, can in this case be interpreted in terms of what could well be termed as “negative-Other representation”, as is typical of any biased account of the facts in favour of the speaker’s or writer’s own interests (Van Dijk 2006a: 372). The paragraph is closed by the statement “No weapons of any kind were found on the bodies of the dead, or any of the 60 or so arrested”, finally reinforcing a rejection of any claims about the possibility that the civilians killed were armed (implicitly challenging the ‘reaction’ hypothesis).

This embryo article seems thus to suggest that ideological concerns are inherently at work in the representation of this specific event concerning two opposing groups. While there is no explicit reference to the author’s belonging to one or the other group, strategies of negative other presentation apparently indicate unequivocally that the paragraph has been written from anti-British perspective (as confirmed also by the option for Derry instead of Londonderry as a toponym). It is precisely this short, necessarily partial and biased, representation of the events of Bloody Sunday that has created the basis for all subsequent contributions by other users, which will be analysed in the following sections.

### 4.3. Early edits

As already argued, editing of a Wikipedia article by various users may vary in nature. In this case, while some of the earliest edits were limited to the correction of typos and minor language mistakes, new elements were added starting from the revision dated 30th November 2002, aptly labelled as “A fundamental re-write contextualising 'Bloody Sunday', detailing the Widgery and Saville inquiries, and explaining the long-term impact of Bloody Sunday”. In this revised version, a paragraph introducing the Widgery report was in fact added:

In the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday, the British government under Prime Minister Edward Heath established a commission of inquiry under the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery. His quickly produced report supported the army analysis of the events of the day, to the extent of implying on the basis of scientific evidence that some of those shot had handled



explosives. Nationalists disputed the report's conclusions.<sup>11</sup>

This representation of the Widgery report is apparently operating towards a strategy of delegitimation of the British government, referring – as it does – to the report as a “quickly produced report”, whose aim was almost inevitably to support the already mentioned British army’s “line”. This entailed backing the supposedly scientific evidence of the victims having handled explosives. By contrast the subsequently appointed Saville Tribunal is presented as being engaged in “a far more wide ranging study “, based on interviews to “‘all’ key witnesses”:

A second commission of inquiry was recently established to re-examine 'Bloody Sunday'. The [[Saville Tribunal]] is engaged in a far more wide ranging study, interviewing “all” the key witnesses; the locals, soldiers, journalists, politicians, etc. While its report has not been written (indeed the new tribunal continues to sit, and is expected to continue for a number of years), evidence so far has severely undermined the credibility of the original Widgery Tribunal report. The scientific basis for the claims regarding the alleged involment of those shot in handling explosives has already been fatally undermined, with the discovery that some bodies were placed next to guns and explosives, while other substances (including playing cards) have been found to leave the same residue on people's hands as that which would be got from explosives. Even the scientists responsible for the original reports to the Widgery Tribunal now dismiss their own findings, and the interpretation put on their findings. While the chair of the current Tribunal, Lord Saville, has declined to comment on the Widgery report, and indeed has made the point that the Saville Inquiry is an inquiry into 'Bloody Sunday', not the Widgery Tribunal, he and his fellow judges have implicitly dismissed the Widgery report by refusing to defend it or trust *anything* it says.<sup>12</sup>

The lexis used in the paragraphs devoted to the two enquiries is definitely oriented to issues of credibility and (de)legitimation as revealed by repeated use of such verbs as “undermine” and “dismiss”, the recurring use of “claim” (both as a nominalized process and as a proper process), and attributes like “alleged”, as used in the following sentences: “evidence so far has severely *undermined* the *credibility* of the original Widgery Tribunal report”; “The scientific basis for the *claims* regarding the *alleged* involment [sic] of those shot in handling explosives has already been fatally *undermined*,” ; “Even the scientists responsible for the original reports to the Widgery Tribunal now *dismiss* their own findings”; and “Lord Saville... and his fellow judges have implicitly *dismissed* the Widgery report by refusing to defend it or trust *anything* it says.” By contrast, the Saville Tribunal is positively represented through a positive metaphor, as “throwing new and disturbing light on the behaviour of the Parachute Regiment in Derry/Londonderry that day”. Significantly, this positive presentation of the Saville Inquiry is reported as being “The prevailing view across the two communities”:

The prevailing view across the two communities is that the much more thorough Saville Tribunal is throwing new and disturbing light on the behaviour of the Parachute Regiment in Derry/Londonderry that day. Few today take the report of the Widgery Tribunal seriously as an accurate factual analysis of what happened on ‘Bloody Sunday’.

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)&oldid=453257](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody_Sunday_(1972)&oldid=453257) (30/11/2002) [Last access 30th June 2016].

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody\\_Sunday\\_\(1972\)&oldid=453257](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bloody_Sunday_(1972)&oldid=453257) (30/11/2002) [Last access 30th June 2016].

The particularly contentious nature of the circumstances in which the events of Bloody Sunday occurred becomes more prominent in a number of subsequent revisions featuring some apparently minor, but significant, changes, including the substitution of the phrase “civil rights march” with a number of alternatives. For instance, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2003 “civil rights march” is replaced by “riot march” (see Fig. 1 below):

## Bloody Sunday (1972): Difference between revisions

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

<p><b>Revision as of 04:22, 13 January 2003 (edit)</b>  Hephaestos (talk   contribs)  <span style="font-size: small;">m</span>  ← Previous edit</p>	<p><b>Revision as of 17:47, 2 February 2003 (edit) (undo)</b>  MartinSpamer (talk   contribs)  Next edit →</p>
<p><b>Line 1:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid orange; padding: 5px;"> <p>On Sunday [[January 30]], [[1972]], in an incident since known as “Bloody Sunday”, twenty-seven people were shot by [[British]] soldiers during a [[civil rights]] march in the [[Bogside]] area of the city of [[Derry]], [[Northern Ireland]]. Thirteen of the victims were shot dead, with another man later dying of his wounds. The official army line was that the [[Paratoopers]] had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected [[provisional IRA IRA]] members. However, marchers and residents of the Bogside who witnessed the events challenge this account; many of them claim that the soldiers fired indiscriminately into the crowd, or were aiming at fleeing people and those tending the wounded. In the rage that followed, the British embassy in Merrion Square in [[Dublin]] was burned by an irate crowd. Anglo-Irish relations hit one of their lowest ebbs, with Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, [[Patrick Hillery]], going specially to the [[United Nations]] in New York to demand UN involvement in the Northern Ireland troubles.</p> </div>	<p><b>Line 1:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p>On Sunday [[January 30]], [[1972]], in an incident since known as “Bloody Sunday”, twenty-seven people were shot by [[British]] soldiers during a riot march which in the [[Bogside]] area of the city of [[Derry]], [[Northern Ireland]]. Thirteen of the victims were shot dead, with another man later dying of his wounds. The official army line was that the [[Paratoopers]] had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected [[provisional IRA IRA]] members. However, marchers and residents of the Bogside who witnessed the events challenge this account; many of them claim that the soldiers fired indiscriminately into the crowd, or were aiming at fleeing people and those tending the wounded. In the rage that followed, the British embassy in Merrion Square in [[Dublin]] was burned by an irate crowd. Anglo-Irish relations hit one of their lowest ebbs, with Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, [[Patrick Hillery]], going specially to the [[United Nations]] in New York to demand UN involvement in the Northern Ireland troubles.</p> </div>

Figure 1

Wikipedia, “Bloody Sunday” (1972). Difference between revisions (13/01/2003 – 2/02/2003).

What is worth stressing in this case is the time at which the change was made: 17.47. One minute later, at 17.48, “riot march” had already been changed into “riot”, only to be changed again – just a few days later – into “a disturbance that followed a civil rights march”. The label used to refer to the event during which the ‘incident’ of Bloody Sunday occurred seems indeed to be of crucial importance to Wikipedians. While some users want to legitimate the demonstration by stressing the relationship with a demand for “civil rights”, others stress the disturbance element in the event, derogatorily labelling it as a “riot”. The conflicting perspective between the labels riot/disturbance/march repeatedly emerges in the edits that follow, to the extent that a number of edits in rapid succession in June 2003 feature riot/disturbance and disturbance /riot as the only changes made to the entry, closing with a temporary victory of riot.

### 4.4. Conflicting perspectives and NPOV edits

#### 4.4.1. Conflicting perspectives

After a period of relative editorial peace, the entry undergoes a number of new important changes on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2003 when a number of subsequent edits contribute a representation of the events of Bloody Sunday thorough transitivity structures that suggest

again a strong ideological bias and implicit ingroup vs. outgroup representation strategies. These changes concern especially a specific section of the article aptly called “Perspectives and Analysis of the Day”. As of 2nd December 2003 at 7:11 the section read:

*The Perspectives and Analyses on the Day*

Thirteen people were shot dead, with another man later dying of his wounds. The official army position was that the Paratroopers had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected IRA members. However many marchers and residents of the Bogside and British and Irish journalists covering the march and witnessed the events unfold challenge the army's account; These claims include soldiers fired indiscriminately into the crowd, or were aiming at fleeing people and those tending the wounded. In the rage that followed, the British embassy in Merrion Square in Dublin was burned by an irate crowd. Anglo-Irish relations hit one of their lowest ebbs, with Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Patrick Hillery, going specially to the United Nations in New York to demand UN involvement in the Northern Ireland troubles. In the immediate aftermath of Bloody Sunday, the British government under Prime Minister Edward Heath established a commission of inquiry under the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery. His quickly-produced report supported the army analysis of the events of the day, to the extent of implying on the basis of scientific evidence that some of those shot had handled explosives. Those present that day on the march and Nationalists disputed the report's conclusions.

A few minutes later, at 17:14, this version was radically revised as follows:

On January 30, 1972, soldiers from the British Army's 1st Parachute Regiment opened fire on unarmed and peaceful civilian demonstrators in the Bogside, Derry, Ireland, near the Rossville flats, killing 13 and wounding a number of others. One wounded man later died from illness attributed to that shooting. The march, which was called to protest internment, was "illegal" according to British government authorities. Internment without trial was introduced by the British government on August 9, 1971.

The British-government-appointed Widgery Tribunal found soldiers were not guilty of shooting dead the 13 civilians in cold blood.

At first glance the entry appears dramatically abridged. Considering the edits in more detail, the very first sentence, “Thirteen people were shot dead, with another man later dying of his wounds”, is replaced by a completely different representation in the clause “On January 30, 1972, soldiers from the British Army's 1st Parachute Regiment *opened fire* on unarmed and peaceful civilian demonstrators”. Particularly noticeable in this revision is the choice to turn the agentless passive form of the previous version into an active form with a significant rewording of the noun phrases used to represent actor and goal. In this way the text creates new labels which clearly present the event in terms of the opposition between “soldiers” and “unarmed and peaceful civilian demonstrators”, which in turn interdiscursively incorporates the idea that the British soldiers’ fire could by no means be interpreted as a reaction violence by the demonstrators. Even more significant changes concern the process: in the shift from passive to active form “were shot dead” becomes “opened fire on...”, an action unequivocally attributed to the British soldiers, in a new configuration of the event which leaves no doubt as to the initiator of violence. Place circumstances are also more detailed (“in the Bogside, Derry, Ireland, near the Rossville flats”), whereas the number of people involved is in a sense demoted by being placed in a dependent non-finite clause (“killing 13 and wounding a number of others”).

In summarizing the content of the earlier version this revised version also pushes into the background the intertextual and metadiscursive function of reporting verbs. The earlier version included phrases like “the official army’s position”, “the army’s account”,

“these claims” which are all nominalizations indirectly referring to a heated debate, in which the dominant position supported by the British Government (and confirmed at that time by the Widgery inquiry) was challenged by ordinary people and eye-witnesses (“marchers... residents... journalists...”). The revised version deletes all this and introduces a short paragraph providing details about the internment without trial measures introduced in Northern Ireland by the British Government, as a sort of legitimation for the supposedly illegal march. Given the dramatic impact of these changes on the representation of the event, it comes therefore as no surprise that the previous version would be restored in a few minutes (at 17:20).

A second wave of extremely interesting edits dates from 3rd March 2005:

<p><b>Revision as of 04:29, 2 March 2005 (edit)</b>  128.100.75.6 (talk)  (disambiguation: IRA -&gt; Irish_Republican_Army)  ← Previous edit</p>	<p><b>Revision as of 11:31, 3 March 2005 (edit) (undo)</b>  211.185.8.254 (talk)  Next edit →</p>
<p><b>Line 1:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>:"For other incidents referred to by this name, see [[Bloody Sunday]]."</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>[[Image:bloody sunday.jpg thumb right 350px Derry civil rights association banner after shootings]]</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p>On Sunday [[January 30]], [[1972]], in an incident since known as "Bloody Sunday", 13 people were shot by [[United Kingdom British]] soldiers <b>after a [[civil rights]]</b> march in the [[Bogside]] area of the city of [[Derry]], [[Northern Ireland]]. The march was organized by <b>Derry</b> MP [[Ivan Cooper]] to protest the [[internment]] of Irishmen in Northern Ireland.</p> </div>	<p><b>Line 1:</b></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>:"For other incidents referred to by this name, see [[Bloody Sunday]]."</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>[[Image:bloody sunday.jpg thumb right 350px Derry civil rights association banner after shootings]]</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px;"> <p>On Sunday [[January 30]], [[1972]], in an incident since known as "Bloody Sunday", 13 people were shot <b>when the IRA attacked</b> [[United Kingdom British]] soldiers <b>during an illegal republican</b> march in the [[Bogside]] area of the city of <b>Londonderry</b>, [[Northern Ireland]]. The march was organized by <b>Londonderry</b> MP [[Ivan Cooper]] to protest the [[internment]] of Irishmen in Northern Ireland.</p> </div>

Figure 2

Wikipedia, “Bloody Sunday” (1972). Difference between revisions (02/03/2005 04:29 – 03/03/2005 11:31).

In this case it is the clause “13 people were shot by United Kingdom British soldiers after a civil rights march in the Bogside area of the city of Derry, Northern Ireland” that undergoes a dramatic change when the explicit agent of the passive clause “by United Kingdom British soldiers” is removed and a temporal dependent clause “when the IRA attacked United Kingdom British soldiers” is introduced, which in fact voices a diametrically opposed view of the events. The change of perspective is in the first place evident in both the semantic role and the re-labelling of participants, which revolutionizes transitivity by turning actors into goals and viceversa. Furthermore, the time-space circumstances of the previous version “after a civil rights march”(time) and “in the Bogside area of the city of Derry” (place) are replaced by “during an *illegal* republican march” and “in the Bogside area of the city of *Londonderry*”, which delegitimizes both the demonstration as such (by calling it an “illegal” republican march rather than a civil rights march) and – more subtly – the Irish national identity, by substituting the name of the city of Derry with its official British name of Londonderry. This is one of the first instances of the dispute about the city’s name Derry/Londonderry found in history of this entry, which we will reconsider below.

Also interesting in the second paragraph of this same entry is the interdiscursive reference to the “official army position”, which is removed. In this way the army’s position (claiming that the British army had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected provisional IRA members) is reported in an affirmative statement

as incontestable truth. The cautious approach in the earlier version is completely abandoned and the new version represents opinions as facts:

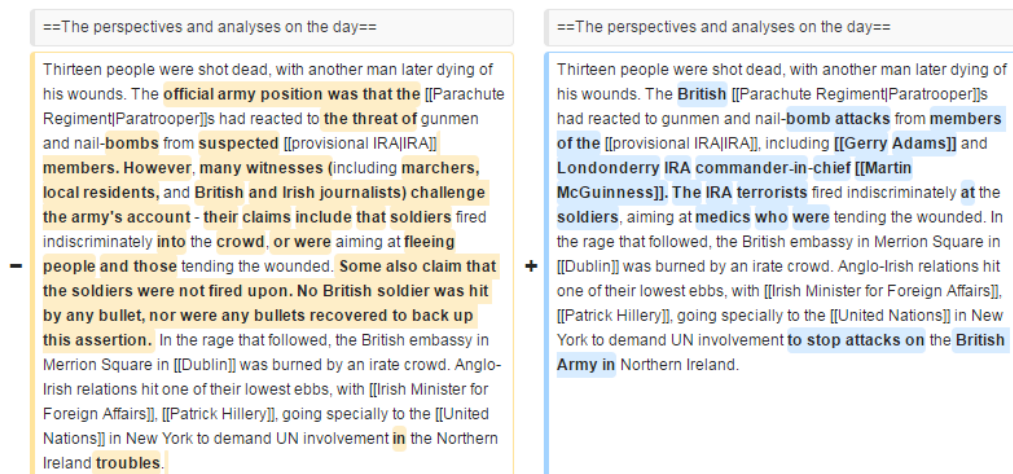


Figure 3

Wikipedia, “Bloody Sunday” (1972). Difference between revisions (02/03/2005 04:29 – 03/03/2005 11:31).

As seen in the screenshot above, the sentence “The official army position was that the Paratroopers had reacted to the threat of gunmen and nail-bombs from suspected IRA members” is changed into “The British Paratroopers had reacted to gunmen and nail-bomb attacks from members of the IRA, including Gerry Adams and Londonderry IRA commander-in-chief Martin McGuinness” which reports as an uncontroversial statement what had been presented as “the official army position”. Also noteworthy is the removal of the adjective “suspected” preceding IRA members and the inclusion of specific reference to Jerry Adams and McGuinness. Particularly worthy of note is the removal of the entire passage “However, many witnesses (including challenge the army’s account – their claims include that...”, whose function was to introduce the clause “soldiers fired indiscriminately into the crowd”. Any form of hedging is removed and everything is reduced to the clause “The Ira terrorists fired indiscriminately at the soldiers...”, featuring – again – a reversal of roles between British soldiers and IRA terrorists in the representation of the same event. Finally, the sentence claiming that no soldier was fired upon or hit by any bullet is removed, whereas the reference to the involvement of the UN “in the Northern Ireland troubles” is rephrased as “involvement to stop attacks on the British army in Northern Ireland”.

In the examples above, many edits in this Wikipedia pages lay bare specific ideological stance on the part of the user, independently of having being categorized as edits related to point-of-view or not. There are anyway a number of edits in the entry’s history of this article which are explicitly categorized as related to the neutral point of view policy of Wikipedia (NPOV or POV), which deserve therefore special attention.

#### 4.4.2. Neutral Point of View edits

Strange as it might seem, on the basis of what has been shown so far, in the almost 15-year long history of the Wikipedia entry for “Bloody Sunday” there have been only 39 edits explicitly labelled by users as relating to POV issues – with a peak of incidence between 2005 and 2009. In these four years we find indeed 25 of the 39 total edits.

The earliest edits labelled with the “NPOV” acronym concern lexical choices as in the already debated riot/disturbance/civil rights march edit war discussed above. A more interesting sequence of POV edits immediately follows the already mentioned editing war of March 2005 (see above) when in a tight sequence of edits between 3rd and 5th March 2003 the representation of the events was subject to continual manipulation as a consequence of conflicting perspectives:

Revision as of 19:58, 3 March 2005:  
 On Sunday January 30, 1972, in an incident since known as Bloody Sunday, 13 people were shot **when the IRA attacked British soldiers during an illegal republican march in the Bogside area of the city of Londonderry, Northern Ireland.**

Revision as of 05:06, 4 March 2005:  
 On Sunday January 30, 1972, in an incident since known as Bloody Sunday, 13 people were shot **when British Paratroopers opened fire on innocent civilians.**[sic]

Revision as of 09:49, 4 March 2005:  
 On Sunday January 30, 1972, in an incident since known as "Bloody Sunday", 13 people were shot **when the IRA opened fire on British Paratroopers during an illegal republican parade through the city of Londonderry.**

It is precisely immediately after this sequence of edits that two subsequent “POV additions” (04/03/2005 11:41 and 15:09) try to re-establish ‘neutrality’, as seen in Figure 4 and Figure 5 below:

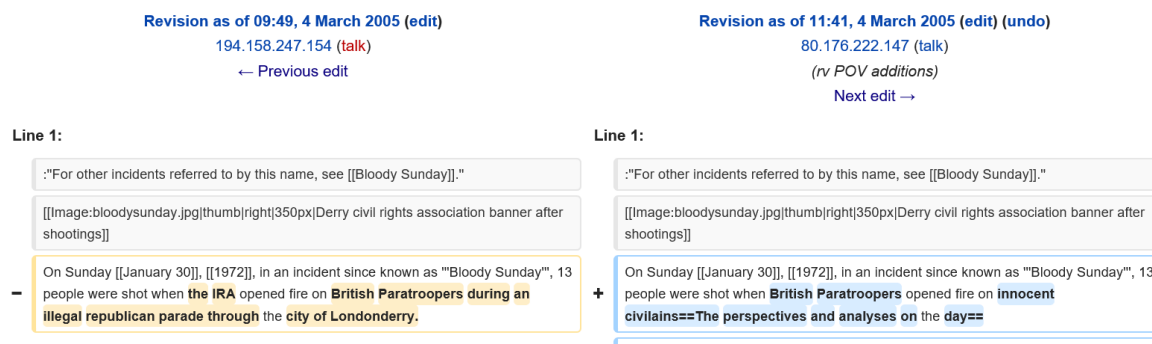


Figure 4  
 Wikipedia, “Bloody Sunday” (1972). Difference between revisions (04/03/2005 09:49 – 04/03/2005 11:41).

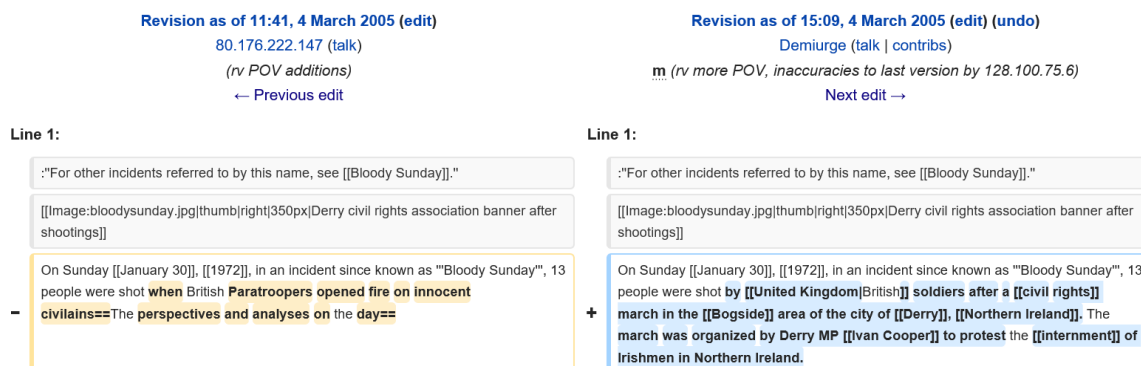


Figure 5  
 Wikipedia, “Bloody Sunday” (1972). Difference between revisions (04/03/2005 11:41 – 04/03/2005 15:09).

Another group of POV edits concerns issues which had been for a long time the object of a heated debate, as is the case of the controversy about the victims having being armed. This also results in textual activity in which the phrase “unarmed civilians” is repeatedly replaced by simply “civilians”, which obviously conveys a different representation of this key participant, according to the writer’s position. Also interesting, at the level of individual lexical choices, is the editing war triggered by the caption to the section reporting the names of the victims, labelled as “The Dead”, a term repeatedly replaced by “The Murdered” – another change openly recognized as revealing a POV issue.

However, it is the Derry/Londonderry question which emerges several times throughout the history of this Wikipedia entry as a clear POV issue. Indeed, already in 2007, the toponym chosen being the cause of continual editing war, a solution was found by making recourse to the specific affordances of the medium, and intertextual reference to a Wikipedia page aptly called “Derry/Londonderry name dispute” was added. In this way, the user hoped to “to save people trying to change the name again” (23/07/07 15.28). Other users tried to address this problem in different ways, for instance by making explicit reference in the text to the fact that Derry “is referred to by Protestants and the British as Londonderry” (08/10/07). This same user described his/her edit as “Added explanation of alternate name, as calling Londonderry, 'Derry' can be offensive to some people (and visa-versa)”.

Nonetheless changes concerning Derry/Londonderry have been an issue in this entry until recently, despite the explicit Wikipedia policy concerning Ireland-related articles, which has deserved a dedicated page in the Manual of Style, with a specific section devoted to Derry/Londonderry:

To avoid constant renaming of articles (and more), keep a neutral point of view, promote consistency in the encyclopedia, and avoid Stroke City-style terms perplexing to those unfamiliar with the dispute. A compromise solution was proposed and agreed in 2004 regarding the Derry/Londonderry name dispute, and has been generally accepted as a convention for both article titles and in-article references since then.<sup>13</sup>

The Derry/Londonderry dispute is at the core of another particularly important revision dated 12 November 2012. The previous version (25th October 2012) read as follows:

Bloody Sunday (Irish: Domhnach na Fola)[1][2]—sometimes called the Bogside Massacre[3]—was an incident on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside area of Derry, Northern Ireland, in which 26 unarmed civil-rights protesters and bystanders were shot by soldiers of the British Army. Thirteen males, seven of whom were teenagers, died immediately or soon after, while the death of another man four-and-a-half months later was attributed to the injuries he received on that day. Two protesters were also injured when they were run down by army vehicles.[4] Five of those wounded were shot in the back.[5] The incident occurred during a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association march; the soldiers involved were members of the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (1 Para).[6]

And this is the revised version dated 12th November 2012:

Bloody Sunday (Irish: Domhnach na Fola)[1][2]—sometimes called the Bogside Massacre[3]—was an incident on 30 January 1972 in the Bogside area of [[the city of

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual\\_of\\_Style/Ireland-related\\_articles#Derry.2FLondonderry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Manual_of_Style/Ireland-related_articles#Derry.2FLondonderry).

Londonderry in the UN recognised province of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland]in which 26 willing volenteers of the global marxist movement were punished by soldiers of the Parachute Regiment of the British Army. Thirteen marxist volenteers instantly instantly took a punishing for attempting to overthrow democracy, seven of whom were teenagers and should have know what they were doing. The death of another man four-and-a-half months later was attributed to the admonishing he received on that day. Two protesters were also injured when they disobeyed Her Majesty clearly signed road traffic regulations and were run down by army vehicles.[4]

The two versions, again, represent completely different discourse worlds: in terms of circumstances “Derry” is replaced by “the city of Londonderry in the UN recognised [sic] province of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland”, a strong reminder of the city’s name being a consequence of its legitimate (UN recognized) status as part of the UK. As to the participants, the phrase “26 unarmed civil-rights protesters and bystanders” is replaced by “26 willing volenteers [sic] of the global marxist movement” which is a quite different conceptualization of the same reality. Finally, and more crucially, the process “were shot” is replaced by “were punished”, a version which leaves no doubt as to the strongly biased ideological position of the writer. Furthermore, the victims (“Thirteen males”) are relabelled as “marxist volenteers [sic]” and the predicate “died immediately” is once again relexicalized in terms of punishment (“instantly took a punishing”); a legitimation for this is added through the clause “for attempting to overthrow democracy”. Equally biased is the reference to the teenagers involved, who “should have know [sic] what they were doing”. Punishment and reference to disobedience in this second version is further reinforced through the sentence “The death of another man [...] was attributed to the admonishing he received on that day”, in which “admonishing” is used to replace “injuries”. The user’s pro-British biased position is finally visible in the addition of the sentence “Two protesters were also injured when they disobeyed Her Majesty clearly signed road traffic regulations and were run down by army vehicles”, in which the overlexicalized “Her Majesty clearly signed road traffic regulations” provides clear uncontroversial evidence of the British imperialist perspective from which this edit was conceived.

This last entry represents an extreme case, in which edits and relabeling go for beyond mere negotiation of conflicting perspectives, and actually borders with mere vandalism. This explains why, in this case, the entry is reverted to the previous version on the following day, by a user who contributes the following lines to the discussion section:

Please do not add commentary or your own personal analysis to Wikipedia articles, as you did to Bloody Sunday (1972). Doing so violates Wikipedia's neutral point of view policy and breaches the formal tone expected in an encyclopedia. Thank you. RashersTierney (talk) 01:07, 13 November 2012 (UTC).

This last example is indeed the proof of explicit conflicting perspectives at the basis of the representation of any event in Wikipedia, especially in the case of particularly controversial issues. Furthermore, the conflict appears not to be limited to different views upon the facts described, but seems also to encompass the approach to Wikipedia in more fundamental ways. Behind the struggles between Loyalist and Republicans one sees a struggle between users striving for objectivity and users patently ignoring it. This also finally foregrounds the role played by the specific medium, which allows all these forms of interaction to actually reveal patterns of negotiation and conflict and makes the palimpsest of different versions (and the resulting perspectives) visible and accessible to any reader.



## 5. Conclusion

As the preliminary and limited results of the present investigation have hopefully shown, the representation of “Bloody Sunday” in Wikipedia can by no means be considered as ideology free, or unbiased. On the contrary, at each stage of its history, the resulting representation seems to have been strongly determined by the ideological stance of the user/writer, which is very likely connected to his/her identity as a member of a specific community (either British or Irish). Thus, the contentious representation of Bloody Sunday in Wikipedia can be seen as reflecting on the one hand the controversies that have surrounded the event since it happened, and on the other hand it lays bare the different approaches of people actively involved in Wikipedia. Indeed, the interplay of conflicting representation of the circumstances, processes and participants in the event, along with the continual reference to opposing claims and counterclaims, suggest that the textual and discursive negotiation taking place in the history of this specific Wikipedia entry reflects – but also reconstructs, reshapes and to some extent re-enacts – the real-life ‘troubles’, and provides a case in point to consider different ways to conceive of the role of Wikipedia contributors, finally emphasizing the role played by new technology in making patterns of negotiation and conflict in discourse visible and accessible worldwide.

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