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Serving the Same Interests: The Wood Green Ricin Plot, Media-State-Terror Relations and the “Terrorism” *Dispositif*

This article analyses the representations of terrorism that arise out of the BBC’s coverage of the Wood Green ricin plot (2003), the first instance of al-Qaeda-related activity in the United Kingdom during the “war on terror”. Inspired by the work Michel Foucault, the article suggests that the BBC’s representations form part of an emergent “terrorism” *dispositif*, or apparatus, which draws together seemingly disparate and antagonistic groups into a strategic, mutually-sustaining alliance. The analysis focuses on two weeks’ worth of BBC “News at Ten” bulletins, alongside speeches and press releases issued by the Prime Minister and statements released by al-Qaeda’s leadership. In particular, the article suggests that the BBC’s representations inadvertently work to the advantage of elements within al-Qaeda and the British executive due to the fact that they portray the Wood Green events in ways that are tactically useful to both groups. As such, the article not only provides substantive new empirical insights into the way representations of terrorism were mobilised in the build up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but also shows how Foucauldian concepts can provide creative and innovative analytical tools for understanding the dynamics of the contemporary media-state-terrorism relationship.

Key words: *Al-Qaeda, BBC News at Ten, Chilcot Report, dispositif, media-state-terror relationship, Wood Green ricin plot*

There is a long history of politicians turning terrorism to their advantage. Such rhetorical dimension, whereby the public’s interpretation of potential threats can be manipulated, becomes even more critical in a situation in which the activities of the terrorists, as well as those of the counter-terrorists, are shrouded in classified secrecy. This can lead to the not uncommon situation in which the alleged enemies feed rhetorically into one another’s interests, as each side perceives political advantage in the very existence of the other (Zulaika & Douglass 2008: 29).

the point is, rather, that the two sides are not really opposed... they belong to the same field (Žižek 2002: 50-51).

At around 6am on the morning of January 5th 2003, British police and anti-terror officials raided a suspected makeshift chemicals weapons factory in Wood Green, North London. They found, what was initially thought to be, small traces of the biological agent ricin, alongside over £4000 in cash and a series of recipes for the production of several other deadly toxins, such as solanine, cyanide, nicotine poison and botulinum (See Lawrence & Archer 2010). Within days the authorities quickly declared the find to be evidence of an extensive “al-Qaeda” plot that had direct links to its core leadership in Afghanistan, with the Prime Minister, in particular, drawing further links between raids and the broader threat posed by rogue states and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

Indeed, these connections were explicitly highlighted within the BBC's coverage of these incidents (a claim echoed throughout Britain's leading tabloid and broadsheet newspapers the following day),¹ and were also later cited by U.S. Secretary of State as evidence of a "sinister nexus" between Saddam Hussain's Baath Party and al-Qaeda in his February 5th 2003 speech to the United Nations Security Council (Powell 2003).

Despite the significance of the Wood Green plot to development and expansion of Britain and America's "war on terror", however, these events have received little in the way of detailed academic scrutiny (See Miller 2006; Matthews 2015, for cursory analysis). The scholarly and historical silences towards these incidents are even more remarkable given the conclusions of the recent Iraq Inquiry, and in particular Lord Chilcot's criticism (2016) of the connections made between Iraq, WMD, and al-Qaeda by the Blair government during the same time period. The report explicitly highlights the shared assessment of Britain's intelligence community that "there was no credible evidence of covert WMD-related technology and expertise to [international] terrorist groups" prior to the 2003 invasion, and, more to the point, that there was "no evidence of current cooperation between Iraq and Al Qaida" (Ibid: 43). In fact, Chilcot goes on to emphasise that "Blair had been advised that an invasion of Iraq was expected to *increase* the threat to the UK and UK interests from Al Qaida and its affiliates" (Ibid: 47, emphasis added), with Britain's actions, instead, providing the group with the "space in which to operate" and the "unsecured borders across which its members might move" (Ibid: 110).

With this in mind, the following analysis provides vital, and much-needed, empirical insight into the way these events were presented to British citizens, and, more specifically, the way representations of terrorism were mobilised for political purposes in the build up to the invasion of Iraq. Due to the BBC's highly influential status within Britain's media landscape (See Born 2005; Flood et al 2012; Mills 2016), not to mention the fact that it was the first news institution to explicitly highlight the connection between the Wood Green arrests, al-Qaeda, WMD and Iraq,

the article focuses on this institution and seeks to analyse the way it sought to represent the terror threat its “News at Ten” programme, the U. K.’s most popular and trusted bulletin during the period analysed (Hargreaves & Thomas 2002: 5).

Inspired by the work of Michel Foucault (See 1978; 1980; 2007), the article views the BBC’s representations as a series of cultural performances that help to support and sustain a wider *dispositif* – a strategically orientated social ensemble that encompasses a broad range of discursive and non-discursive elements – that emerges in response to an urgent need. Though Foucault was careful to point out that such an ensemble is beyond the control of any one group or set of institutions, the analysis shows how the strategic orientation of the *dispositif* during this event helps to produce representations that work, albeit inadvertently, to the advantage of elements within the British executive and the broader al-Qaeda movement, portraying the terror threat in ways are tactically useful to both groups. Thus, for the various individuals, groups and movements that comprise “al-Qaeda”, these representations provide this fragmented entity not only with a cohesive form and structure, but also with a powerful propaganda image that is disproportionate to its true size and effectiveness (after Hellmich 2011: 29). Similarly, for the “small coterie” of politicians and special advisors that were close to the Prime Minister during this period, the BBC’s representations engender a vision of the enemy that serves to legitimise the far-reaching foreign policy aims that emerged during the early years of the “war on terror” (after Kettell 2013: 266). This is in no way to suggest that the BBC was complicit with policymakers within the Blair cabinet or figures within the al-Qaeda movement, but rather that the focus on this institution helps to shed light on the way the news media, of which the Corporation is *primus inter pares* in the U.K., form part of a complex nexus of strategic power-knowledge relations that, at times, works to the advantage of such groups.

Given the fact that these events took place nearly 15 years ago, the article begins with a brief historical overview to the Wood Green events and the broader context of the coming invasion of Iraq. Following this, the discussion moves on to introduce the concept of the *dispositif*

(explaining what it is, what it consists of, and how it helps us to understand the way mediated representations form a crucial point of convergence between a heterogeneous assemblage of discursive and non-discursive elements), before outlining the methodological framework used in the analysis; namely Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995). The article then analyses two weeks' worth of BBC "News at Ten" bulletins aired in the immediate aftermath of these incidents up until reporting restrictions were imposed by the Blair government (January 7th – 20th 2003). The analysis begins with a description of how the terror threat was first constructed within the BBC's reporting, and then goes on to show how such portrayals fed into the strategic interests of the two groups identified above. The article ends with a consideration of the way the concept of the *dispositif* can help us better understand recent coverage of the Syria conflict and its representations of the Islamic State phenomenon.

The Wood Green ricin "plot", WMD and the coming invasion of Iraq

The events in Wood Green, London had complex origins that transcended the narrow historical timeframe of the "war on terror". The brutal, ten-year long civil war in Algeria, and the "state of emergency" imposed by the Bouteflika regime, created the conditions in which hundreds of Algerian dissidents sought asylum in the United Kingdom. Many new arrivals settled in the area around Blackstock Road and Finsbury Park, which quickly became known as "little Algiers" by Londoners (Collyer 2003). During this period, relations between the British security services and exiled members of various Algerian dissident groups were close, leading to the establishment of an unofficial "covenant of security" (See Curtis 2010: 256-267; Pantucci 2015: 148-151), which created the initial conditions of possibility for the "terrorism" *dispositif* that forms the theoretical basis of this article. From this secure UK base, groups such as the Islamic Salvation Front and the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria would recruit, organise, and finance operations in Algeria, something that earned the capital the sobriquet "Londonistan" within security circles during the late 1990s. While the primary focus of these groups was on unseating the Bouteflika regime in Algiers, some of those involved had trained in al-Qaeda-linked camps in Afghanistan during the

early 1990s, and had thus began to explore ways of targeting “far enemy” regimes in France and beyond (Gerges 2005).

Much of this changed, however, in the post-September 11th 2001 security environment, where an increased sense of urgency brought about greater levels of cooperation between the British security services and overseas intelligence agencies. In particular, the Algerian government received massive levels of military and financial support and intelligence from the United Kingdom and other western states (Keenan 2006). One of the more significant outcomes of this new spirit of cooperation was the arrest of a 35 year-old Algerian named Mohammed Meguerba on December 16th 2002. Under harsh interrogation methods, Meguerba revealed how he had received extensive chemicals and explosives training at a training camp in Afghanistan and how he had passed on these skills to an al-Qaeda cell based in London (Archer & Bawdon 2010: 94). This information led to the arrests of a number of Algerian asylum seekers in the Wood Green area of North London on January 5th 2003. As noted, the raids revealed significant amounts of cash and recipes for the production of several crude, but deadly, poisons. Further examination of the flat revealed natural ingredients which could be used to produce some of the poisons detailed in the recipes; these included small piles of cherry stones, apple pips, and castor beans (Ibid: 118-119). Although toxicologists carrying out tests initially urged caution, the story was leaked by an anonymous source on January 7th 2003, where it was covered extensively by the BBC and ITN, and then by the print media the following day. Due to the level of media interest generated by the find, the Cabinet Office sought to issue precautionary information about the dangers posed by ricin through the newly established Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS), via its News Coordination Centre (NCC) (See Miller 2004: 85-88). Ironically, the news coverage devoted to the raids alerted the alleged mastermind behind the plot, a 28 year-old Algerian asylum seeker called Kamel Bourgass, to the fact that the security services were apprehending him. By chance the police later stumbled upon Bourgass during an unrelated immigration arrest in Crumpsall, Greater Manchester. When he realised that he had been identified he lashed out at those guarding him,

stabbing three police officers and killing Stephen Oake, a Manchester-based Detective-Constable. As a result of this event, reporting restrictions were imposed from January 16th 2003 until the end of the trial in 2005, something that shrouded the poisons plot in an additional layer of secrecy.

As these events were taking place, however, senior figures within the Bush and Blair regimes were finalising their case for the invasion of Iraq. While very much a U.S.-led intervention, the preparation for war was dependent upon the support offered by Britain and its allies (Doig et al 2007: 25). The release of dossiers on Iraq's WMD capability by the Blair government, on September 24th 2002 and February 3rd 2003, further sought to highlight the connections between Saddam Hussain, international terrorism and WMD (See Herring & Robinson 2014a and 2014b; Robinson 2017). These documents were accompanied by a government-sanctioned propaganda campaign to prepare media and public opinion for war and promote information about Iraq's "WMD reconstitution and other crimes", most significant of which were its connections to international terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda, to British newspapers and broadcasters (Robinson 2017: 52). Capitalising on these reports, on February 5th 2003, Colin Powell explicitly cited the supposed discovery of ricin in Wood Green as further evidence of a connection between al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussain's Baath party, a claim supported and endorsed by Foreign Secretary Jack Straw hours after. Incidentally, as the first bombs fell on Baghdad on March 20th 2003, British politicians were formally informed that no actual ricin had been discovered at the Wood Green flat; a fact that would not be made public until the April 2005 trial (Archer & Bawdon 2010: 79).

The media-state-terror relationship and emergence of the contemporary 'terrorism' *dispositif*

Despite the scholarly and historical silence surrounding these events, the Wood Green plot provides a fitting case through which to reconsider the broader power relations that underpin the bond between the media, state actors and terrorist groups, and, in particular, the way representations of terrorism are mobilised for political purposes during moments of crisis and uncertainty. While this relationship has been the subject of an extensive level of academic scrutiny

(See Schlesinger et al 1983; Herman & O’Sullivan 1989; Alai & Eke 1991; Paletz & Schmid 1992; Norris et al 2003; Jackson 2005; Nacos 2007; Hoskins & O’Loughlin 2007; Papacharissi & Oliveira 2008; Reece & Lewis 2009; Freedman & Thussu 2012), much of debate has tended to centre upon the extent to which news media coverage of terrorist events *either* works in favour of governments or terrorists (See Norris et al 2003: 3).

Drawing on the theoretical insight of French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, and in particular his conceptualisation of the *dispositif* (1980), this article would like to pursue a different approach to the analysis of the media-state-terror relationship; one that, importantly, avoids the inherent dualism of much of the existing literature and provides greater theoretical insight into the symbiotic, transactional affiliation noted in previous studies (See Wilkinson 1997; Leibes & Kampf 2004; Hoffman 2006), and, instead, lays bare the complex interactions and mutually-sustaining power relations that support such coverage. This is not meant to substitute existing conceptual models, but rather to provide an alternative, and in some way complimentary, approach that takes into consideration the complexities of news media representations of terrorism, and the effects or unintended consequences of such portrayals.

Though he never advanced a complete definition of the term, Foucault viewed the *dispositif* as a method for analysing relations of power that explicitly avoided simplistic, hierarchies of control and dominance; viewing them instead as a series of interactions between a complex range of individuals, ideologies and institutions. Distancing it from his earlier analyses and archaeologies of “discourse” (1974), Foucault characterised the *dispositif* as a large-scale, social ensemble that encompasses an extraordinarily diverse range of phenomena (1980). His careful separation of *dispositif* from that of an “apparatus”, in which the latter is used to describe state-specific mechanisms of power, enables us to recognise the complex ways in which power functions to shape knowledge in society (Bussolini 2010: 94). In his most comprehensive conceptualisation of the term, he describes the *dispositif* as

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions – in short the said as much as the unsaid (Foucault 1980: 194).

More specifically, for Foucault the *dispositif* is not so much the individual elements listed above, but can be viewed as the “system of relations” that is established between such elements; linking together a broad range of discursive and non-discursive phenomena into a seemingly singular, totalising configuration. While this “system” is beyond the control of any single group or individual, due to the fact that their very identities and modes of subjectivity are engendered within the discursive structures of such a *dispositif*, they, nevertheless, emerge at a specific historical moments in order to fulfil an important political or social purpose. As Foucault points out, the *dispositif* has a “dominant strategic function” in that it responds to an “urgent need” at a given time (Ibid: 195). This sense of immediacy brings together a variety of, often fragile and conflicting, elements which work together in order to address the problem at hand.

By way of an example, in the past 15 years we have witnessed the emergence of what can be described as a global “terrorism” *dispositif*; a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of agents, conflicts, politico-ideological encounters and semiotic resources. While some have identified elements of this “terrorism” *dispositif* in the social and political turmoil of 1930s Europe (Ditrych 2013), its most recent manifestation can be understood as responding to the urgent need of the September 11th 2001 attacks and the subsequent wars, interventions, and counterterrorism practices that have arisen in response to that event (See Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2009; Hodges 2011). As Claudia Aradau and Rens Van Munster have shown, this “war” has engendered new ways of seeing, speaking and thinking about the phenomenon of terrorism, whereby “terrorism” takes on a simultaneously *catastrophic* and *uncertain* dimension (2007). This representation of terror is characterised by an ontological and epistemological uncertainty in regard to who, what, and where

“terrorism” can be located, thus, giving rise to new modes of governance and techniques for managing populations, and renewed rationalities and technologies for countering such threats.

As such, the *dispositif* draws together a whole series of discourses and discursive formations (such as the concept of “Orientalism”, “Islamophobia” or the notion of “Islamic terrorism”), discursive practices (like “pre-emptive assassination”, “extraordinary rendition” and “biometric surveillance”), alongside social and cultural institutions (including elements within the media, the government and the security and intelligence services), architectural forms and structures (such as the airport, the terrorist training camp, or the detention centre), as well as a number of philosophical propositions and forms of knowledge and power (sustained by academic disciplines such as Area Studies, Terrorism and Security Studies, Politics, International Relations and Contemporary History). These heterogeneous elements are brought together and aligned in formation with the principle purpose of governing the threat posed by “terrorism”, and, in doing so, engender new forms of knowledge, power, identity and subjectivity.

Crucially, however, while Foucault sought to emphasise that the *dispositif* is beyond the control of any single group or individual (1980: 195), this is not to say its strategic orientation does not benefit certain groups engaged in the “war on terror”. Indeed, although *dispositifs* are characterised by “an inherent mobility and instability” (Aradau et al 2015: 65), as Jeffrey Bussolini observes, the fact that Foucault refers to such formations as being “a rational and concerted intervention indicates that it is something more than just a chaotic turbulence of forces” (2010: 92). Thus, contrary to much of the overtly poststructuralist scholarship drawing upon his work (See Hülse & Spencer 2008, for example), it is important to remember that Foucault always sought to maintain the underlying assumption that social subjects possess a minimal level of agency and intentionality, and that they can appropriate a limited range of ways of seeing and speaking about the world in order to further their own apparent self-interest (See Bevir 1999; Caldwell 2007; Bakir 2013). His discussion of the “formation of strategies”, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1974) further

enabled him to show how certain individuals and groups are able to invest discourse with meaning and appropriate them for their own ends. As he explains,

in our societies (and no doubt in many others) the property of discourse – in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions or practices – is in fact confined (sometimes with the addition of legal sanctions) to a particular group of individuals (Ibid: 75).

In this regard, the *dispositif* can be viewed, to borrow the terminology employed by William E. Connolly (2005), as a kind of “resonance machine”, in which different phenomena come together in “emergent and resonant, rather than efficient, relationships” (Bialasiewicz et al 2006: 408). Such a relationship can be seen to produce common goals and interests that, while sometimes divergent, often orientate themselves towards a common purpose as a result of shared “*affinities*” or “*sensibilities*” (Connolly 2005: 871). As Connolly explains, within this machine

diverse elements *infiltrate* into others, metabolizing into a moving complex – causation as a resonance between elements that become fused together to a considerable degree. Here causality, as relations of dependence between separate factors, morphs into energized complexities of mutual imbrication and interinvolvement, in which heretofore unconnected or loosely associated elements *fold, blend, emulsify, and dissolve into each other*, forging a qualitative assemblage resistant to classical models of explanation (Ibid: 870).

Here, the individual ideological, doctrinal, economic, political or religious differences of each group or element are suppressed, as the machine, or in our case the *dispositif*, gives rise to new configurations of power relations that have uncertain consequences for those involved.

As the analysis outlined below seeks to demonstrate, of all those involved in the Wood Green incidents, two groups in particular stand to gain from the emergence of such a *dispositif*; these are the various individuals, groups and organisations that comprise the al-Qaeda movement, and the small number of influential politicians that formed the head of the Blair government. In identifying these two groups, the point here is not to suggest that the BBC is in some way deferential or subservient to their interests, thus imposing a second-order judgement on its coverage, but rather to show how the *dispositif* produces representations that have, in the words of

Nikolas Rose, “unpalatable functions” and unintended consequences (1984: 116). Indeed, though it certainly problematic to regard these two disparate groupings as being fixed in form, identity and strategic outlook, there is sufficient reason to view them as having a shared set of objectives during the period analysed.

For example, despite its fragmented structure, for “al-Qaeda”, statements released by prominent figures within the broader jihadi movement during this event reveal a common set of aims and objectives that were to be implemented at both a global and local level (See Kepel & Milleli 2008; Lia 2009; Schmid 2014). One of the most salient of these was the desire to overwhelm adversaries by drawing them into a series of wars of attrition (Byman 2015: 51). Such a strategy was explicitly outlined around the time of the Wood Green event by the influential Jihadist thinker Abu Musab al-Suri, who suggested that the best way to defeat the enemy was to use multiple, loosely-connected cells and operatives to launch attacks on Western targets so as to encourage an overreaction (See Sageman 2008; Lia 2009; Byman 2015). As bin Laden himself made clear,

all we have to do is send two mujahedin to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses (2004).

Central to this strategy, moreover, was the news media as a key site through which this asymmetrical struggle was to take place. Here, media coverage of any “al-Qaeda”-related activity would provide a potent weapon for promoting political grievances and relaying the threat to a wider audience. In adopting this multifaceted approach, therefore, the various individuals and groups who self-identified as “al-Qaeda”, and those who aligned with its worldview, were able to maintain a level of influence over the security agenda of Western states, and, perhaps more crucially, capitalise on the levels of fear and uncertainty that surrounded various plots and acts of terror carried out in its name.

On a similar level, though we should express equal caution in regard to the notion of a singular “British executive”, several studies have highlighted the fact that throughout the “war on

terror” UK counterterrorism policy has corresponded to the interests of a small number of influential politicians surrounding the Prime Minister (See Curtis 2010; Kettell 2010 & 2013; Edmunds et al 2014; Robinson & Herring 2014a). As Steven Kettell points out, following successive electoral losses during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the underlying structure of the Labour party became increasingly centralised, elitist and hierarchical in nature, something that, moreover, enabled foreign and domestic counterterrorism policy during the “war on terror’s” early years to be shaped by a small number of influential figures (2010: 50-51). One of the key interests motivating this group was to highlight the links between a range of disparate and distant threats, and then draw these together into a singular and unifying narrative so as to justify a narrow set of policy objectives. As Tony Blair himself acknowledged in the aftermath of the Wood Green arrests,

I think it is important that we do everything we can to try and show people the link between the issue of weapons of mass destruction and these international terrorist groups, mainly linked to al-Qaeda, who will do literally anything they possibly can in order to destroy and disrupt the lives of ordinary people.²

Most significant of these objectives at the time was the legitimisation of the coming Iraq invasion. In the face of massive legal and public opposition to this war, key figures within the Blair government sought to develop a sophisticated media and public relations campaign through which to warn of the dangers posed by a convergence between Saddam Hussain, international terrorism and WMD, and thus “prepare public opinion” for war (Kettell 2010: 58-59). As Alastair Campbell, Director of Communications for number 10, advised in the weeks leading up to the invasion, the U.K. needed “to make more of the issue of WMD more generally, and make the link (largely unbelieved here or in the US) with terrorism” (Chilcot Report – Section 3.6, 2016: 67).

To say that these two groups share the same set of political interests, despite being engaged in open “war” with one another, is, however, a particularly contentious claim, and is one that would be immediately rejected by both parties. And yet, in responding to the “*urgent need*” of the Wood

Green plot, the very nature of the *dispositif* engenders such a tangled and internally contradictory relationship, because each element enters into “resonance or contradiction” with one another producing effects and outcomes that are beyond the control of any single actor (1980: 195). Thus, despite being in a state of prolonged conflict, the emergence of a post-September 11th 2001 “terrorism” *dispositif* has brought al-Qaeda and elements within the British government into a strange, mutually-sustaining relationship that has advantages and unintended outcomes for both parties. In fact, what the analysis outlined below seeks to demonstrate is that politicians, political parties, terrorist groups, journalists, and news editors all take part in a variety of relationships, “sometimes conciliatory, often hostile, but ultimately are all part of one apparatus” (Basu 2014: 93).

Research design

Importantly, while much of the existing literature on the concept of the *dispositif* tends to focus analysis on macro-level social ensembles, such as the use of biometric technologies to manage and protect populations from crime, terrorism and illegal immigration (See Amoore 2006; Aradau and van Munster 2007; Bigo & Tsoukala 2008), this article provides a contribution to this body of scholarship by suggesting that it is within the news media that *dispositifs* are at their most visible. The reason for this is because mediated representations form a crucial point of convergence between a broad range of discourses, discursive formations, social and cultural institutions, and forms of knowledge and power. Here, the “system of relations” that sustains a *dispositif* can be witnessed directly, as each of its heterogeneous elements are brought together into an often volatile working relation. These elements come together as a shifting configuration of words, images and sounds, title-screens, headlines, straplines, studio settings, interview segments and live feeds, which communicate information to a seemingly singular, yet socially and politically fragmented, audience.

In order to interrogate these aspects of the *dispositif*, and, more importantly, the representations that emerge within it, the analysis outlined below draws upon the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (See Fairclough 1995; Jørgensen & Phillips 2002;

Wodak & Mayer 2009). CDA is principally concerned with the way media representations function as a sources and sites for the production and reproduction of knowledge and power. More specifically, CDA seeks to focus analytical attention on the *textual*, *intertextual* and *contextual* dimensions of media coverage (Fairclough 1995). As Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips assert, this approach “is based on the principle that texts can never be understood or analysed in isolation – they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts/discourses and in relation to the social context” in which they are created (2002: 70).

Though in some ways ill-suited to Foucault’s sceptical view of the notion of “methodology”, techniques which he considered to be, themselves, *discourses* that predetermined arguments in the name of power and knowledge, CDA can help us shed light on the historical conditions of possibility through which terrorist phenomena such as “al-Qaeda” are made meaningful. Perhaps more than this, however, in focusing the analysis primarily upon the discursive aspects of the *dispositif*, such as news media representations, the material and non-discursive features of such an ensemble are given less attention in a CDA. This is not to say they are completely overlooked, but given the sheer size and scale of any one *dispositif* no analysis can ever be considered comprehensive or complete. And, of course, we should also be clear that news media institutions such as the BBC, themselves, form only one part of such a complex and multifaceted social ensemble, thus the analysis outlined below cannot be verified or falsified in any rationalist or positivist sense. That said, in focusing on the representations and cultural performances that emerge within a particular institutional setting, CDA allows us to directly observe the various shifts and transformations, what Deleuze describes as the “curves of visibility and... of enunciation” (1992: 160), that help to support and sustain wider social and political structures.

For the analysis, two weeks of “News at Ten” bulletins were sourced through archives housed at universities in Cardiff and Glasgow (January 7th – 20th 2003). These broadcasts totalled

just over 7 hours of news coverage; of which 1 hour and 18 minutes of continual reporting were dedicated to events in Wood Green and Crumpsall. The central question driving the research was “How is the terror threat represented during the events in Wood Green, and in what way do these portrayals reinforce the strategic objectives of those fighting the ‘war on terror?’” Given the complex, multimodal nature of these television broadcasts, the case study approach can be understood to be the most appropriate method as it facilitates an intensive study of the various shifts and transformations that take place within a single unit (Gerring 2004). As Robert K. Yin points out, case studies are often the best method to adopt when the boundaries are blurred between the unit under analysis and the context in which such phenomena appear (2009: 18). Here, the representation of the terror threat is inseparable from, and often determined by, the nature of the event being reported on.

The first stage of the analysis involved making detailed visual, verbal and aural transcripts of each “News at Ten” bulletin. These transcripts were then placed alongside one another in chronological sequence, something that enabled close textual analysis of not only the main words, images and sounds used to portray the terror threat (after Howard & Davies 1983), but also the interactions that took place between these visual, verbal and sonic elements (Mitchell 1996). This strategy facilitated analysis of the kinds of deep, subtextual and symbolic meanings that inform and underpin news media representations and showed how certain modes of representation are often privileged at the expense of others (after Hutchings & Miazhevich 2009: 222).

Nevertheless, while the main focus was on the close examination of BBC representations of the terror threat, in order to make sense of the findings and place them in context, a secondary research strategy was employed to examine speeches, statements, press conferences and broadcast material issued by the British Prime Minister and al-Qaeda’s leadership during the overall timeframe covered in the analysis. In the case of the Prime Minister, this involved looking at speeches, press statements and policy documents that were issued in the period around the Wood

Green events (January – February 2003). These documents were readily available through government websites and online archives such as Hansard, Gov.uk and No10.gov.uk, where full transcripts of speeches by the Prime Minister are archived for the public record.

In order to shed light on the strategic goals and objectives of al-Qaeda, moreover, propaganda statements and videos released by key figures within the movement were consulted. For obvious reasons, the frequency in which these documents were released by al-Qaeda's leadership meant that a much longer timeframe had to be considered; with statements and propaganda releases covering the October 2002 – February 2003 period. Given the difficulties in establishing the source and authenticity of al-Qaeda's online output, material was taken from a number of scholarly translations, edited collections and single-authored texts on al-Qaeda's worldview (See Lawrence 2005; Ibrahim 2007; Kepel & Milelli 2008; Lia 2009). As Gadi Wolfsfeld points out, however, “[a]ttempting to interpret systematically other people's interpretations is a risky way to make a living” (1997: 7), and, in making the arguments outlined below, there is always the possibility that the modes of representation identified in the analysis are subject to interpretive bias of the researcher. Nevertheless, in drawing on multiple sites of representation, and indeed adhering to the sound methodological guidelines outlined in previous analyses of media texts, it is hoped that clarity and consistency of enquiry can be achieved across the data.

January 7th – 20th 2003: Constructing an Elusive Threat

Described at the time as the first instance of “al-Qaeda”-related activity in the United Kingdom (See Archer & Bawdon 2010: 78), the Wood Green events constitute, in Foucauldian terms, a “strategic moment” (Foucault 1980: 195); one that not only elevated the terror threat to existential levels, but also produced an alignment of relations between broad range of discursive and non-discursive elements. The emergence of this *dispositif* is significant in that it serves to engender a particular way of seeing and speaking about “terrorism”. As Gilles Deleuze asserts, the *dispositif*

“has its way of structuring light, the way in which it falls, blurs and disperses, distributing the visible and invisible, giving birth to objects which are dependent on it for their existence” (1992: 160).

In particular, this can be first seen in the levels of uncertainty surrounding the Wood Green events, and the way the plot is portrayed as the work of an elusive, almost shapeless threat spread out across the United Kingdom and beyond. For instance, it is suggested that there may be “other people out there trying to do the same thing”,³ that “bigger quantities could be in the hands of terrorists who are still at large in the country”,⁴ that “police are still searching for at least two members of the group”,⁵ and that there may be “a much wider network” at large with links to Europe, North Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶ The slippage by the BBC’s journalists between the terms “al-Qaeda” (n = 11), at its peak during the first two days of reporting, and the broader, more diffuse “network” metaphor (n = 11) is further significant in this regard. While most likely the result of the uncertainty surrounding these events, the appearance of such labels enables the terror threat to become increasingly fluid in nature, thus facilitating connections to a broader range of phenomena. Here, the inherent dynamism and flexibility embedded within the “network” metaphor ensures that the boundaries surrounding the Wood Green incidents are dangerously extended (after Stohl & Stohl 2007: 95), thus further emphasising the levels of uncertainty and elusiveness underpinning the coverage; a notion powerfully underscored by Frank Gardner’s blunt admonition that Britain’s intelligence agencies themselves “simply don’t know how big the network is”.⁷

As if to further confirm this notion, the BBC’s reporting also features a series of references to the secretive, cell-like nature of the plot, with terms such as “cells”,⁸ “sleeper cells”⁹ and “terrorist cells”,¹⁰ working to advance the belief that unknown number of terrorists hiding across the United Kingdom. The metaphor of the “sleeper cell”, a direct legacy of the U.S. anti-Communist “witch-trials” of the 1950s and 1960s when it was believed that unknown numbers of highly-trained Communist spies were living in secret and masquerading as loyal American citizens,

here works to further the notion that terrorist operatives are at loose across the United Kingdom, waiting for orders from bin Laden and his lieutenants (Lustick 2006: 38). Indeed, the additional belief that the Wood Green events constitute a sinister, and “spreading”, “web”-like plot also draws upon the same discursive repository, with the boundaries surrounding the terror threat becoming increasingly vague and unclear as the coverage develops.¹¹

Interestingly, however, despite the presence of Cold War-era language and symbolism, it is clear that the portrayal of the terror threat is firmly embedded within the discursive structures of the “war on terror” and the broader *dispositif*. This can be seen, for example, in the repeated references to the September 11th 2001 attacks and the narrow historical timeline of the “war on terror”. Appearing a total of eight times across the period analysed, references to the September 11th 2001 attacks shift between the popularised and shortened versions of “September 11th”¹² or “9/11”,¹³ to the “post September 11 fight against terrorism”,¹⁴ “the new post-9/11 threat”,¹⁵ or, on a number of occasions, simply “post-September 11”.¹⁶ Home Affairs Correspondent Margaret Gilmore is the first to highlight this connection, describing how the ricin plot reflected the way “just after September 11th in America someone was sending out letters with anthrax which created mass panic and mass fear”.¹⁷ Occurring little more than fifteen months after the devastating attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania, it is, perhaps, to be expected that the events in Wood Green and Manchester would be, for the most part, linked to recent developments in the “war on terror”. And yet, as Richard Jackson points out, the popular shortening of September 11th 2001 to “September 11” or, more commonly, “9/11” is a powerful discursive practice which serves to “erase the history and context of the events and turn their representation into a cultural-political icon” (2005: 7). Within this narrative framework, the historical factors that led many young Algerians to settle in the Wood Green and High Road area of North London, such as the brutal, ten-year long civil war or the role of the Algerian security services in radicalising large swathes of the population, are powerfully silenced and obscured.

The elusive nature of the terror plot is perhaps more subtly communicated through the near-total *lack* of images and visual representations within the BBC's coverage. With the exception of a short, three-second sequence of footage taken from an Armed Islamic Group of Algeria propaganda video, in which an unknown number of militants are seen climbing out of a military vehicle,¹⁸ at no point during the coverage do any images of the alleged plotters appear in the BBC's reporting. Though this lack of images is most likely a result of there being no images available to broadcast, in the absence of a corresponding image, terms such as "al-Qaeda" or the broader "network" metaphor become empty signifiers, and thus invite the BBC, and its audiences, to imagine what the terror threat is and what the plotters look like. Thus, rather than draw limitations around the power of the terror threat, its sheer *invisibility* becomes its most potent asset. As art historian W. J. T. Mitchell points out, when something is prevented from being shown or hidden away from view "its power as a concealed image outstrips anything it could have achieved by being shown" (2011: 63). This is not to say that the BBC deliberately prevents its audiences from having visual access to the terror threat, but more simply that the lack of visuals can be said to imbue its coverage with a considerable sense of uncertainty regarding who or what is behind the Wood Green events, thus encouraging further speculation about the scale and nature of the dangers posed to British citizens. Notably, this lack of images further contrasts with the immaterial, asomatous nature of ricin as a substance. So, for example, the BBC's Niall Dickson suggests that ricin "can be administered in food or water, sprayed as an aerosol, or injected directly into the victim", and chemical pathologist Alastair Hay furthers this assessment, highlighting the fact that ricin can be "breathed in" leading to "failure of the heart".¹⁹

Curiously, however, the BBC's coverage also features a series of Orientalist"-inspired references to the religious and ethnic identity of the plotters, something that helps to stabilise the terror threat and arrest some of the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding their identity. Thus, we see references to the fact that the group not only consisted of "Islamic extremists"²⁰ who have "adopted al-Qaeda's *anti-Western* doctrines",²¹ but also that those arrested were "Algerians",

“North Africans” or,²² more simply “outsiders”²³ and “asylum seekers... housed by the local council at public expense”,²⁴ and who “entered Britain on false passports”²⁵ and “fake documents”.²⁶ Notably, the connections between terrorism and Britain’s immigration and asylum system are further intensified with the arrest of Kamel Bourgass, the alleged “mastermind” behind the plot. Here, for instance, Peter Sissons suggests that “questions are now being asked about the failure of the asylum system to stop suspected terrorists” coming into the United Kingdom, and further speculates whether “terrorists are simply using the asylum system to get a foothold here”.²⁷ Similarly, Margaret Gilmore highlights the fact that “there’s likely to be much soul searching about asylum policies and whether these could be affecting some aspects of UK security”.²⁸ In focusing on such statements the point here is not to deny the religious, ethnic or legal status of those arrested, or, moreover, to accuse the BBC of stoking populist fears and anxieties surrounding Britain’s asylum policy. Rather, it is to show how the “terrorism” *dispositif* draws together a variety of elements into its singular and totalising configuration, thus helping to secure a particular image of the terror threat.

Discussion: Serving the Same Interests

As mentioned above, the strategic logic and orientation of the “terrorism” *dispositif* brings a range of previously unconnected phenomena into a resonant, yet internally contradictory, relationship; a process that produces unexpected and unintended political outcomes. In particular, the “system of relations” that sustains and underpins such an assemblage is particularly evident when we consider the range of social, cultural and political institutions from which the BBC constructs its narrative to events. Thus, appearing over the course of the two weeks of coverage we see statements and interviews with senior politicians and M.Ps (such as Tony Blair,²⁹ Jack Straw,³⁰ David Blunkett,³¹ Oliver Letwin,³² and Simon Hughes),³³ members of the police and security services (like Assistant Constable Alan Green³⁴ and Roy Ramm),³⁵ a host of terrorism and security “experts” (such as Magnus Ranstorp,³⁶ Reda Hessaine,³⁷ Richard Cobbold,³⁸, Nigel Churton³⁹ and Jean-Francois Daguzan),⁴⁰ chemical pathologists, toxicologists and health experts (like Alastair

Hay⁴¹ and Pat Troop),⁴² alongside several members of the public from the Wood Green and Crumpsall area.⁴³ These statements are also supplemented by repeated references by the BBC's journalists and correspondents to veiled "police", "security" and "intelligence" sources,⁴⁴ a trend highlighted in previous analyses of the role anonymous sources served in shaping news coverage of terrorism and anti-terror raids during this time (See Miller & Mills 2009; Matthews 2013).

While Foucault always sought to make clear that *dispositifs* are beyond the control of any single entity, of the various political groups and movements appearing within the BBC's coverage, two in particular stand to benefit from the representations described here; these are the various individuals, groups and organisations that comprise the al-Qaeda movement, and the small number of influential politicians that formed the head of the Blair government. This is not to say that the BBC directly colluded with such groups, but rather that the strategic orientation and focus of the *dispositif* helped to produce representations that functioned, albeit inadvertently, in their immediate interests. Here, to paraphrase Foucault, the various strategies deployed within the *dispositif*, that is, the "formation of strategies" that govern such an assemblage, are defined by a certain constant way of relating possibilities, of associated discourses (and other discourses exterior to them), and a whole non-discursive field of practices, appropriations, interests and desires (1974: 69).

At the most basic and politically expedient level, the BBC's representation of the Wood Green plot as the work of an elusive, invisible network of terrorist cells would have been strategically useful to the various individuals, groups and franchises that comprise "al-Qaeda" during this period. It should be noted that due to the United States' overtly military response to the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, al-Qaeda had suffered massive military and economic losses, most specifically the loss of its base and training camps in Afghanistan. As Fawas Gerges has pointed out,

[t]he period between September 11 until the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq was rich with possibilities and opportunities regarding the campaign against bin Laden's men. Lacking any public Muslim support and with very few safe shelters, the noose was

tightening around their necks. On the run and defensive, al-Qaeda faced a decidedly bleak future (2011: 105).

In this regard, the mere fact that the term⁹ “al-Qaeda”, and the broader, more diffuse “network” metaphor, is used within the BBC’s reporting would have been incredibly useful to not only the movement’s core leadership, but also those who sought to align themselves with bin Laden’s worldview, as it would have provided this disparate movement with a potent propaganda image that could be used to strike fear into the hearts and minds of its enemies. In particular, the levels of uncertainty underpinning the BBC’s reporting of would also have functioned powerfully in the strategic interests of this group because it would have encouraged even more alarm over the scale of the poisons plot and anxiety over who was responsible.

As noted above, a key strategy adopted by al-Qaeda’s central leadership during this period was to exhaust its enemies through a strategy of attrition. This meant, encouraging its various franchises and sympathisers to carry out random, uncoordinated attacks in order to create confusion over the actual size and capability of “al-Qaeda” and thus further its propaganda aims. While most statements released by al-Qaeda’s core leadership around the October 2002 – January 2003 period focus on the United States, several stress the importance of attacks against its allies. For example, in his “[t]o the Allies of the United States” speech bin Laden referred to “sporadic actions” carried out against Australian, French and British targets (cited in Ibrahim 2007: 231-232). His October 2002 statement “Israel, Oil and Iraq” further sought to highlight the fact that “[w]e have the right to retaliate at any time and place against all countries involved [in the up-coming Iraq invasion] – particularly England, Spain, Australia, Poland, Japan and Italy” (Ibid: 211). The aim of this strategy was to sow fear and confusion within the enemy populace in order to encourage an aggressive response. Indeed, in urging supporters to attack these nations, al-Qaeda’s leadership also emphasised the importance of adopting evasive, furtive and secretive methods. For example, in a statement issued around December 2002 bin Laden urged his followers to “resort to

dissimulation”, especially when carrying out acts of terror (cited in Kepel & Milelli 2008: 64, emphasis added). He also underscored the need for them to employ a range of techniques and “to use their intelligence in killing [the enemy] *secretly*” (cited in Intelcenter 2008: 26, emphasis added), using “*camouflaged* defensive positions in plains, farms, mountains, and cities” (cited in Ibrahim 2007: 246, emphasis added). These sentiments were further reinforced by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who underscored the importance of leaderless resistance, suggesting that “[y]oung Muslims need not wait for anyone’s permission, because jihad against the Americans, the Jews, and their allies, hypocrites and apostates, is now an individual duty” (cited in Kepel & Milelli 2008: 234). As such, in representing the Wood Green incidents as the work of an elusive, hidden network of individuals and loosely-connected terrorist cells the BBC’s coverage would have served to reinforce the levels of fear and uncertainty surrounding the al-Qaeda threat, and, thus, help to further bolster the group’s overall propaganda image.

At the same time, however, the *dispositif* produces an alignment in power-knowledge relations, bringing together previously unconnected and antagonistic groups and individuals into new, mutually-sustaining relations of resonance and symbiosis. In this regard, the portrayal of the Wood Green events as being the work of an elusive and secretive network of hidden cells and operatives would have been equally useful to the small number of influential politicians who formed the executive during this period, as it would have further legitimised claims made regarding the connections between the Wood Green events, al-Qaeda, Iraq and the issue of WMD. As noted above, while we should certainly express caution when viewing the British government in such narrow and monolithic terms, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the architecture of the parliamentary system enabled political decisions to be made by a small group of influential figures (Kettell 2010). Here, the vague, pliable boundaries surrounding the terror threat, and in particular the oscillation between the terms “al-Qaeda” and “network”, serve, albeit unwittingly, to facilitate connections between the Wood Green plotters and the broader threat posed by al-Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.

Notably, this connection is emphasised within the first few minutes of the January 7th 2003 broadcast by London correspondent Ben Brown, who points out that “[d]ocuments discovered in Afghanistan showed Osama bin Laden’s terror network had planned to produce ricin, and the Iraqis are said to have manufactured it in the past”.⁴⁵ Brown’s comments are further supported by a short clip of the prime minister speaking to the House of Commons, where he argues

[i]t is only a matter of time before terrorists get hold of it [weapons of mass destruction], and as the arrests that were made earlier today show, the danger is present and real and with us now, and its potential is huge.⁴⁶

Indeed, these connections were repeatedly emphasised by the prime minister in statements and press conferences throughout the January and February 2003 period,⁴⁷ where he made continual reference to the interlinked threat posed by Saddam Hussain, the terrorism of al-Qaeda, and WMD. In his most explicit, and persistent, example of such linking, Blair argues that

WMD is not the only threat we face and Iraq is not the only country posing a risk in respect of WMD. Over the past few weeks, we have seen powerful evidence of the continuing terrorist threat: the suspected ricin plot in London and Manchester; al-Qaeda experiments in Afghanistan to develop chemical, biological and radiological weapons; the arrests of those linked to al-Qaeda in Spain and France; and further arrests in Italy.... I repeat my warning: unless we take a decisive stand now, as an international community, it is only a matter of time before these threats come together; that means pursuing international terrorism across the world in all its forms; it means confronting nations defying the world over WMD.⁴⁸

Though the recently published Chilcot report does not pass comment on the role of the news media during this period, its authors do highlight the “flawed” nature of the intelligence upon which claims such as this were made (2016: 6). As the report makes clear, in the months prior to war intelligence assessments were used “to support Government statements in a way which conveyed certainty without acknowledging the limitations of the intelligence” (Volume 6, Section 7: 612). As noted above, the Blair government had actually been advised that any possible links between the two would “be heightened by military action against Iraq”, with the additional “risk that the transfer of CB [chemical and biological] material or expertise, during or in the aftermath of conflict, will enhance Al Qaida’s capabilities” (JIC Assessment, February 19th 2003). While it is clear the BBC has a duty to report these statements for its audiences, in highlighting the links

between such disparate phenomena journalists like Brown can be accused, intentionally or not, of uncritically endorsing the validity of Blair's claims.

The repeated references, as mentioned above, to the September 11th 2001 attacks and the narrow historical timeframe of the "war on terror" also stand to support this claim, as they help to construct an almost one-dimensional vision of the terror threat that has very little political or historical roots outside of such a context. Indeed, this construction ignores the role of the British security services, in particular MI5 and London's Anti-Terror Branch of the Metropolitan Police, and its conciliatory relationship with prominent members of dissident Algerian groups based in London throughout the 1990s. As noted above, though this is not to say that the BBC knowingly conspired with the prime minister in its representation of the terror threat, in blurring the boundaries between the Wood Green plot, al-Qaeda, Iraq and WMD the Corporation inadvertently helped to make these connections appear natural or inevitable.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the way in which the BBC represented the terror threat within its "News at Ten" bulletin during the alleged 2003 Wood Green ricin plot. In particular, it has shown how these representations unwittingly help to support and sustain a wider "terrorism" *dispositif* that has emerged in the years after the September 11th 2001 attacks. As a heterogeneous ensemble of associated discourses, institutions, identities and forms of knowledge and power, the *dispositif* is dependent upon the representations that support and underpin it. More crucially, these representations unwittingly work in the interests of elements within both al-Qaeda and the British executive, as they constitute a mutually-legitimising framework in which enables each to depend on the other for strength and sustenance. As emphasised, while the point here is not to accuse the BBC of being either passive or complicit in such a process, as one of the central mediums through which terrorists and governments seek to promote their own preferred representations, the broadcaster's "News at Ten" bulletins have actively participated in the process of visually and

verbally constructing the terror threat for British citizens, helping to constitute the very identity of phenomena such as al-Qaeda, and, as a consequence, furthered the propaganda aims of such groups.

Nevertheless, while this article has shown how the BBC's representations work in the interests of al-Qaeda and the British executive, it should be emphasised that the "terrorism" *dispositif* is not controlled by any one group, and that its strategic orientation produces outcomes that are unplanned, unforeseen and, ultimately, unintended by those who benefit from such an ensemble. As such, for the two groups identified here the BBC's representations only really serve their interests in the most basic and politically expedient sense. Thus, for al-Qaeda, despite significantly boosting its propaganda status, there is no discussion of the *political* aims and grievances that motivate its terrorism. Likewise, for the British executive these interest-driven representations also come at a significant social and political cost, as they can be said to have damaging consequences for the U.K's delicate social fabric throughout the "war on terror" period. As if to confirm such a view, studies measuring individual fears of terror attacks around the time of the Wood Green events show that citizens were acutely aware of the dangers posed by phenomena such as al-Qaeda, and, moreover, reported relatively high expectations of an imminent attack (Goodwin et al 2005).

Similarly, while much of the emphasis in this article has been on analysing discursive phenomena, such as the symbolic and representational manifestations of the *dispositif*, it is important to emphasise the fact that CDA is also powerfully suited for analysing the wider material forms and forces that constitute such a social ensemble (See Jäger & Maier 2009). Thus, in addition to the political interests explored here, news media representations are equally the product of market pressures which govern the way terrorism-related events are covered by the news media. For instance, in over-exaggerating the scale of terrorism-related incidents, and in foregrounding the possible links between a range of disparate threats and societal dangers, news media institutions can be accused of playing on citizens' looming fears of terrorism in order to secure larger audience

ratings and revenue, and thus stave of competition from other news providers.⁴⁹ Scholars have pointed out that during the period under analysis, for example, the U.K. news landscape underwent increased threats of centralisation, concentration and competition, in particular from new online news providers, something that had a marked impact on coverage of terrorism (See Bromley & Cussion 2011). In fact, despite its status as a publicly-funded institution, the BBC itself was not immune from such market-driven pressures as it deliberately sought to redirect significant amounts of resources into its new online and user-generated services around this time in order to maintain its influence in Britain's media landscape (See Belair-Gagnon 2015). The point here is that in focusing exclusively on the discursive manifestations of the *dispositif*, therefore, the analysis often neglects the wider role that material forces play in shaping representations of terror.

Limitations aside, however, it is hoped that this article can make a clear contribution to inherently dualistic debates concerning the relationship between the news media and political actors, showing how Foucauldian concepts can provide sophisticated analytical tools within the field of media-related enquiry. Indeed, in light of the massive levels of media and political attention currently devoted to the armed conflict in Syria and, more specifically, the Islamic State phenomenon, it is hoped that future studies might find this concept useful when seeking to map out the various networks of relation that underpin and fuel this near-7 year conflict. Here, the concept of the *dispositif* can help to shed light on the power relations and the broad, mutually-beneficial association that has emerged between movements such as the Islamic State, 24-hour global media organisations, such as Al Jazeera, BBC 24 and Fox News, the Assad, Putin and Trump regimes, and the legions of digital activists, useful idiots and "web-bots" who daily disseminate images, narratives and knowledge about the Syria conflict. While these individuals, groups, states and social movements each hold widely divergent ideological and political positions, each has a vested interest in representing this conflict to their core supporters. Thus, the (self)representation of Islamic State as an evil, conspiratorially-spreading threat to global stability not only works hand-in-hand with cynical, ratings-driven news media portrayals, but also serves to sustain a fragile, yet

politically advantageous and mutually-legitimising, relationship between many of the key belligerents within this conflict, whereby each state actor promotes an idealised image of Islamic State that helps to reinforce their own regimes of truth and claims to self-identity.

Within this shifting, ever-complex context, the imaginative scope of the *dispositif* concept is useful in that it enables us to locate and conceptualise disparate developments across the field of power-knowledge relations, thus helping us to connect circulations of representation between multiple actors, institutions and other sites of meaning. On a broader level, while not explored in detail here, this concept is particularly useful for exploring those moments of rupture and discontinuity that appear within news media representations of terrorism (See Ahmad 2018). This is because, as Deleuze points out, far from being fixed or static in nature, *dispositifs* are “continually aborting, but when restarting, in a modified way, until the former apparatus is broken” (1992: 164). Thus, in the words of Foucault, the aim of future research should be to focus on the way the *dispositif* produces relations of both “resonance and contradiction” (1980: 195).

Endnotes:

¹ See John Twomey, “UK Poison Gang on Loose”, *Daily Express* (January 8th 2003), p. 1; Nick Hopkins & Tania Branigan, “Poison Find Sparks Terror Alert”, *The Guardian* (January 8th 2003), p. 1; Jason Bennetto & Kim Sengupta, “Alarm Over Terror Suspects with Deadly Toxin”, *The Independent* (January 8th 2003), p. 1; Jeff Edwards, “It’s Here...”, *The Mirror* (January 8th 2003), pp. 1-3; Mike Sullivan, “Factory of Death”, *The Sun* (January 8th 2003), p. 1, for examples.

² Tony Blair, “Select Committee on Liaison” (January 21st 2003). Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmliain/334-i/3012102.htm> (Accessed December 27th 2017).

³ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).

⁴ Ben Brown, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).

⁵ Margaret Gilmore, ‘News at Ten’ (January 8th 2003).

⁶ George Alagiah, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003).

⁷ Frank Gardner, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).

⁸ Margaret Gilmore, ‘News at Ten’ (January 8th 2003).

⁹ Frank Gardner, ‘News at Ten’ (January 7th 2003).

¹⁰ Andrew Marr, ‘News at Ten’ (January 15th 2003).

¹¹ Michael Buerk, ‘News at Ten’ (January 8th 2003).

¹² Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).

¹³ Jean-Francois Daguzan, “News at Ten” (January 9th 2003).

¹⁴ George Alagiah, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003)

¹⁵ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).

¹⁶ See Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 9th and 14th 2003).

¹⁷ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).

¹⁸ See Margaret Gilmore, ‘News at Ten’ (January 8th 2003).

- ¹⁹ See Niall Dickson, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Alastair Hay, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ²⁰ Frank Gardner, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ²¹ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ²² Michael Buerk, ‘News at Ten’ (January 7th 2003).
- ²³ Ben Brown, “News at Ten” (January 16th 2003).
- ²⁴ Michael Buerk, “News at Ten” (January 8th 2003).
- ²⁵ Reda Hessaine, “News at Ten” (January 8th 2003).
- ²⁶ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 8th 2003).
- ²⁷ Peter Sissons, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ²⁸ Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ²⁹ Tony Blair, “News at Ten” (January 7th, 8th and 15th 2003).
- ³⁰ Jacks Straw, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ³¹ David Blunkett, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003).
- ³² Oliver Letwin, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ³³ Simon Hughes, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ³⁴ Assistant Constable Alan Green, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003).
- ³⁵ Roy Ramm, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003).
- ³⁶ Magnus Ranstorp, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ³⁷ Reda Hessaine, “News at Ten” (January 8th 2003).
- ³⁸ Richard Cobbold, “News at Ten” (January 8th 2003).
- ³⁹ Nigel Churton, “News at Ten” (January 9th 2003).
- ⁴⁰ Jean-Francois Daguzan, “News at Ten” (January 9th 2003).
- ⁴¹ Alastair Hay, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ⁴² Pat Troop, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ⁴³ Unnamed witnesses “News at Ten” (January 7th, 8th and 15th 2003).
- ⁴⁴ Michael Beurk, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Ben Brown, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Frank Gardner, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 9th 2003); George Alagiah, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003); Kevin Bocquet, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, “News at Ten” (January 14th 2003); Peter Sissons, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003); Frank Gardner, “News at Ten” (January 15th 2003), for examples.
- ⁴⁵ See Ben Brown, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ⁴⁶ See Tony Blair, “News at Ten” (January 7th 2003).
- ⁴⁷ See Tony Blair, “PM Speech to Foreign Office Conference in London” (January 7th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20061101012618/http://number10.gov.uk/page1765> (Accessed December 27th 2017); “Tony Blair, “Prime Minister Press Conference” (January 13th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060715135117/http://number10.gov.uk/page3005> (Accessed December 27th 2017); Tony Blair, “Address to the House of Commons Liaison Committee” (January 21st 2003). Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmliaisn/334-i/3012102.htm> (Accessed December 27th 2016); Tony Blair, “Press Conference: Tony Blair and Jose Maria Aznar” (January 31st 2003): Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060715135117/http://number10.gov.uk/page1768> (Accessed December 27th 2017); Tony Blair, “Press Conference: Tony Blair and George W. Bush” (January 31st 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060715135117/http://number10.gov.uk/page1767> (Accessed December 27th 2017); Tony Blair, “Statement to Parliament following Summit with President Bush” (February 5th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20061101012618/http://number10.gov.uk/page1770> (Accessed December 27th 2017); Tony Blair, “PM Press Conference” (February 19th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20061101012618/http://number10.gov.uk/page3007> (Accessed December 27th 2017).
- ⁴⁸ Tony Blair, “Statement to Parliament following Summit with President Bush” (February 5th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20061101012618/http://number10.gov.uk/page1770> (Accessed December 27th 2017).
- ⁴⁹ I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for highlighting the wider economic relations that form part of the “terrorism” *dispositif*.

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