

**The Iron Lady's Afterlife Controversy:  
A Historical Study and Press Analysis of Margaret  
Thatcher's Death**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	1
1. Introduction .....	2
2. Context .....	4
2.1 Historical Context.....	4
2.1.1 Thatcher’s Political Life and 1979 General Elections.....	4
2.1.2 Monetarism.....	6
2.1.3 1983 General Elections.....	7
2.1.4 The Falklands .....	8
2.1.5 Trade Union Reforms and the Miner’s Strike .....	8
2.1.6 Dealing with Terrorism .....	10
2.1.7 1987 General Elections and Burges Speech.....	11
2.1.8 The Community Charge and Thatcher’s Downfall .....	12
2.1.9 Thatcher’s Legacy .....	13
2.2 The UK press.....	14
3. Press and Twitter Analysis .....	15
4. Conclusions .....	22
5. Bibliography .....	24
5.1 Primary Sources.....	24
5.2 Further Reading .....	25
Appendices .....	27
Appendix A: Labour Isn’t Working .....	27
Appendix B: Tramp the Dirt Down – Elvis Costello Lyrics .....	27

## **ABSTRACT**

Margaret Thatcher's election as a Prime Minister had a marked impact on the history of the British Isles, not only for the fact that she was the first woman to lead a major political party in the UK but also for her radical politics. However, not only did her election as PM cause controversy but so did her death. The 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013, Baroness Thatcher died at the age of 87 because of a stroke. The same day of her death, many news sources in the British Isles mobilised and brought to light the breaking piece of news. This paper aims to show the positions that many newspapers adopted towards the ex-PM Margaret Thatcher's demise, 23 years after she left office, having their roots in the actions that the Baroness carried out during her premiership. By stating this, this paper also corroborates that Thatcherism and its consequences prevail and are current in the UK. Besides that, through the analysis of British newspapers, this paper also endeavors to prove that the general feeling of sadness and respect for the so-called Iron Lady was the mood that most of the articles adopted and predominated, but there also were other reactions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An over life-size bronze statue of Margaret Thatcher stands impressively in the Member's Lobby inside the Parliament of the United Kingdom. Margaret Thatcher has been the only PM to whom a statue has been raised in her honour within her lifetime. The statue, in front of Winston Churchill's statue, was erected in the year 2007, six years before she deceased. The raising of this statue, as well as the raising of many others in her honour, sparks controversy among UK citizens. "Controversy" is a word that like a ghost continuously followed Margaret Thatcher's political life and even, her death. The 8<sup>th</sup> of April of 2013 Margaret Thatcher died following a stroke and the same day, Margaret Thatcher's face was in each newspaper around the UK. Although many articles were written, as may seem obvious, not all of them were written by the same author, hence, different articles with different opinions took place.

"Sometimes the reality presented by the media matches the world as you know it, and sometimes it is very different. Sometimes two media present similar versions of the same event, and sometimes the result is very different" (J. Shoemaker, D. Reese, 2009)

As Shoemaker and Reese state, the mass media does not simply mirror one unique reality, but it reflects different positions. This variety of ideas the article writers in newspapers and magazines show let us glimpse what the different views of a society are. However, there is always one outlook that prevails, and usually it is the one that goes down in history. The event that is studied in this paper may fall back into the same patterns, so through the post-modern<sup>1</sup> attempt to give voice to the marginal, this paper aims to study not only the position of the predominant social class of the moment, but also the others that, as time goes by, usually sink into oblivion. In order to do so, this

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<sup>1</sup> In *Consciousness and the Novel*, David Lodge asserts that postmodernism rejects the duality central-marginal and gives importance to the "plurality of the 'different'".

paper analyses articles from newspapers and magazines with different political orientations. By analysing these articles in relation to the Iron Lady's death and using the mass media as a representation of diverse ways of thinking, this paper also aims to show through historical events why her death was such a controversial occurrence. The main hypothesis is that Margaret Thatcher's death not only caused sadness in society, as the majority of the journalists stated, but that there were other reactions that were also depicted in the press. Although the main sources used in this study are journalistic articles, some other mass media and social media sources are employed. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some social networks, such as Twitter, have become a subsidiary tool for the press and this paper makes use of them.

The effect of Margaret Thatcher's politics in the British society has been extensively studied in recent years, especially after her death. However, none of the existing studies have centred their topic on how her politics were reflected in the behaviour of the citizens on the day of her death. Although the topic of this paper has been academically neglected, through a journalistic study of the Iron Lady's death, this paper will try to help us to understand the social division that her politics caused. It would be seen, however, that further investigations are needed in order to expand and complete the study. In this paper, only British articles are studied and just opinions from UK citizens are taken into account. Therefore, the international repercussions that the death of a well-considered international governor had are not covered in this study.

Eventually, the paper is organized in four main sections; Firstly, the introduction, in which the research space is created and the main objectives of the study are presented. Secondly, the second section provides contexts and is subdivided in two sections; the first one consists of an explanation of the most polemic events of Margaret Thatcher's government, which need to be explained in order to better understand why

her death caused such controversy. The second subsection is a brief explanation of the story of the newspapers from which the articles are analysed in the third section. This explanation is provided in order to place the newspapers which are later analysed according to their political orientation and, by doing so, the subsequent analysis of the articles becomes more manageable and straightforward. The third section consists of the analysis of the articles, where, as mentioned before, the different opinions about Margaret Thatcher's death are compared and examined from a historical point of view. Finally, in the last section some conclusions that this study suggests are drawn.

## **2. CONTEXT**

### **2.1 Historical Context**

#### **1.1.1 Margaret Thatcher's Political Life and 1979 General Elections**

Many scholars consider Margaret Thatcher's political career as one of the most remarkable of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Evans (1996) refers to her as an "extraordinary phenomenon" and not vainly. Whether you are for or against her politics, her perseverance in all aspects of life cannot be questioned. She was the first woman who got to be prime minister in the UK, and since then any other woman has been elected PM again in Britain. Nonetheless, she did not only become an "extraordinary phenomenon" for being the first woman PM in the British history; Margaret started her political career in 1950, in her mid-twenties, but she would not become Member of the Parliament until 1959. Sixteen more years would have to pass for her to be elected Conservative Leader and only three more years to become PM. Thatcher was the PM who stayed the longest in office in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was PM for almost 12 years, from May 1979 to November 1990; she won three successive general elections, two of

them with absolute majorities, thus also becoming the only party leader who won more than two in the 20th century.

Thatcher's politics had such an impact on the British society that Thatcher's name became eponymous.

"You know you've made it in life when you've got an ism. Marx, Buddha, Darwin. They're all ism'ed up to the gills. And then there's Thatcherism, an equally hardy ism that still looms over us all, like a shadow blocking out the sun. Small state, free markets, deregulation, privatisation, tax cuts, union-breaking: that's Thatcherism told simply, an 11-year premiership condensed into a concept. (Elmhirst, 2010)

As Elmhirst sarcastically summarizes, Thatcherism is a term that represents the hard economic and political policies that Margaret Thatcher supported. These policies attempted to lower inflation and were mainly based on the rejection and privatisation of state ownerships of industries and business together with an economic policy of monetarism and income tax cuts.

Even before becoming PM, when Thatcher became Secretary of State for Education and Science with Edward Heath as the leader of the party, she agitated part of the population when she removed free school milk from children aged seven to eleven. In September 1971, at the Labour Party Conference, a floor speaker came up with the phrase "Mrs. Thatcher Milk Snatcher". (Moore, 2013) This phrase quickly spread among the press and it became a nickname that would follow Thatcher for the rest of her political career.

Although as Secretary of Education, the Iron Lady started to divide the nation, when Baroness Thatcher really turned Britain upside down was when she became Prime Minister on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June of 1979. The elections of Margaret Thatcher were preceded by a winter which was known as the "Winter of Discontent". During the winter of 1978-1979 there was a considerable union strike movement that was mainly provoked

by the Labour party of James Callaghan that attempted to control inflation by preventing pay increases. With her message “Labour isn’t working”<sup>2</sup>, Margaret Thatcher gained the premiership in a delicate economic situation. When she came to power, Britain was often described as “the sick man of Europe”; State-owned industries had poor productivity, there was high inflation and the British economy had come to a standstill. In this situation of economic decline, Lady Thatcher refloated the British economy by putting into practice the right-wing economic ideas of the so-called Chicago School of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman<sup>3</sup>.

### **2.1.2 Monetarism**

These economic ideas received the name of “monetarism”; “The newfangled word monetarism means, of course, no more than the good old name "quantity theory of money"” (Hayek, 1980). As Hayek indicated, monetarism is rooted in the concept of Quantity Theory of Money (QTM), an economic theory that states that the amount of money in the economy determines the rise in the prices of products and services. The monetarist economists believe that the economy cannot thrive unless a financial condition of low inflation is given and, in order to control inflation, keeping tabs on money supply plays a key role. According to monetarists, the government should only guarantee the fundamental state necessities and relinquish the rest to the enterprises and the customers.

“To monetarists, the best thing for the economy is to keep an eye on the money supply and let the market take care of itself. In the end, the theory goes, markets are more efficient at dealing with inflation and unemployment.” (Radcliffe, 2008)

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<sup>3</sup> Both Friedman and Hayek were economists involved in the monetarist movement. Friedman was a scholar of the Chicago School of economics, one of the most recognized economy schools.

Understanding the concept of monetarism is important to comprehend the economic policies that Margaret Thatcher carried out. As mentioned before, when Margaret Thatcher took office, the economy of England was in danger, and in order to overcome this delicate financial situation, the economic program that the PM put in action was mainly based on: monetary policies, the removal of government control over the industries, i.e. denationalization and privatization, a program of deregulation, and a tax reform together with a trade union reform. However, these economic policies did not work as well as Thatcher's Cabinet expected and, although they reactivated the industrial production and enterprise's competitiveness, unemployment increased to levels not seen since 1930<sup>4</sup>. Thatcher's economic program also contributed to social inequality. Since, actually, in 1982 inflation lowered and there was an increase of wealth, but only for those who had a job, those ones who were not that lucky fell into a poverty vicious cycle difficult to leave from. The social discontent mainly caused by huge unemployment rates ended up with the emergence of young working-class riots all around the country.

### **2.1.3 General Elections 1983**

Nevertheless, despite the recession, the Tories achieved a spectacular victory in the General elections of 1983. Different factors account for this success: Firstly, the opposition was unsteady; some Labour MPs left the party to form the new Social Democrat party, causing then a division of the anti-Tory vote. Secondly, the Housing Act 1980 brought about a growth in house ownership and enabled people from a social-working background to have their own houses. Many of these new house holders, usually Labour party sympathizers, stopped trusting in Labour policies and casted their vote to the Conservatives. Eventually, the principal cause of Margaret Thatcher's

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<sup>4</sup> In 1930 the Wall Street Stock Market crashed and the world economy fell into the Great Depression. The entire world suffered its consequences, England included.

success was the so-called “Falklands Factor”. The Falklands War, or also known as the Malvinas War or the South Atlantic Conflict was for Thatcher’s reputation a gift fallen from Heaven. The victory in the South Atlantic changed the mental image that many UK citizens had of Margaret Thatcher, and from then onwards she started to be seen as a powerful leader able to fight for Britain and surpass difficult situations.

#### **2.1.4 The Falklands War**

The Falklands War was between the UK and Argentina and its victor was the UK. Both Argentinean and English people set on going to war - the public polls in England suggested an 80% approval of sending military forces to the South Atlantic in order to take back the territory (Evans, 1997) -. However, as any war, it was a controversial event, and even currently the holding of the islands is a polemic subject. One of the most polemic occurrences during the war was the sinking of the Argentinean vessel, *ARA General Belgrano* which was attacked by the nuclear-powered submarine called *The Conqueror*. The controversy falls to the positioning of the cruise; the ship was outside the 200-mile exclusion zone around the Falklands when she was attacked. The launching of the torpedo left more than 300 casualties, most of them young people under the age of 30. That’s why many critics consider it a war crime. For some people like Diana Gould, the sinking of the *Belgrano* was unnecessary. Moreover, the decision was taken by Thatcher’s War Cabinet. Therefore, she had the last word. According to Diana Gould, the sinking of the *Belgrano* was a denial of any chance of a peace deal, and it was Thatcher’s fault.

#### **2.1.5 Trade Unions Reforms and the Miner’s Strike**

After the winning of the General Elections in 1983, Margaret Thatcher’s hold in power tightened. The previously mentioned economic changes stiffen, and in

consequence the social discontent rose simultaneously. As Moore states Thatcher's "dislike of trade union power and its municipal alliance with socialism" was a "political motive". Year after year Thatcher's Cabinet progressively attempted to bring the Trade Unions to nothing while, at the same time, applied austere privatization laws. The changes of the UK Trade Unions legislation started with the 1980 Employment Act, whose main points consisted on a restriction of lawful picketing and the necessity of 80% support in ballots to legalise a closed shop<sup>5</sup>. However, the following Acts concerning employment and Union Trade legislation were the ones that really put England upside-down. With the 1982 Employment Act, only the workers of an enterprise could protest against their employers and the fellow sympathy strikes was banned. This Act also allowed the employers to sue their workers for damages and there were clauses that made closed shops hard to hold up. Later on, further Acts were more and more restrictive and they looked with favour on individualism and privatization. In short, Thatcher always looked for economic benefits and she never had sympathy for the ones who were in economic troubles because of her policies.

Some working collectivities were not cost-effective; one of the most remarkable cases was the UK miners, who, besides, were the most important collective in the Trade Union movements. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the coal industry was the lifeblood of England's economy. However, one century later, by Thatcher's time, the coal industry was in decline all around Europe and there was no market for all the coal that was produced since it was being replaced by petroleum and nuclear energy. Instead of taking the industry down in a controlled way, 20 mines were closed in 1984 and this meant that thousands of people lost their job in less than a year. The closing of the pits led to a

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<sup>5</sup> A place of work where you have to belong to a particular Trade Union (Cambridge Dictionary)

massive illegal<sup>6</sup> year-long strike led by Arthur Scargill<sup>7</sup> which went down in history for being one of the largest most violent<sup>8</sup> strikes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, the miners and the Trade Unions were weakened because of Thatcher's policies and the strike ended up with the miners' defeat. Eventually, the PM Margaret Thatcher had defeated "the enemy within"<sup>9</sup>, an aim that some of her predecessors attempted to carry through but never achieved. After defeating the miners, privatization was the next step. Thatcher brought the Chicago School revolution to England and sold the steel industry, the airlines, water, gas, electricity, telephone, the trains and oil. (Riddell, 1989)

### **2.1.6 Dealing with Terrorism**

That same year, 1984, the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, IRA (Irish Republican Army) made an attack on Margaret Thatcher's life and all her cabinet. IRA bombed the Brighton hotel where Thatcher and her political partners were staying for a Conservative Party Conference. Five persons died and thirty-four were injured. Five years before, Airey Neave, a member of the Conservative Party and one of Thatcher's close colleagues, was assassinated by IRA. Neave had the belief that the Irish conflict should be won militarily and that became Thatcher's policy. "This attempt has failed. All attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail" (Thatcher, 1984)

Terrorism is another reason that explains why Thatcher received the nickname of "The Iron Lady". In the Northern Ireland conflict, she always refused to negotiate with the IRA. It was not until 1998, under Tony Blair's premiership in England and Bertie Ahern's in Ireland, that it came to an English-Irish agreement that has gone down in

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<sup>6</sup> The strike was not accepted by the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers)

<sup>7</sup> British trade unionist president of the NUM from 1982 to 2002)

<sup>8</sup> During the 27 weeks of the strike thousands of people were arrested and several policemen and picketers injured.

<sup>9</sup> In Thatcher's speech after 1984 Brighton bomb, she called Labour and Miners "the enemy within" implying a similarity with terrorists.

history as the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. One example of Thatcher's stubbornness was the death of Bobby Sands and other IRA's supporters, who starved to death whilst demanding to be treated as prisoners of war in the 1981 Irish hunger strike.

In her memoirs, Thatcher herself tells the reader that her tenacity and inflexibility brought her to office. However, she also admits that being so determined had disadvantages when it comes to leading a party.

Once I begin to follow a train of thought I am not easily stopped. This has its advantages. It means that I can concentrate on a tricky point almost no matter what is going on in the background, a useful ability, for example, at Prime Minister's Question Time. But it does, of course, also mean that I am inclined to talk over people and ignore timid or inarticulate objections and arguments. (Thatcher, 1993)

### **2.1.7 1987 General Elections and the Burges Speech**

After all the complaints and protests her government was receiving from different sectors of the population, it is hard to understand why she was re-elected in the 1987 General Elections. As Peter Jenkins states, "1987 was a re-run of 1983". Thatcher's political hat-trick happened thanks to the thriving economy and an opposition that was divided. Even the slogan of the conservative campaign was based on the same idea of continuing what it was started in 1979 and 1983; "Britain's great again. Don't let Labour wreck it".

Jacques Delors was elected President of the EC Commission in 1985. He had the idea of a European single market, a European Monetary System with a single currency for all the Community and a European Central Bank that controlled the members' monetary policy. (Evans, 1997). This idea really upset and offended Margaret Thatcher. Since she took office, she had been fighting for individual freedom and did not believe in federalism. Thatcher's answer to Delors' politics was the famous Burges speech of 20<sup>th</sup> September 1988. She asserted that the European nations must have particular

identities. She opposed any “European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels” (Thatcher, 1988). Although she considered the UK part of Europe, she upheld the idea of national identity.

The European Community is *one* manifestation of that European identity, but it is not the only one. [...] Britain does not dream of some cosy, isolated existence on the fringes of the European Community. Our destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community. That is not to say that our future lies only in Europe, but nor does that of France or Spain or, indeed, of any other member. The Community is not an end in itself. (Thatcher, 1988)

### **2.1.8 The Community Charge and Thatcher’s downfall**

The position she took towards the European Monetary System breached opinions in the Conservative Party. But what made Thatcher’s premiership tremble and eventually fall was the introduction of the “Community Charge”, a policy also known as the “Poll Tax” that replaced the domestic rates. Even her closest confidants in the Conservative Party warned her about the stiffness of that new policy and many other Tories were against it. The Poll Tax was a harsh policy that consisted of an equal tax per head, i.e. everybody had to pay the same amount of money regardless their income. The introduction of this policy brought about huge popular discontent that ended up in riots. The last time a poll tax was introduced it initiated the 1381 Peasant’s Revolt, a social rebellion that was caused by the highly unpopular poll tax. Taking a brief look back in history, Thatcher could have perceived that these kinds of policies are not welcomed in the UK.

As mentioned before, Thatcher was a highly determined politician, and although it could be considered a good trait in certain situations, this time her stubbornness led to her own downfall. Her own party pressured her to resign. Since then, Thatcher felt betrayed and resentful for the way she was forced to leave office. Her offense is visible

in her memoirs, where she compares her premiership with Churchill's one but in a wretched mood.

Of course, democracy is no respecter of persons, as my great predecessor, Winston Churchill, learned when having led Britain through her supreme struggle against the Nazi tyranny and in the midst of negotiations crucial to the post-war world order; he was defeated in the 1945 general election. At least, however, it was the British people who dismissed him from office. I was not given the opportunity to meet the voters — and they were not able to pronounce on my final term of office, except by proxy. (Thatcher, 1993)

The first woman prime minister resigned her position and left Downing Street the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1990 leaving behind a completely remodelled country.

### **2.1.9 Thatcher's legacy**

Margaret Thatcher's legacy is perhaps the most important point regarding this paper. She transformed England economically and socially. Perhaps the sentence that summarizes the best Thatcher's policies is a sentence that she herself said in an interview in the magazine *Women's Own*. "There's no such a thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (1987). Thatcher's vision of society was competitive. Her policies resulted in a scarcity of employment, money and food for many families. She never had sympathy for those who suffered from economic struggle and this brought to an even more unequal society. "It (British Society) became less tolerant, greedier and far less humane. It elided the socially critical distinction between selfishness and self-interest" (Evans, 1997). However, this is one perspective. For others, Margaret Thatcher has been one of the most brilliant political leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She was the one that with her policies reactivated the British economy and healed a country that was once called the "sick man of Europe". For some her determination and lack of indulgence enriched the UK, for others they caused hardship and a deep sense of unease.

## 2.2 THE UK PRESS

A great variety of newspapers can be found in the United Kingdom and they are generally separated in two main groups; one called “quality press” and another called “popular press”. The quality press newspapers, also called broadsheets, are distinguished by their earnestness. Their content is mainly political and economical, and they are chiefly addressed to cultivated people. The language used tries to be objective as well as the information given. Regarding the layout, they are large in size and their articles are longer than the popular newspaper’s. According to the NRS<sup>10</sup>, currently the most read broadsheets in the UK are *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *i*. Concerning the popular newspapers, also commonly called tabloids, they are smaller in size and they have an eye-catching layout. As far as their content is concerned, they are less serious than the quality newspapers. They also deal with politics and economy but their approach is more humane, partisan and personal. Their readership usually comes from a humble background. According to the NRS, the most important tabloids in the UK are *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Daily Star* and *The Daily Express*. The last NRS survey (December 2015) has shown that the 8 most read daily newspapers are, from more to less; *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Star* and *Daily Express*. As can be seen, tabloids are more popular than broadsheets.

Although the distinction between popular and quality press is relevant in regards to an analytical comparison, the political leanings of the newspapers also needs to be highlighted, especially when it comes to Margaret Thatcher’s death. On the one hand, articles from *The Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*, which are politically on the right, are the ones that will be analyzed deeply in the following section

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<sup>10</sup> The National Readership Survey

of the paper. On the other hand, left oriented newspapers will also be analyzed, which are *The Guardian*, *Daily Mirror* and *The Morning Star*.

However, not only newspaper articles will be considered, but also two magazines will be commented on. The magazines that will be used in this paper are *The Socialist Worker* and *British Heritage*. Both the magazines either deal with history subjects, politics or culture.

### **3. PRESS AND TWITTER ANALYSIS**

As it has been mentioned in the introduction, this third section consists of the analysis of several articles and various mass media reactions regarding Margaret Thatcher's death. First of all, broadsheet articles will be analyzed. This analysis will lead to the study of articles published in tabloids and, simultaneously, the study of magazine's articles. Subsequently, some remarkable tweets will be considered. In regards to the conclusions, they will be drawn in the last part of the paper.

“Margaret Thatcher left a dark legacy that has still not disappeared”, Hugo Young, a political columnist of *The Guardian* and one of Margaret Thatcher's biographers wrote an article with this title in 2003, two weeks before he died of colon cancer at the age of 64. Ten years before Baroness Thatcher's death, Hugo Young wrote this epitaph for the former Prime Minister, an epitaph that was published in *The Guardian* the day of her death. In this article he depicted Margaret Thatcher as a “divisive figure”, a determined politician that deleted the sense of community from the British society and, irreversibly, made the “Brits become more unpleasant to be with”. Ten years are nearly nothing for the Earth but it is a long time for people, and the “dark legacy” that Hugo Young presented in his article seems to have dimmed over time and,

perhaps, because of the respect towards the deceased's family, or because of the passage of time, the broadsheet articles written in 2013 were less judgemental than Young's. Yet, Hugo Young's view would be the main line followed by other broadsheet's left-opted columnists. *The Guardian's* Editorial defined her as a "political warrior" and her legacy of "public division, private selfishness and a cult of greed, which together shackle far more of the human spirit than they ever set free". However, even though this right-wing statement is a soundly disagreement with Thatcher's politics and her individualist moral stance, the newspaper shows respect towards the former PM and also describes her as an "exceptionally consequential leader" and "the most formidable peacetime leader this country has had since Gladstone".

*The Guardian* generally provides the same information that *The Times* and *The Telegraph*, but with the difference that, in the left-oriented broadsheets, much is made of the positive changes and the controversy regarding the social conflicts is prone to be diminished and regarded as unimportant in comparison to her legacy. With the article "Thatcherism was right, necessary and effective" (2013), *The Telegraph* tries to justify Thatcher's polarising attitude by stating that Thatcher was "divisive and confrontational" because "she lived in a divided and confrontational time" so she acted as she should have done. In this same article her policies are described as a "painful medicine", thus it is accepted that her policies were strict and unpleasant sometimes, but they were also required and successful. However, any article holds as primary the damage Baroness Thatcher caused on the economically disadvantaged communities. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the principal focus of the articles in *The Times* and *The Telegraph* is on the positive consequences her time in office produced.

"The death of Baroness Thatcher yesterday prompted an outpouring of admiration, some criticism, and a fresh debate over her legacy. Britain began to assess the foremost peacetime politician of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a

woman who transformed life in this country, profoundly, permanently and through sheer force of personality” (Macintyre, 2013)

This is how the leading article of *The Times*, the day after Margaret Thatcher died, starts. If we analyse it semantically we can see that in order to describe the admiration her death received, the adjective “outpouring” is used, while, when it comes to the criticism received, the adjective “some” is the one chosen. So, Thatcher’s terms in office, her legacy and her appreciation are not only highlighted in the content of the articles, but also in the words chosen.

Taken together, although *The Guardian* tends to decidedly underline the negative consequences Lady Thatcher’s government had, the three broadsheets end by describing her as a remarkable politician, albeit divisive, who, to a greater or lesser extent, changed Britain for good. In fact, apparently the only chief discrepancy among these newspapers is their standpoint in regards to the type of funeral Baroness Thatcher received. Generally, whereas *The Times* and *The Telegraph* agreed with the fact that she would receive a state funeral or at least, a similar one, *The Guardian* opposed.

As far as tabloids are concerned, they have a populist tendency and are prone to be subjective and less neutral than broadsheets, as explained in section 2.2. Therefore, when right-oriented and left-oriented tabloids are compared, the different opinions about Thatcher’s death are shown clearly. Whereas *Daily Mirror* and *The Morning Star* published evident anti-Thatcher articles, *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* held Baroness Thatcher in high esteem and published articles which expressed an exceptional admiration towards the deceased.

The analysis of the tabloids and magazines begins with Lazenby and Bagley's article. It was published in *The Morning Star* and it is a clear example of an anti-Thatcher opinion.

“Margaret Thatcher, the most hated British prime minister of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, died today (April 8). Victims of her vicious 1980s onslaught against the working class refused to show any sorrow over the final demise of the frail 87-year-old after a stroke. Spontaneous exultation broke out across Britain as news of her death spread like wildfire” (Lazenby and Bagley, 2013)

The article starts describing Baroness Thatcher as “the most hated British prime minister” and her time in office as a “vicious onslaught”. If we compare the beginning of Lazenby and Bagley's article with Macintyre's on page 18, we can see that the language used in Macintyre's, albeit pro-Thatcher, is much more academic and formal. Besides, after announcing her death, the first relevant piece of information given is the “spontaneous exultation that broke out across Britain”. This tabloid is the only one which starts by giving notice of the celebrations Thatcher's death had on the streets of England, especially in mining and industrial towns where Thatcher's policies affected the community negatively. Thousands of people gathered in different cities of the British Isles and celebrated Thatcher's death with champagne, placards and music. Almost all the UK tabloids and broadsheets wrote an additional article commenting on these occurrences in particular.

Returning to *The Morning Star's* article, unlike the articles on broadsheets and pro-Thatcher tabloids, Lazenby and Bagley only focus their attention on the negative consequences Thatcher's era had. Nevertheless, the most provocative public writing was not published by the *Morning Star*, but by the *Socialist Worker*. In this magazine's front page a tombstone appeared engraved with the words “Margaret Hilda Thatcher

1925-2013, loved by the rich, hated by the poor”, over the headline “Rejoice!” which prompted the readers to remember Thatcher’s call to “rejoice” after winning the Falklands’ war. This front page caused a lot of media reactions, both pro and against, which the *Socialist Worker* answered by saying that they were the only ones who “dared to say what millions of working class people were thinking”. However, not all the leftist tabloids and magazines were so radical as *Socialist Worker* or *Morning Star*, in fact, they are a minority. The *Daily Mirror* is also a left-oriented reference tabloid, and, even though they do not encourage the reader to dance on Thatcher’s grave - like *Socialist Worker* does - they do not forgive the suffering that many people went through under her premiership. They claim that Margaret Thatcher “broke Britain” and they draw special attention to the fact that people, especially the “casualties” of her policies and economic changes, do not forget, so her death is not an excuse to rewrite history and turn The Iron Lady in national hero.

Conversely, in *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* the reverse is true and she is depicted as an extraordinary woman who lifted the country to a higher economic level. Even in *Daily Mail*’s front page she is described as the British saviour of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the headline “The woman who saved Britain”. The social problems her government caused are treated trivially and only the legacy considered “good” is presented. At the end of *The Sun*’s article, ten reasons to remember Margaret Thatcher are listed and virtually all of them show her as a congenial, good-natured woman. By the same token, Dana Huntley, in the magazine *The British Heritage*, advocates that she would be remembered for her “personal character, her warmth and human kindness, her humour and sense of duty” even over her political accomplishments.

Both *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* tried to reinforce the great positive impact Margaret Thatcher had by adding leftist personae talking about the good qualities Baroness

Thatcher had. In *Daily Mail*, the opinion of Ed Miliband, a former leader of the Labour party, is presented. He announced that she was “a unique figure” that “reshaped the politics of a whole generation”. Then, in *The Sun*, the fact that Ed Miliband suspended the party’s local election is highlighted. Nevertheless, in general terms, both tabloids focus on the positive reactions several institutions, celebrities and political figures had towards Margaret Thatcher’s death whereas her legacy and political triumphs and defeats are pushed aside.

Considering that these tabloids principally pay attention to public opinions, the appearance of tweets in their articles was expected. Nowadays, Twitter is a powerful communicative weapon which is increasingly becoming a complementary tool for the traditional printed publications and media. In *The Daily Mail*’s article several tweets were published, yet, only tweets that praised her, and mainly tweets with rightist tendencies were selected. Tweets from recognized politicians like Boris Johnson and Dr. Liam Fox had representation in the tabloid. However, David Cameron’s tweet was one of the most quoted and commented in the press, it states: “It was with great sadness that I learned of Lady Thatcher’s death. We have lost a great leader, a great Prime Minister, and a great Briton”.

Even though *The Daily Mail* only published tweets that paid tribute to the deceased, many other tweets against her persona were written. A case in point and one of the most controversial tweets that were written the same day of her death is George Galloway’s: “Thatcher described Nelson Mandela as a “terrorist”. I was there. I saw her lips move. May she burn in the hellfires”. With the last sentence of this tweet Galloway expresses great satisfaction for Thatcher’s passing away. Moreover, despite Cameron’s being one of the most commented tweets in the press, it had 3,316 retweets and 735 likes whereas Galloway’s had 3,548 retweets and 1,121 likes. There is evidence to

suggest that Twitter is an online platform that provides us with a wide variety of opinions definitely broader than the opinions in newspapers if analysed thoroughly.

Lastly, Galloway also quoted an Elvis Costello protest song, “Tramp the dirt down”<sup>11</sup> in another tweet which was less followed but equally controversial. In Costello’s song “Tramp the dirt down” the singer looks forward to dancing on Margaret Thatcher’s grave. However, this was not the most sung song the day Thatcher passed away, but the Wizard of Oz’s “Ding dong the witch is dead”, a song which is regarded to be a sort of hymn for the anti-Thatcherites. “Ding dong the witch is dead” topped the UK i-tunes chart and got the second slot in the official UK singles chart. In contrast, the rival punk song “I’m in love with Margaret Thatcher”, reached the number 35 in the official UK singles chart and got the number six on UK i-tunes.

The mass media reactions and the purchase on a large scale of an anti-Thatcher song, definitely suggest that more than a few people celebrated Lady Thatcher’s demise. This statement reasserts the idea that, generally, all the newspapers, independently whether they are broadsheets, which tend to be more objective, or tabloids, which tend to be the contrary, they are all, to a certain extent, subjective. In the case of the news regarding Margaret Thatcher’s demise, despite the fact that leftist opinions caused great commotion, a larger number of right-oriented articles were written and it appears that this might be the predominant attitude that will go down in history. When Thatcher died, David Cameron gave his backing to a £15 million museum called “The Thatcher Centre”, which, as he stated, would help young people “learn about her achievements” and “ensure her legacy lives on”. Nevertheless, times are changing, and some people like the artist Darren Cullen do not want the history to be told only by a particular sector

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<sup>11</sup> See appendix 2

of the society so he plans to open an anti-Thatcher museum in London. Ibid.

Whitehouse's article in *The Mirror*, Cullen states:

"I wanted to start this project because I think there's going to be a serious need to counteract the whitewashed version of Thatcher's legacy the official museum will present." (Whitehouse, 2015)

On the whole, although it is uncertain whether Margaret Thatcher's legacy will be regarded as positive or negative, what is indubitable is the fact that Margaret Thatcher was a divisive figure when she was alive, and now, deceased, still sparks controversy.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This TFG had two different purposes. First of all, this paper demonstrated that Margaret Thatcher's premiership stirred a deep division in the British society and, when she died, that division was expounded in the articles of British newspapers and magazines published after her death. In order to demonstrate this, this paper provided historical context and a press study. The events explained in the first part of the paper are the basis for understanding what Margaret Thatcher's represented, and still represents, in British society. This has also helped us understand the reason why Margaret Thatcher's demise had different reactions. Secondly, by showing a broad variety of opinions, this paper also disproved the general feeling of sadness that was mainly transmitted by the majority of newspapers. The analysis of the press and some Twitter comments proves that the British broadsheets usually adopted a neutral position similarly to right-oriented tabloids, which did not focus on Lady Thatcher's political achievements, albeit they praised her persona. However, it is in left-oriented tabloids and magazines where a strong anti-Thatcher opinion was expounded. Moreover, the media effect that some personal tweets had, in relation to Thatcher's death, offered to

the paper a wider valuable view of how British society reacted towards Baroness Thatcher's passing away. Indeed, on the whole, Thatcher's footprint in British society is unquestionable, as well as the fact that, because of her legacy, she will continue being loathed by some and loved by others.

This investigation was especially limited by my own origins and cultural background. The fact that I am not a member of the English community had simultaneously a positive and negative effect regarding the paper. On the one hand, this lack of first-hand knowledge provided further objectivity, and a different and external perspective of the occurrences, which was extremely useful regarding the media analysis. On the other hand, some positions and events were culturally difficult to understand and, subsequently, hard to explain. Moreover, due to the fact that the studied event is very recent, there is a lack of previous press analysis study. Nevertheless, despite the lack of academic support, this study could provide an analysis of the most widely read British press and, to the extent possible, a transparent and objective observation toward the different opinions in reference to Margaret Thatcher's death. However exploratory, this study may offer a provisional interpretation of this new material and it may work as a starting point for future research. Further research should examine interpretations and consequences of Thatcher's death in international and local newspapers as well as in other media. This paper aimed to work as an open door for further research concerning the life and death of Margaret Thatcher, a woman that changed the lives of thousands of people and, to a large extent, shaped the Great Britain that we know today.

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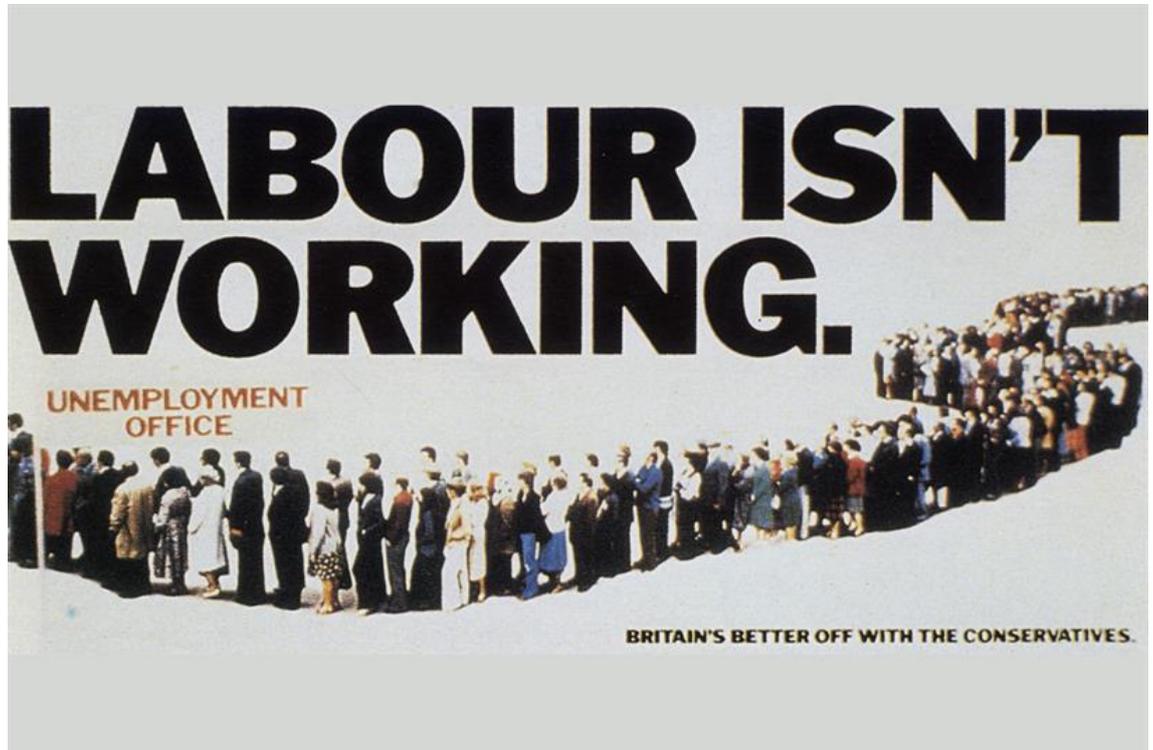
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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A



This was the advertising campaign that the Conservative Party used in order to win the 1979 general elections. The conservatives won the campaign with a 43-seats majority. These were the first elections that Margaret Thatcher won as the party leader.

### Appendix B

#### Tramp the Dirt down – Elvis Costello Lyrics

I saw a newspaper picture from the political campaign  
A woman was kissing a child, who was obviously in pain  
She spills with compassion, as that young child's  
Face in her hands she grips  
Can you imagine all that greed and avarice  
Coming down on that child's lips

Well I hope I don't die too soon  
I pray the lord my soul to save  
Oh I'll be a good boy, I'm trying so hard to behave  
Because there's one thing I know, I'd like to live  
Long enough to savor  
That's when they finally put you in the ground

I'll stand on your grave and tramp the dirt down

When England was the whore of the world  
Margaret was her madam  
And the future looked as bright and as clear as  
The black tarmacadam  
Well I hope that she sleeps well at night, isn't  
Haunted by every tiny detail  
'Cos when she held that lovely face in her hands  
All she thought of was betrayal

And now the cynical ones say that it all ends the same in the long run  
Try telling that to the desperate father who just squeezed the life from his only son  
And how it's only voices in your head and dreams you never dreamt  
Try telling him the subtle difference between justice and contempt  
Try telling me she isn't angry with this pitiful discontent  
When they flaunt it in your face as you line up for punishment  
And then expect you to say thank you straighten up, look proud and pleased  
Because you've only got the symptoms, you haven't got the whole disease  
Just like a schoolboy, whose head's like a tin-can  
Filled up with dreams then poured down the drain  
Try telling that to the boys on both sides, being blown to bits or beaten and maimed  
Who takes all the glory and none of the shame

Well I hope you live long now, I pray the lord your soul to keep  
I think I'll be going before we fold our arms and start to weep  
I never thought for a moment that human life could be so cheap  
'Cos when they finally put you in the ground  
They'll stand there laughing and tramp the dirt down.