

14 ARTS MMO 33-1 332301 11:

wish I had the furniture contract for BBC 1's daytime programmes. With the addition of Gloria Live, the schedule is now a veritable MFI warehouse of chairs and sofas: from Breakfast News through two editions of Open Air to Daytime Live. It is sometimes hard to tell the difference between these programmes, since they all seem to have the same presenters (before becoming the eponymous star of Gloria Live, Miss Hunniford had appeared on Open Air - or was it Daytime Live?) and seem to spend a lot of their time talking about other television programmes. "I just want to say Martin Shaw was brilliant, brilliant, brilliant," one enraptured viewer told me while listening on the first edition of Open Air. Over on ITV, they take a loftier view of media matters: John Stypapleton was deploring the impending deluge of cheap, time-filling television programmes - which took a certain amount of nerve considering that Stapleton's own show The Time... The Place depends almost entirely on its unpaid studio audience and that its budget can't apparently run to a decent suit for its presenter, a shot of the back of which occupies much of the programme's running time. Still, perhaps they'll be discussing Stapleton's jacket in a future edition: no sense using up all your good topics at once. It is not entirely the programme makers' fault that everything on these daytime strips is so flimsy and plank-

11; THE INDEPENDENT

TELEVISION / Mark Steyn on the well-worn upholstery of BBC Daytime and spiralling violence in Natal Province

sounds familiar. After all, life itself is cyclical, and as the presence of Robert Maxwell launching another newspaper reminded us. 10 years ago, he was on the Wogan sofa saying that what we all wanted was a 24-hour London paper; yesterday, he was in Gloria's easy chair saying that what we all wanted was a weekly European paper; next year, having invented another community of interest, he will probably be on Kilroy! plugging his new fortnightly The Northern Hemisphere. The upholstery in change, but that weird fruity drawl, which the ambitious acolyte has kidded him into the voice of authority, will be as bullish as ever. "I

"Do we think European enough?" asked Gloria. This was a good question, but no matter how hard you tote that barge, 61-year-old Maxwell keeps rolling along: "The younger people who take two or three holidays a year? who know the difference between French wine and a slightly onomatopoeic spin on that last word. The list continued a while longer, though there are a few more."

me mis-

he droned, putting a contemptuous air on his face. It didn't seem to be a verb at the end. But the technique works: in the other chair, Torin Douglas, BBC Media Correspondent, had the look of a school-leaver at his first job interview. He was armed with statistics but seemed too irritated to use them effectively, like a man suffering from a demographic breakdown. Miss Hunniford left one set of chairs and crossed to another, to talk to Sunnie Manley, whose 76-year-old husband was kidnapped in

Beirut a year ago. On radio, Gloria seems neither very sensitive to her guests nor to the medium which produced a fascinating interview. I still don't know if Jack's dead or alive," said Mrs. Mann of intensive shelling, during which they slept together in the corridor because of the glass flying in through the windows. Recently, someone attempted to seize her in the street, and, although she escaped, the dog was taken. "If you're probably the bravest woman I've ever met," said Gloria, a sentiment more sophisticated presenters wouldn't dare use but which seemed here a sober and apt conclusion.

The chat show format can seem grossly voyeuristic when it strays off the plug circuit, I but, thanks in part to its presenter, this one idiomatic, but here she displayed a tactful pressure of personal testimony to life in Beirut was both moving and illuminating. Its impact returned later during Inside Story (BBC1) if any.

Mann. Every time I walk around the streets I think, George Case's film of township violence keeps me thinking if he's beneath me in an underground room! The last of a once numerous British community, she has lived in Beirut since the Forties: "Our home is there, our animals are there. And England is elsewhere." She held back her tears until 1983; she spoke before in Natal had even more horrifyingly including one woman's account of how her six-year old son had been murdered only two months after her brother had been decapitated. Yet alone had the quiet, forceful immediacy of Mrs Mann live with a hushed audience and the sheer indiscriminate quantity of stories, in her dog, her only companion for three months.

J
4;
19

began, as in spaghetti westerns, to produce diminishing returns, to numb the senses, which cannot surely have been the intention. This was partly because, for these subjects, a documentary is bound to seem more distant than a live studio presence, but also because those moments which add to the emotional intensity when they arise spontaneously seem cheap and intrusive when left in an edited film: a grieving mother breaking into tears, for example. Other scenes also hinted worryingly that Case might have been casting light on a murky issue. The camera caught one youth emptying a bucket through somebody's house, and then cut to show the contents from the other side, coming through the window. The scene was obviously set up by the filmmakers, but the question is why? What did it add to the argument? The obvious answer is that the programme didn't have an argument. I never thought I'd miss John Pilger's overwrought TV essays, but at least they had a narrative thrust. In Inside I'd be more interested in a good . . . , vote, in a unitary state"

Thursday 10 May 1990 Q
)

Story, like so many presenter-less actuality documentaries, the director had found plenty of evidence, but seemed to think that was enough. This was a static programme which never de-

veloped beyond its opening statement: that Inkatha and the ANC were battling for control of the Zulus, and that the South African Police, by turning a blind eye to Inkatha murders, were practising a policy of divide and conquer. In an intriguing variation of apartheid, intentional or not, it was left to well-meaning whites - a lawyer, a priest, a Democratic Party spokesman - to try and place these personal tragedies in a wider context. The township blacks, mostly inarticulate, were seen either as (5 a) J. S. M. witnesses of black-on-black killings or as chanting extras, which wasn't much more reassuring. The witch doctor led them through rituals which would make them immune to bullets, a protection one warlord already enjoyed because he had cut out parts of his victims' corpses and made them into a magic potion. This means that, even if he's shot, the bullet can't penetrate his body," explained one mother. Any attack on him will fail." The cry sung recently at Wembley - "one man, one voice" - seems an increasingly unlikely panacea for South Africa's ills, and the gulf between Mr Mandela and the hooded man wearing his image on a T-shirt wider than ever.