

TV documentaries are usually created to inform and educate and they are made to be entertaining enough to fulfil these functions. BBC's *Panorama* (originally described as 'a window on the world') is a long-running documentary series, which has investigated and commented on current affairs, both in the UK and internationally, since 1953. Certain episodes of *Panorama* have been considered to be controversial because of the challenging nature of the content. In this way, *Panorama* fits in with the ideals of the BBC's first Director General, John Reith, who felt that the BBC's purpose was to, *inform, educate and entertain*, while also honouring the more left-wing views of the founder of the documentary movement of the 1930's, John Grierson, who wished to use film to educate citizens in an understanding of democratic society and to 'tell truth to power'.

Grierson described documentary as: "**the creative treatment of actuality**", an interesting definition. If 'actuality' means the truth then how can we be creative with it and have it remain as a truth? Philosophers have asked the question "What is truth?" and have never come up with a firm answer. Surely a creative treatment of truth must have some bias? My truth must differ from yours? Perhaps the best a documentary can hope to do is to present us with interesting questions to consider?

*The Secret Drone War* (referred to as *TSDW*) is an episode of *Panorama*, which was first aired in 2012. Its main purpose is to raise awareness about secret drone strikes being carried out by the U.S Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) against groups in Pakistan's Waziristan region. It questions the legality and the usefulness of the strikes. A secondary purpose could be an attempt to work against the use of stereotypes and the 'othering' of people from these areas – to ask the viewer to consider them not as targets and 'collateral damage' but as people.

The makers of *The Secret Drone War* use the Documentary **expository mode** (as defined by American documentary theorist, Bill Nichols), relying heavily on the voice-over narration of the reporter Jane Corbin over footage that explains and illustrates her argument. This is further strengthened through the use of other **documentary conventions** such as: archive footage (eg. of President Obama' and of drones on the ground); 'talking heads' (Jane Corbin herself); witness address to the reporter; 'jiggly' camerawork at demonstrations and by interviews with those involved. Imagery is used to evoke certain responses in the viewer. **Editing** serves the argument. **Music and sound** are also used to clarify ideas and to manipulate the audience. **Technical codes** such as camera angles enforce idea of the reporter as brave and trustworthy.

The **narrative** of *The Secret Drone War* follows an argumentative form where we are introduced to the facts of the situation, the facts are discussed and the argument developed, witnesses suggest a possible solution and there is an epilogue, updating the viewer on the situation.

I feel that the programme is successful and also quite justified in creating questions in the viewer's mind regarding the US activities in Waziristan and I am also convinced and moved by the portrayal and the comments of the people of Waziristan. As such, I would be considered to be among those **audience** members who accept the preferred reading of the *Secret Drone War*. Members of the armed

forces might have special knowledge which could cause them to have a negotiated response – agreeing with some and disagreeing with other parts. It is possible that very nationalistic people would have an oppositional response or there may be those who consider the programme's argument to be biased and unrealistically liberal.

To make their case, Panorama:

1. Creates trust in the reporter.
2. Develops a strong, clear argument, which is slanted against these strikes.
3. Gives facts and statistics which can be verified.
4. Presents many witnesses and 'experts'.
5. Furthers its case by appealing to our emotions.

#### B1 **Creates trust in the reporter.**

**Technical Codes** When we first see Jane Corbin she is in a helicopter, wearing a headset. We hear electronic/helicopter-like music and her voice over: *"The tribal areas of Pakistan. A no-man's land that Westerners rarely get to. Britain's 7/7 bombers trained here. It's home to al-Qaeda and a dangerous brew of militants. Pakistan's army fought a bitter war here in South Waziristan. Below are ruined compounds once the militants' stronghold."* The unsettling throb of the music cue gives us a sense of danger. Jane Corbin's voice is calm and measured as she describes the context for the viewer– she sounds reliable and authoritative. So, while it gives the viewer contextual information it also evokes a feeling of threat and an impression of the reliability of the narrator. This is followed by her direct address to camera, which suggests her objectivity and honesty to the viewer.

Later we see her on the ground interviewing in Waziristan, wearing a scarf around her head – showing cultural knowledge and respect. On another occasion she is studying a laptop. We see a long shot of this then a mid shot of her face, concentrating. A reverse shot shows the screen of the laptop which has a video of President Obama, defending America's position with Jane Corbin's face reflected in the screen – thus, she is shown to be objectively studying his image and words.

#### B2 **Develops a clear argument against the use of drones in this area.**

The **Enigmatic code** keeps us involved: Why does USA use drone strikes which kill innocent civilians?

The situation is clearly explained with Jane Corbin's voiceovers and statements from and interviews with leading figures like: Admiral Denis Blair, Director of US National Intelligence from 2009-10 and Christine Fair from the Centre of Peace and Security at Georgetown University both of whom defend the use of drone strikes in Waziristan. However, it is important to notice that they both question this stance towards the end of the programme.

Documentary editing makes the argument as well as telling a story:

Rafiq ur Rahman (father killed in a drone strike): "We're fed up with America and the rest of the world. This is unjust. We are poor deprived people and instead of shedding blood they should build schools and educate our children."

Corbin (voiceover): "Are drone strikes really making the world any safer?"

There is archive footage of drones being dragged from hangars and flying. They look alien and metallic. We are shown what targets look like through the crosshairs and also footage of a house being blown up. This is **edited** to enhance the argument as it is put alongside an interview with Christine Fair in which she mentions that one of the positive aspects of drone warfare is that the pilot gets to 'go home for dinner'.

### *Representation*

The doubts and objections to the strikes are made clear through footage of demonstrations led by cricketer turned politician, Imran Khan, who comes from the 'tribal area' of Waziristan and who is leading protests and marches. He is shown to be active - almost crusading - as he is often on the move when being interviewed and making his points: in profile in a moving jeep, walking in the countryside, moving among his supporters. We feel positive about him because of this representation, which suggests colour and life and passion. His supporters carry colourful flags and call out repetitively "NO MORE DRONES!" He is among the last few speakers, saying, "The key to peace lies in getting the people of the tribal areas on our side. Win hearts and minds and we win the war."

### **B3 Gives facts and statistics which can be verified.**

**Anchorage** Dates, names and maps are used to help us understand the reality of the situation. Statistics regarding strikes and number of casualties are given and where there is doubt about their accuracy this is made clear.

### **B4 Presents many witnesses and 'experts'.**

#### **Representation**

Perhaps the most memorable witnesses are the relatives of the victims of the strikes. In direct contrast to headlines like The Sun's "Jihad it coming!" Or the Daily Mail's "They Got What They Deserved" where the victims are treated disrespectfully as aliens, TSDW makes the humanity of these people clear.

#### **Language:** lighting, framing and anchorage

- The least powerful in the film are often given a sense of dignity by careful lighting and beautiful framing using the 'rule of thirds' and dramatic lighting.
- The witnesses' voices are heard, though the words are translated.
- They are encouraged to tell their stories with lots of personal detail.
- Photographs of the dead as young people are shown.
- We even follow a family to hospital and see x-rays of injuries. The doctor explains that these are common injuries in drone strikes and that they can be limb-threatening and life-threatening.
- The captions name the witnesses, which conveys a sense of individual identity. The captions **anchor** the carefully composed images and this combination of image and words may give the viewer a sense of outrage.

### **B5 Furthers its case by appealing to our emotions.**

- Added to the many points made above, we might consider the use of the **semic code** (connotations): e.g. we see coffins we think of death and mourning; metal fences suggest lack of freedom and police imply threat.
- Musical connotations underscore images (see 'helicopter' music above).
- Also, the protesters themselves use tragic images such as a close up photograph of a dead baby, which evokes horror and outrage.

