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## Why isn't this shown on the BBC?

When the Tricycle theatre's Bloody Sunday drama premiered in Derry on Friday, the relatives of the victims had one question. Eamonn McCann reports

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[The Guardian](#)



The Tricycle's Bloody Sunday. Photograph: Tristram Kenton

The warmest applause at Friday's performance in Derry of *Bloody Sunday: Scenes From the Saville Inquiry* came during the discussion afterwards, when somebody in the balcony called for a campaign to pressurise the BBC into presenting the play on television. Director Nick Kent had explained that although the BBC had contributed £10,000 to development of the piece with a view to a TV screening, nobody from the corporation with commissioning authority had come to the Tricycle theatre to see the finished work. To many in the audience it seemed obvious that here was another example of the media glancing at *Bloody Sunday* and then averting its eyes from the clear truth emerging, and that the appropriate reaction was to fetch out the placards.

"I don't know, though," sighed Gerry Duddy - brother of Jackie, who was 17 when he was shot in the back by a paratrooper as he fled across the Rossville flats car-park. "Thirty years of campaigning is nearly enough."

The presence of relatives of all 13 civil rights demonstrators killed in the Bogside, as well as half a dozen of the surviving wounded, gave the evening a jagged edge. "I won't read out the next paragraph," said Terrence Hardiman as Michael Mansfield, glancing round at the auditorium, cross-examining Soldier F about the bullet he'd fired into the back of the head of Barney McGuigan, 41, as he stepped out from cover of a telephone box at the corner of the flats waving a white handkerchief to go to the aid of Paddy Doherty, 31, as he lay dying from a bullet that hit him an inch from the anus and furrowed through his body to exit at his chest. Questioning F in October 2003 at the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, Mansfield had omitted the passage out of deference to members of the McGuigan family present. The consideration was apt here, too.

The audience's involvement - participation, almost - in the play reflected a sense of ownership of the proceedings on which the script was based. Many had sat through all of the 431 days of evidence. They wanted to see what the writer, Richard Norton-Taylor, had made of the search for the truth which their campaigning had forced upon the British authorities.

"It was completely balanced, completely objective," said John Kelly, whose brother Michael, 17, was shot as he stumbled from a rubble barricade in Rossville Street. "That's what'll have worried the BBC. Anybody watching that play can see we were right."

None of the five soldiers whose evidence is covered - F, S, Colonel Derek Wilford of the Parachute Regiment, 8th Brigade Commander Pat MacLellan and the Commander of Land Forces NI, General Robert Ford - emerges with reputation intact. All of the civilians depicted, including Mickey Bridge (wounded as he ran remonstrating towards the soldiers who had just killed Jackie Duddy) and Bishop Edward Daly (both also in the audience), Bernadette Devlin (now McAliskey) and Reg Tester, the quartermaster of the Official IRA, came across as credible. Herein lies the source of the terror the Derry audience believes is still felt by powerful interests in Britain, including media interests, when confronted with a representation of the truth about Bloody Sunday.

A majority of people in Derry aren't waiting for Saville to tell them the truth, but to discover whether Saville will tell the truth to the world. The killings unfolded over a period of perhaps 17 minutes in a built-up area in broad daylight. Every killing and wounding was witnessed, some at very close quarters, from the windows of flats and maisonettes or the nooks and crannies where local people had huddled. Within hours, even as the paratroopers' fraudulent account was being transmitted around the world by British government agencies, people in Derry were piecing their memories together, resolving that, however long it might take, there'd be a reckoning.

The Tricycle won acclaim for its Scott "arms-to-Iraq" piece and The Colour of Justice, from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. Saville offered a bigger challenge politically: the truth about Bloody Sunday has to do not with institutional prejudice or administrative complicity in law-breaking, but with the direct, wilful murder of innocent unarmed civilians by uniformed representatives of the state.

And, as Kent pointed out, "We have Iraq now ... The soldiers there have to know that the law applies to them."

This may be a factor - certainly, the families believe it so - in the failure of the mainstream media to report adequately on the proceeding of Saville. Of the close on 250 soldiers who testified, from teenage privates to General Sir Michael Jackson, then second in command of the paras, none provided an explanation of how the 26 people now acknowledged as innocent came to be shot. Jackson, for example, managed not to observe a single killing or wounding.

The Tricycle's Bloody Sunday was thus seen in Derry not as a piece of political drama but as an episode in a long political struggle, a chink in the official armour still imprisoning the truth, a voice speaking out from within surrounding silence.

It's doubtful whether anybody here has the energy for a campaign to persuade the BBC that this is a voice worth amplifying to its audience. But they left content that the London theatre at least had played its part in the truth-telling they crave.

· Bloody Sunday is at the Tricycle Theatre, London NW6 (020-7328 1000), from tomorrow.