

NEW SECURITY CHALLENGES

Series Editor: George Christou



The BBC, The 'War on Terror' and the
Discursive Construction of Terrorism

Representing al-Qaeda

Jared Ahmad



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The last decade has demonstrated that threats to security vary greatly in their causes and manifestations and that they invite interest and demand responses from the social sciences, civil society, and a very broad policy community. In the past, the avoidance of war was the primary objective, but with the end of the Cold War the retention of military defence as the centrepiece of international security agenda became untenable. There has been, therefore, a significant shift in emphasis away from traditional approaches to security to a new agenda that talks of the softer side of security, in terms of human security, economic security, and environmental security. The topical New Security Challenges series reflects this pressing political and research agenda.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The BBC, The ‘War on Terror’ and ‘Al-Qaeda’

Despite ‘existing’ in some form or another since the late 1980s, the events of September 11th 2001 served to project the al-Qaeda phenomenon into the global consciousness. On that fateful day, citizens around the world were introduced to the looming figure of Osama bin Laden and his amorphous terrorist ‘organisation’, while at the same time witnessing a level of terror and destruction never before seen in the West. In the words of Christina Hellmich and Andreas Behnke, this event can be regarded as the ‘opening of a blank page’ upon which al-Qaeda’s narrative was to be written.¹ In particular, this process of knowledge production was most evident within the news media, where in the days and weeks that followed, accounts of bin Laden’s immense wealth and influence, along with stories about al-Qaeda’s sheer size and scale, dominated the news agenda. In the United States, for example, Brigitte L. Nacos has shown how bin Laden appeared on U.S. television more often than President Bush following the September 11th 2001 attacks, dominating news reports, documentaries, and current affairs programming.² Within such coverage, the strangeness and unfamiliarity evoked by the word ‘al-Qaeda’ ensured that journalists and producers had to employ a series of culturally available frameworks of knowledge in order to make both ‘al-Qaeda’ and ‘bin Laden’ mean *something* for their audiences.

For trusted institutions like the BBC, the growing sense of fear and anxiety that followed these events meant that its news staff had to quickly make sense of the uncertainty surrounding who, and what, was

behind the attacks in order to provide its citizens not only with a clear idea of why someone would carry out such an act, but also a broader sense of security, stability and reassurance. As Mark Easton, the BBC's Home Affairs Editor, recalls,

[a]t the time we were developing our understanding of what 'al-Qaeda' was, and were in a continual dialogue about how best to describe it. This was an ongoing process, and not something that could simply be done in a two-minute bulletin. Our aim was to be as accurate and truthful as possible with the resources we had at the time... but it was, and still is, a really difficult area for any journalist to cover.³

Thus, in the days, weeks and months following the events in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, a slow process of signification began to take shape which has, despite the best intentions of institutions such as the BBC, given rise to the elusive and continually shifting enemy that continues to mystify and evade meaning today.

It is this process of meaning-making that the current book seeks to analyse and interrogate. It aims to explore the various ways in which 'al-Qaeda' has been represented and made meaningful for British news audiences, and understand how these portrayals have changed over the course of the 'war on terror'. In particular, it seeks to shed light on the way these representations have, in the absence of any stable ontological and epistemological frameworks of knowledge, functioned as a continually shifting site upon which a broad range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend. As will be seen in the pages that follow, despite a significant amount of scholarly attention surrounding al-Qaeda, there has been surprisingly little consideration of the way the media have sought to represent this entity for citizens. Moreover, within this nascent academic field there has been no attention given to the way 'al-Qaeda' has been visually *and* verbally constructed within the news media, or the way news language and imagery work together in order to secure, or challenge, dominant understandings of the terror threat. It is this focus that distinguishes this book from other works focusing on al-Qaeda and the 'war on terror', and, as such, provides direct insight into the *production* and *politics* of 'al-Qaeda' as an object of representation, discourse, knowledge and power.

Focusing on the medium of television news, 'the main source of news and information for populations across the Western world',⁴ and in

particular the BBC's flagship 'News at Ten' programme, Britain's most watched and trusted bulletin,⁵ the book sheds light upon the representational practices underpinning some of the most significant al-Qaeda-related events of the past decade. Beginning with the September 11th 2001 attacks, the book analyses over 30 hours of BBC news coverage from across the 'war on terror' period, encompassing the January 5th 2003 Wood Green ricin plot, the July 7th 2005 transport bombings, and the May 2nd 2011 death of Osama bin Laden. Despite being taken from a broad range of national and international contexts, these case studies provide insight into the many ways 'al-Qaeda' has been presented to British news audiences over a 10-year period. Perhaps more importantly, however, each case study shows how the meaning of 'al-Qaeda' changes in relation to the various contexts in which the BBC reports and the emergence of new discourses and frameworks of knowledge surrounding the terror threat more broadly.

The overall argument is as follows: Rather than simply view al-Qaeda in a material sense, as a phenomenon made up of real people in real locations around the world, the book suggests that this threat can be better understood as a discursive entity that derives much of its form, strength and structural coherence from the representations offered by the news media. This is not to say that al-Qaeda is not 'real', or that its acts violence do not cause physical harm, but more simply that, for most people in the United Kingdom, our understanding of who and what 'al-Qaeda' is has been shaped by a limited series of words, images, and sounds; in short, through what the French philosopher Michel Foucault refers to as 'discourse'.⁶ According to Foucault, discourses can be understood to be a highly regulated 'system of representation' that help us to stabilise and make sense of 'real'-world phenomena such as terrorism.⁷ But rather than simply represent reality, discourses systematically form the objects and subjects of which they speak.⁸ Understood in this way, instead of being conceived as something that exists prior to, or separate from, the BBC's reporting during the 'war on terror', al-Qaeda can be viewed as an entity that emerges from *within* such coverage. These representations are by no means neutral reflections of reality, but instead are a dynamic site upon which a whole range of conflicting ways of seeing, speaking and thinking are enacted, with the meaning of al-Qaeda shifting in relation to the various cultural materials and frameworks of knowledge that emerge during a given event and the different contexts the BBC's reports within. Thus, in the same manner that Edward W. Said describes

how ‘a scarecrow is assembled from bric-a-brac and then made to stand for man’,⁹ this book sets out to detail the process through which al-Qaeda has been pieced together from a range of discursive components and then made to stand for a more complex and convoluted reality. More so than this, however, rather than show how these depictions simply serve as a repository for the most reductive discourses circulating within society, the book provides insight into the complexity of the BBC’s representations; showing how, in the absence of any lasting cultural frameworks for knowing and understanding ‘al-Qaeda’, they simultaneously draw upon and challenge the kinds of portrayals that are traditionally understood to inform Western coverage of ‘Islamic’ terrorism. And, in so doing, it reveals how the dominant mode of representation to emerge within the Corporation’s coverage over the course of the ‘war on terror’ period is one that increasingly resembles Britain’s own, diverse and multicultural ‘Self’.

Following on from this, the analysis has two primary aims. First, it seeks to explore the nature of the BBC’s representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon: posing a series of interconnected questions that focus on the manifest and latent content of the BBC’s coverage, such as ‘how is “al-Qaeda” visually and verbally represented within the BBC’s coverage?’ and ‘how have these representations changed over the course of the “war on terror”?’ Despite their apparent simplicity, few scholars have sought to consider these questions in regard to news media representations of this entity. More to the point, because of the centrality of news in formulating public understandings of social and political phenomena it is vitally important that we investigate the nature of its representations of terrorism, because it is from these portrayals that all else follows. As Jonas Hagmann explains, representations of terrorism are important because they provide ‘knowledge bases for political action’.¹⁰ Here, in addition to Foucault’s development of the concept of discourse, the book draws upon the methodological tradition of multimodal discourse analysis to help account for the way ‘verbal, visual and aural aspects of a medium combine or are intentionally combined to achieve particular meanings’.¹¹ In doing so, this approach enables us to analyse the dominant words, statements, symbols, images, and narrative and visual templates used to represent ‘al-Qaeda’, and indeed their various breaks, discontinuities and ruptures, and will thus provide a significant level of insight into the way this entity has become known to British television audiences over the course of the ‘war on terror’ period.

Second, despite claims of objectivity and impartiality by institutions such as the BBC, it is important to acknowledge the fact that news media representations do not exist in isolation from wider social, political and cultural processes. As a result, the book also seeks to move beyond the media text and pursue a set of questions related to the wider political functions and consequences these presentations can be said to give rise to. Here, questions such as 'whose interests are served by adopting particular modes of visual and verbal representation?' and 'what consequences can be said to arise from these depictions?' guide the second stage of the analysis. While this is not to suggest that the BBC's representations simply function as a vehicle for government propaganda, or, moreover, to claim that its coverage has direct causal effects. Indeed, as former Home Affairs Correspondent Margaret Gilmore makes clear, 'the BBC has always sought to maintain its integrity when reporting such serious issues; seeking to tell the truth clearly and without bias'.¹² Nevertheless, in helping to construct the parameters for public debate, the BBC's representations, often unwittingly, reflect dominant discourses and frameworks of knowledge that circulate within society, and, as a result, help to formulate the conditions of possibility for a limited number of potential outcomes.

For instance, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, during the alleged Wood Green ricin plot of January 2003 the absence of visual representations of the suspects served to imbue the BBC's reporting with a heightened sense of fear, leading to increased speculation and uncertainty about who was behind the plot and where such individuals might be located. These concerns functioned not only to boost al-Qaeda publicity profile in the United Kingdom, but also acted to powerfully fuel the Blair administration's own fear-driven narratives about the pervasive threat of terrorism and the purported connections between al-Qaeda, Iraq and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Such uncertainty, moreover, also had significant consequences for citizens' understandings about the scale and nature of the terror threat during this period, creating unnecessary level of concern and anxiety within Britain. As one eye-witness put it at the time, '[i]t could be next-door to you and you wouldn't know, would you... it's just the way we live now, we're living on a knife edge'.¹³

Complementing the discursive and multimodal approach outlined above, here the analysis makes use of the Foucauldian concepts of the 'dispositif' and 'truth regime' in order to interrogate the complex power

relations underpinning the BBC's representations, and understand their broader social, political and cultural effects. To further facilitate the analysis, the book also employs a form of critical discourse analysis to consider the way 'relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' are produced, enacted and challenged through news media representations.¹⁴ While the focus throughout is primarily on the analysis of 'News at Ten' bulletins, such close scrutiny is not carried out in ignorance of the wider politics and processes of news production. And, as a result, the textual analysis is further supplemented by a series of semi-structured interviews with current and former BBC journalists and producers whose input provides us with deeper insight into the way representations of al-Qaeda are constructed and circulate within today's contemporary media environment. It is this unique blend of Foucauldian-inspired textual analysis and interview-based material that marks this book as different from others focusing on similar, 'war on terror'-related themes and subjects.

WHAT IS 'AL-QAEDA'?

Given the book's central argument, namely that al-Qaeda is primarily a discursive phenomenon that emerges from within the BBC's coverage, it is important to briefly consider what is meant when the term is used within the book. According to the conventional narrative, something resembling 'al-Qaeda' materialised around 1988, when former veterans of the ten-year long Soviet/Afghan war, such as Osama bin Laden, Abdallah Azzam, Mohammed Atef and Abu Ubaidah, formed a new military group in Peshawar, northern Pakistan.¹⁵ As Fawas Gerges has pointed out, from the very start, this entity resembled more a 'small and transient private army', rather than a global organisation,¹⁶ and its principal goal was to harness the financial resources and networks of recruitment that had been established during the Afghan war in order to help Muslims under threat of persecution around the world.¹⁷ Most importantly, the term 'al-Qaeda' was not used at this stage to describe a specific group or organisation, but instead referred to a basic set of rules, principles and ascetic values that were to be adhered to within training camps set up in Afghanistan during the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁸ As bin Laden explains in an interview,

the situation isn't like the West portrays it, that there is an 'organization' with a specific name and so on. That particular name is very old and was born without any intention from us. Brother Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri,

may God have mercy upon him, created a military base to train the young men to fight against the Soviet empire... this place was called 'al-Qaeda', as in a training base.¹⁹

In fact, many of those arrested for their roles in 'al-Qaeda'-related bombings and terrorist activities during this period denied ever having heard of such a group or organisation and did not recollect anyone else using the term in such a way either.²⁰ A study of over 1500 audio-cassettes of speeches and sermons by leading figures within the jihadi community from across the 1980s and 1990s fails to find a single instance in which al-Qaeda was described as a militant organisation, with the exception of a vague reference to 'al-Qa'ida's publicity committee'.²¹

Of course, bin Laden was linked to a number of religious and political organisations throughout his life. He was closely associated within Abdallah Azzam's Maktab al-Khidama, or 'Services Office', an NGO-style group that sought to formalise outreach efforts and maintain a database of militants who had fought or had received training in Afghanistan.²² Similarly, during the early 1990s, bin Laden created the 'Advice and Reformation Committee', which functioned mainly to disseminate communiqués criticising the Saudi royal family for its corruption, irreligion and, perhaps most significant of all, its hosting of U.S. military bases in Saudi Arabia.²³ He also took part in the short-lived World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders, a rough coalition between two Egyptian groups, Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Ahmed Refai Taha's al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, and two Pakistan-based militant organisations, Fazul Rahman's Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Sheikh Mir Hamza's Jamiat e Ulema of Pakistan.²⁴ And yet, each of these entities are regarded as being distinct to 'al-Qaeda' as a formal organisation and do not evoke the same levels of fear.

Significantly, over the course of the past 17 years a vast body of knowledge has developed around the al-Qaeda phenomenon: From personal, first-hand 'insider' accounts²⁵ and investigations into the historical and political origins of its terrorism,²⁶ to studies into the written and spoken pronouncements of its leading figures²⁷ or the more popular journalistic, narrative-based accounts,²⁸ research into this global movement has covered an extraordinary range of literary fields; something one commentator shrewdly refers to as 'the al-Qaeda industry'.²⁹ And yet, within this literature there remains remarkably little consensus as to what 'it' is: Is it a highly-structured 'organisation',³⁰ a diffuse 'network' of affiliated groups, grass-roots movements, and like-minded individuals,³¹

a ‘franchise’ that can be ‘bought into’ by anyone who seeks to lay claim to the label,³² an ‘electronic database’ or ‘archive’ with the details of thousands of terrorists stored within it,³³ a ‘nightmarish fantasy’ dreamt up by corrupt political figures,³⁴ a ‘convenient label’ for a more complex and geographically diffuse phenomenon, or an ideological ‘world-view’ that can be appropriated by various individuals irrespective of their geographic or cultural location.³⁵ As critical terrorism scholar Richard Jackson points out,

officials, security practitioners, and terrorism experts have never been able to agree on what the term ‘Al Qaeda’ represents or means in real-world material, strategic, or political terms, and they have put forward ontologically opposing descriptions and explanations of this thing called ‘Al Qaeda’.³⁶

As such, while the al-Qaeda phenomenon has gone on to dominate media and political debates during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, there exists as much uncertainty and lack of understanding today about who and what ‘al-Qaeda’ is as there was in the days and weeks after September 11th 2001.

In the face of such uncertainty, however, *Guardian* and *Observer* journalist Jason Burke’s tri-partite analytical framework, as outlined in his influential *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (2003), offers a particularly useful way to view this entity. According to Burke, though it might not exist in any traditional sense, ‘al-Qaeda’ can be conceptualised in three distinct, yet interrelated, ways. First, it can be viewed as a small grouping of individuals surrounding figures like bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, Atef and Ubaidah, and around 10–15 other individuals who make up its overall religious and organisational council. Former CIA operations Officer and terrorism expert Mark Sageman refers to this grouping as ‘al-Qaeda Central’.³⁷ While these individuals were fairly influential in the years preceding September 11th 2001, launching attacks in Kenya, Tanzania, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, the U.S-led ‘war on terror’ has severely limited their ability to organise, recruit and direct terrorist attacks around the world, with many of al-Qaeda’s shura, or religious and organisational council, either captured or killed. Indeed, even within this centralised grouping there have been historic divisions in regard to core tactics and ideology, with many of its senior religious and organisational council questioning the legitimacy of large-scale, spectacular terror attacks such as those carried out on September 11th 2001.

The second component of al-Qaeda is the broader '*network of networks*'. This is a diffuse entity made up of a range of like-minded, yet often disconnected and continually rotating, Sunni extremist groups. These include both official and self-styled affiliates, such as al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and more recent Jabhat Fateh al-Sham in Syria.³⁸ Building on an understanding of networks as 'temporary, dynamic, emergent, adaptive, entrepreneurial, and flexible structures',³⁹ here different individuals and groups work together for short-term, strategic objectives, rather than as part of top-down hierarchies of command and control.⁴⁰ Thus, a group engaged in a local or regional conflict may simply adopt the 'al-Qaeda' label to increase funding opportunities or to provide it with greater levels of legitimacy on the international stage.

Finally, there is the broader 'ideology' that draws together a number of groups and individuals from a variety of disparate contexts and conflicts.⁴¹ Though we should be clear that this al-Qaeda 'ideology' is incredibly diverse and multifaceted, with no one group or set of individuals subscribing to the same world-view, there are shared affinities and schools of thought which resonate with many of those who comprise the overall grouping.⁴² In particular, this ideology calls for an immediate end to Western political, economic and military influence in the Middle East, the removal of all corrupt, 'appostate' regimes within Muslim-majority countries, and the broader, perhaps more vague, creation of a 'true' Islamic Caliphate that would restore honor and pride to the global Muslim community, or Ummah. In fact, for Burke, and also for counter-terrorism officials around the world, it is this category which poses the greatest threat, and is, as he has recently pointed out, 'the most significant development of the last decade and may well be the most durable'.⁴³

Thus, while it may not exist in a concrete sense, or even have a single, settled meaning, it is across these three broad categories that something resembling 'al-Qaeda' can be realised. So, in some instances, for example, it is possible to trace a clear line of influence or funding to the individuals who comprise al-Qaeda Central. In others, however, it might be the case that a particular individual or group have been inspired by, or share an ideological affinity, with figures such as Osama bin Laden, and merely seek to use the 'al-Qaeda' label for their own strategic gain. Regardless of debates surrounding its physical form and shape, however, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the overarching argument of this book suggests that 'al-Qaeda' can be better understood as a

discursive phenomenon that emerges from within news media coverage. It is these mediated representations that provide the various individuals, groups, organisations and movements who self-identify as ‘al-Qaeda’ with a powerful, coherent and lasting propaganda image, but one that is, importantly, disproportionate to the true size and effectiveness of such a phenomenon.⁴⁴

WHY STUDY THE BBC’S ‘NEWS AT TEN’ REPRESENTATIONS?

In an era in which there has been a proliferation of media platforms, the focus on the BBC’s representations of al-Qaeda may seem a rather outdated project; the sheer range of news and alternative information sources open to today’s citizens surely makes television a redundant medium? Despite inroads from these emergent media forms, however, television continues to remain the most important source of information for people across the Western world; something that was all the more the case in Britain during the opening stages of the ‘war on terror’.⁴⁵ As Justin Lewis makes clear, television news, ‘more than any other cultural form, carries the burden of defining the world in which citizens operate’.⁴⁶ The significance attached to this medium is further emphasised by the fact that during terrorist incidents and other periods of crisis citizens turn to television not only for reliable, up-to-date information, but also for stability, reassurance and a sense of normality.⁴⁷

As the nation’s foremost public service institution, this makes the BBC makes an exemplary choice for analysis. Renowned for the quality of its journalism, and its much vaunted ‘impartiality’, it is, in the words of Georgina Born, ‘the model for public broadcasters on every continent’.⁴⁸ Indeed, since its creation in 1922, the Corporation has dominated Britain’s news media landscape; with some 80% of Britons continuing to access its services daily.⁴⁹ In addition to its looming presence within Britain’s media environment, the quality of its news output is also understood to have a considerable impact upon broader patterns of news content and coverage within the United Kingdom, with many media outlets turning to the BBC for direction and leadership. Within an increasingly commercialised setting, where market forces often impact on the form and content of news stories, the Corporation’s apparent independence from both political and economic pressure provides it with a level of freedom not afforded to other broadcasters. While citizens draw their news from an increasing range of sources, well over half of U.K. nationals consider it their most important source of news.⁵⁰ Its flagship ‘News at Ten’

programme, the focus of this study, receives a nightly audience of around 4.9 million viewers, around 35.9% of the audience share,⁵¹ and is widely understood to be the most watched, and most trusted, news programme in Britain today.⁵² As such, the bulletin is expected to serve as a forum for the most important issues of the day.⁵³ While these reasons alone warrant significant attention, there are, however, specific reasons why the BBC makes a particularly important case when seeking to study representations al-Qaeda, and terrorism more generally.

First, as a publicly owned institution, the BBC is formally required to act in the public interest by providing its audiences with a comprehensive forum for public debate on controversial issues such as non-state terrorism. Thus, in line with its democratic principles, the Corporation is expected report upon terrorism-related events in an objective and impartial manner, supplying citizens with a critical forum for a range of competing viewpoints in order to encourage and facilitate self-government. In this regard, the broadcaster's representations are a crucial starting point for a variety of debates surrounding the different responses the government and security services might have to al-Qaeda's terrorism. Here, due to the fact that few people have direct access to the various groups and individuals who make up this disparate phenomenon, the representations offered by the news media form a crucial point of access, where audiences can gain insight into aspects of al-Qaeda's character, identity, ethnic make-up and world-view. As Shani Orgad asserts,

[w]e rely on media representations to make sense of our lives and our world. They shape, inform and orientate the way we see and judge the world, others and ourselves, and how we imagine real and possible lives.⁵⁴

In focusing on the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda, therefore, this study provides a level of insight into the way terror threats are represented to the public and the extent to which these representations form a starting point for further debate and discussion.

Second, while the BBC may seek to provide depth of coverage and balance of opinion across the entire range of its programming, however, its reporting of issues surrounding non-state terrorism has traditionally been understood to be heavily reliant upon 'official' sources, with its representations working largely within the definitional framework developed by senior government officials and members of the security services. In particular, despite its celebrated independence and impartiality, a number of scholars have noted that the Corporation's reportage is characterised

by a ‘degree of tension’ between its impartial viewpoint and its moral commitment to upholding a series of core civic values;⁵⁵ something that positions it as ‘part of both the Establishment and the fabric of British society’.⁵⁶ Such a state of affairs is acknowledged by one former BBC journalist, Paul Lashmar, who points out that,

it is important to remember that because you’re ‘the BBC’ you are under so much pressure and scrutiny that it makes it impossible for some things to be said. So it’s not simply a case of saying that the BBC is independent of government; it is *minded* by government.⁵⁷

Here, research by Philip Schlesinger et al.,⁵⁸ David Altheide⁵⁹ and John David Viera⁶⁰ has shown how the BBC has tended to ‘cover’ terrorism in a highly ritualised, standardised and formulaic manner, foregrounding the irrational and violent nature of terrorist actions at the expense of vital information regarding the historical and political context behind such acts. Such findings reflect broader academic studies into the Corporation’s reporting of war and conflict, more generally.⁶¹ In focusing upon the BBC’s most popular news programme, therefore, this book aims to consider the extent to which representations of al-Qaeda, and non-state terrorism more generally, have reinforced or deviated from the state’s ‘official’ perspective.

Third, in addition to providing a forum for public understanding and information about the nature of such threats, the BBC must also, in accordance with its broader Public Purpose remit, seek to present a positive image of the nation to itself whilst also encouraging awareness of Britain’s ‘different cultures and alternative viewpoints’.⁶² As Glen Creeber points out, over the course of its development ‘the BBC has played a crucial role in conceiving and cementing notions of “Britishness”... constructing a deep sense of national consciousness and consensus’.⁶³ Here, the broadcaster is required to pay lip service to culturally entrenched notions of national identity, whilst at the same time celebrating the diversity and multiculturalism that exists within the many towns and cities of the United Kingdom. In this regard, the BBC must tread carefully when representing an entity like al-Qaeda. As a phenomenon that is comprised of an extraordinarily diverse range of individuals, some of whom have been drawn from minority communities within the UK, there have been instances throughout the ‘war on terror’ period in which the BBC has had to report on incidents that have involved British victims *and* perpetrators. Indeed, as an entity that legitimises its political violence by way of a particular religious world-view, covering al-Qaeda-related events is bound to

be an incredibly difficult task: too much of a focus on the religious underpinnings of al-Qaeda's terrorism might force the spotlight on Britain's 2.7 million Muslims; not enough attention could lead to accusations of left-wing 'political correctness'. In short, how the BBC represents an entity like al-Qaeda during incidents such as the July 7th 2005 London transport bombings tests its values and principles to the utmost.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

The book is structured as follows. Chapter 2 begins by discussing the existing literature focusing on the media-state-terrorism relationship and, in particular, the surprisingly few studies that have sought to consider media representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. Building on this existing body of scholarship, the chapter moves on to develop an original conceptual and analytical framework through which to interrogate the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda. This framework draws primarily upon concepts developed by Michel Foucault, and focuses, first, on the manifest visual and verbal content of these portrayals, and in particular how they shift over the period under analysis, and, second, on the wider political functions and consequences of such representations. To operationalise this framework, the chapter ends by outlining the methods required for studying mediated representations of terrorism and introduces the key case studies covered in the analysis.

Chapter 3 begins the empirical investigation. Focusing on two weeks of BBC 'News at Ten' coverage following the September 11th 2001 attacks (September 11th–24th 2001), the analysis centres on the various ways in which the al-Qaeda phenomenon was visually and verbally represented in the immediate aftermath of these events. In particular, it shows how the BBC's representations function as a dynamic and continually shifting site upon which a range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend, and through which a number of different 'al-Qaedas' manifest themselves. Three shifting modes of visual and verbal representation are identified within the analysis which each correspond to a different understanding of al-Qaeda: namely, the 'Islamic' mode, the 'Personalised' mode and the 'Elusive' mode. Importantly, rather than simply serve as a vehicle for Orientalist discourse, as suggested in previous studies, the chapter shows how these representations both draw upon and challenge the dominant discourses surrounding Islam, non-state terrorism, and the identities of terrorist suspects, providing audiences with a variety of, often conflicting, ways of seeing and speaking about this entity.

Chapter 4 continues the analysis, but broadens the focus somewhat to consider the political functions and interests that result from adopting particular modes of representation. The case concerns the alleged discovery of the biological agent ricin in a flat in Wood Green, North London; a find that was described at the time as the first instance of al-Qaeda-related activity in the United Kingdom. Rather than function in the interests of a single group, however, the chapter draws upon the Foucauldian notion of the ‘dispositif’ to show how the BBC’s representations inadvertently work in favour of a range of competing groups; with both al-Qaeda *and* the British state, in particular, gaining political advantage in the mere existence of other. Two weeks of coverage (January 5th–18th 2003) are analysed following the initial arrests, alongside speeches and press releases issued by the Prime Minister and propaganda statements distributed by al-Qaeda’s senior command. The analysis shows how the BBC’s representations formulate a crucial point of convergence between a variety of heterogeneous elements, ranging from discourses about asylum and immigration to broader social and political institutions, such as the BBC, the government, and al-Qaeda itself. As such, the chapter provides a deeper understanding into the way representations of al-Qaeda were mobilised in the build up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and shows how a single category of representation (the ‘Elusive’ mode) dominated news coverage during this early stage of the ‘war on terror’.

Centring on the coverage of the July 7th 2005 transport bombings (July 7th–20th 2005), Chapter 5 considers the social, political and discursive consequences arising from the BBC’s reporting of this event. In the first instance, the analysis shows how the broadcaster’s representations systematically form the very thing they seek to depict; namely, the al-Qaeda phenomenon. But, rather than engender a single ‘al-Qaeda’, and thus a single set of consequences, the Foucauldian concept of ‘truth regime’ is employed to show how the two dominant modes of representation emerging during this period (the ‘Islamic’ mode and the ‘Elusive’ mode) form the conditions of possibility for a limited range of policies and audience interpretations. Thus, while the initial coverage gives rise to a reductive, Orientalist-inspired ‘Islamic’ mode of representation, something that can be said to produce policies that disproportionately impact upon Britain’s various Muslim communities, the appearance of a series of prosaic visual representations of the four bombers, moreover, provides the conditions in which a more negotiated, and perhaps more socially damaging, understanding of this phenomenon can be developed.

Chapter 6 focuses on two weeks of coverage following the death of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan (May 2nd–15th 2011). Reflecting on the various modes of representation seen across the previous case studies, the chapter focuses on the way al-Qaeda is made simultaneously visible and invisible for British television audiences in the days and weeks after bin Laden’s death. In particular, the analysis shows how the BBC’s representations help to construct al-Qaeda as a seemingly distant, foreign and highly identifiable threat, as seen in the presence of the ‘Personalised’ and ‘Islamic’ modes of representation, but how in doing so this focus serves to render other categories of representation less noticeable within the coverage, most significantly the ‘Elusive’ mode. As such, the chapter suggests that the BBC’s foregrounding of certain modes of representation over and above others functions to powerfully distance the threat posed by al-Qaeda, and thus attempt to repair the damage done to Britain’s delicate social order in the years after the July 7th 2005 attacks.

Finally, the Conclusion returns to, and summarises, the key themes and findings identified over the course of the analysis, linking these back to the core research questions and the dominant themes highlighted in the literature on media representations of al-Qaeda, and the media-state-terrorism relationship, more broadly. The chapter then moves on to reflect upon the BBC’s overall performance when representing al-Qaeda across the first stage of the ‘war on terror’; that is, how these representations have functioned *politically*, reinforcing or challenging the dominant discourses and forms of knowledge and power circulating during this period. Here, in order to supplement the analysis of ‘News at Ten’ bulletins, material is taken from interviews with several current and former BBC journalists, editors and documentary film-makers who reflect on the various challenges faced when covering ‘al-Qaeda’, thus providing a deeper level of understanding into the way these representations have taken shape. The final section also addresses some of the book’s theoretical and methodological limitations, and ends by reflecting on how the main findings might inform future research into the emergence of the Islamic State phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

Despite a significant amount of media, political and academic attention, ‘al-Qaeda’ continues to remain an elusive and unstable object of representation, absorbing a broad range of, often wholly unrelated, groups

and individuals into a singular, all-encompassing label. This book aims to shed light on the representational practices that are at play within contemporary news portrayals of non-state terrorist phenomena, and, in doing so, provide a clearer assessment of the way ‘al-Qaeda’ has been made possible by Britain’s most prized public service institution; understanding how it has been made into a stable, coherent object of knowledge and how, at the same time, this phenomenon has been called into question and unmade by the BBC’s own patterns of representation. In this regard, the ensuing chapters seek to provide a much-needed corrective to the repeated criticisms of the Corporation’s inherent bias and partiality that are often raised in studies of this nature. But the point of this book is not to reveal the true identity of the BBC’s al-Qaeda. Rather, it aims to make sense of the way this entity has been pieced together from the various fragments of discourse that have circulated within Britain during the ‘war on terror’ period, and, as a result, offer new insight into the way mediated representations are always powered sites of political struggle and resistance, providing audiences with a variety of ways of seeing and speaking. With this in mind, the aim of the next chapter is to design a suitable theoretical and analytical framework through which to answer the core questions outlined above.

NOTES

1. Christina Hellmich & Andreas Behnke, *Knowing Al-Qaeda: The Epistemology of Terrorism* (London: Ashgate, 2012), p. 2. Throughout this book the date of September 11th 2001 will be written in full, unless it is quoted otherwise. The reason for this is because its shortening to ‘September 11’ or ‘9/11’ is, as Richard Jackson observes, ‘neither natural nor without consequences; rather, the effect is to erase the history and the context of the events and turn their representation into a cultural-political icon where the meaning of the date becomes both assumed and open to manipulation’. See Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2005), p. 7.
2. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), p. 162.
3. Interview with Mark Easton (June 25th 2016).
4. See Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 8.

5. BBC Trust, 'Public Perceptions of Impartiality and Trustworthiness of the BBC'. Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/inside-thebbc/howwework/reports/pdf/bbc_report_trust_and_impartiality_report_may_2013.pdf (Accessed July 28th 2015). See also Charlotte Higgins, *The New Noise: The Extraordinary Birth and Troubled Life of the BBC* (London: Faber & Faber, 2015).
6. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith (London: Tavistock, 1974), for the most consistent and focused discussion of this concept.
7. Stuart Hall et al. (eds.), *Representation*. 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2013), p. 29.
8. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 49.
9. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 312.
10. Jonas Hagmann, 'Representations of Terrorism and the Making of Counterterrorism Policy', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2013), p. 431.
11. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, 'Remediating Jihad for Western News Audiences: The Renewal of Gatekeeping', *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), p. 206.
12. Interview with Margaret Gilmore (July 1st 2016).
13. Unnamed Witness, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
14. Ruth Wodak & Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 2009), p. 2.
15. Peter Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 81.
16. Fawas Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 66.
17. Michael Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 59.
18. See Flagg Miller, 'Rereading the Origins of Al-Qaeda through Osama Bin Laden's Former Audiocassette Collection', in Lorry Fenner et al. (eds.), *Ten Years Later: Insights on Al-Qaeda's Past and Future Through Captured Records* (Washington: National Defence University), p. 101. See also Flagg Miller, *Audacious Ascetic: What the bin Laden Tapes Reveal About Al-Qa'ida* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015), p. 34.
19. See Tayseer Allouni, 'Interview with Sheik Osama Bin Laden', *Al-Jazeera* (October 2001). Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-JImrztINp0> (Accessed January 11th 2013).
20. See Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 7. See also Flagg Miller, *Audacious Ascetic*, pp. 138–139.
21. Flagg Miller, *Audacious Ascetic*, p. 7.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

23. Michael Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 93–97.
24. See Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*. Trans. James Howarth (London: Verso, 2005), p. 58.
25. See Mohamed Sifaoui, *Inside al-Qaeda: How I Infiltrated the World's Deadliest Terrorist Organisation* (London: Granta, 2003); Montasser al-Zayyat, *The Road to Al-Qaeda: The Story of bin Laden's Right-Hand Man* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Omar Nasri, *Inside the Jihad: My Life with Al-Qaeda—A Spy's Story* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); and Morten Storm et al., *Agent Storm: A Spy Inside Al-Qaeda* (London: Penguin, 2014), for a number of interesting, if often highly sensationalised, 'insider' accounts.
26. See Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (New York: Berkley, 2002); Karen J. Greenberg (ed.), *Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Fawas Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda: From Global Network to Local Franchise* (London: Zed Books, 2011); and Michael Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), for example.
27. See Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World*; Raymond Ibrahim (ed.), *The Al Qaeda Reader* (New York: Random House, 2007); Gilles Kepel & Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*. Trans. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); and Flag Miller, *The Audacious Ascetic*, for examples.
28. See Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin, 2003); Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10th 2001* (London: Penguin, 2004); Peter Bergen, *The Osama Bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al-Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda's Road to 9/11* (London: Penguin, 2007); Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (London: Penguin, 2011); Peter Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda* (New York: Free Press, 2011); Jason Burke, *The New Threat From Islamic Militancy* (London: Vintage, 2016); and Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile: The Flight of Osama bin Laden* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), for a number of journalistic investigations into al-Qaeda and the broader Jihadi movement.
29. See Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 290.
30. See Bruce Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (May/June, 2008), pp. 133–138.

31. See Mark Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). See also Rick Nelson & Thomas M. Sanderson, 'A Threat Transformed: Al Qaeda and Associated Movements in 2011', Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington: CSIS, 2011).
32. See Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*.
33. See Robin Cook, 'The Struggle against Terrorism Cannot Be Won by Military Means', *The Guardian* (July 8th 2005). Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jul/08/july7.development> (Accessed September 5th 2017).
34. See Adam Curtis (Dir.), *The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear—Part 1. Baby Its Cold Outside* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).
35. See Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 13.
36. See Richard Jackson, 'Bin Laden's Ghost and the Epistemological Crises of Counterterrorism', in Susan Jeffords & Fahed al-Sumait (eds.), *Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), p. 6.
37. See Mark Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*.
38. Jason Burke, *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy*, pp. 18–20.
39. Cynthia Stohl & Michael Stohl, 'Networks of Terror: Theoretical Assumptions and Pragmatic Consequences', *Communications Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2007), pp. 93–124.
40. Russ Marion & Mary Uhl-Bien, 'Complexity Theory and Al-Qaeda: Examining Complex Leadership', *Emergence*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2003), pp. 54–76.
41. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 10.
42. Christina Hellmich, 'Al-Qaeda: Terrorists, Hypocrites, Fundamentalists? The View from Within', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005), pp. 39–54.
43. Jason Burke, *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy*, p. 22.
44. Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 29.
45. Ian Hargreaves & James Thomas, *New News, Old News* (London: Broadcasting Standards Commission, 2002), p. 5.
46. Justin Lewis, 'News and the Empowerment of Citizens', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2006), p. 305.
47. See Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Kirsten Mogensen, 'Television Journalism During Terror Attacks', *Media, War and Conflict*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), pp. 31–49; Brian McNair, *News Culture*. 3rd ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), p. 134.
48. Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. 5.

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52. BBC Trust, 'Public Perceptions of Impartiality and Trustworthiness of the BBC'. Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/inside-thebbc/howweknow/reports/pdf/bbc_report_trust_and_impartiality_report_may_2013.pdf (Accessed December 3rd 2016).
53. See Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture* (London: Comedia, 1983), p. 41.
54. Shani Orgad, *Media Representation and the Global Imagination* (London: Polity Press, 2012), p. 8.
55. See Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 5.
56. Stephen Hutchings & Galina Miazhevich, 'The Polonium Trail to Islam: Litvinenko, Liminality, and Television's (Cold) War on Terror', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2009), p. 222.
57. Interview with Paul Lashmar (June 20th 2016).
58. Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism'*. See also Philip Schlesinger, *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News* (London: Methuen, 1978).
59. David Altheide, 'Format and Symbols in TV Coverage of Terrorism in the United States and Great Britain', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1987), pp. 161–176.
60. John David Viera, 'Terrorism at the BBC: The IRA on British Television', *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988), pp. 28–36.
61. See Glasgow University Media Group, *War and Peace News* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Greg Philo & Mike Berry, *Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004) and *More Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2011); Justin Lewis et al., *Shoot First and Ask Questions Later: Media Coverage of the 2003 Iraq War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006); David McQueen, 'BBC TV's *Panorama*, Conflict Coverage and the "Westminster Consensus"', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bournemouth (2010), for notable examples.
62. BBC Trust, 'Representing the UK, Its Nations, Regions and Communities' (2007). Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/regulatory_framework/purpose_remits/nations.pdf (Accessed September 15th 2016).
63. Glen Creeber, 'Hideously White: British Television, Glocalization, and National Identity', *Television and New Media*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2007), p. 29.



CHAPTER 2

Understanding Al-Qaeda as a Discursive Phenomenon

INTRODUCTION

There are two main aims to this chapter. First, it considers the existing literature focusing on the dynamics of the media-state-terrorism relationship and, in particular, the few studies that have sought to consider media representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. In doing so, this helps us identify the main limitations within this body of scholarship and points towards several key areas for further research. Second, the chapter also seeks to develop an original conceptual and analytical framework with which to interrogate the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda. As noted in the Introduction, this framework draws upon concepts developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault and focuses, first, on the manifest visual and verbal content of the BBC's representations, and, second, on the political functions and consequences of such portrayals. In order to operationalise this framework, the final part of the chapter lays out the methodological tools employed in the analysis and identifies the main case studies that subsequent chapters will focus on.

THE NEWS MEDIA, TERRORISM AND ISLAM

Long before al-Qaeda emerged as the 'quintessential "Islamic terrorist" group',¹ the relationship between the news media, governments and terrorist actors had been the subject of an extended level of academic and

scholarly analysis.² Dating back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a series of high-profile terrorist incidents began to attract increased levels of Western media attention,³ much of the initial research in this field primarily focused on issues surrounding the communicative nature of terrorism,⁴ the extent to which journalists and terrorist actors formed an ‘interactive’ or ‘symbiotic’ relationship,⁵ or on news media’s role in shaping the definitional and representational boundaries of ‘terrorism’.⁶ Indeed, while some criticised the news media for reporting on, and thus providing legitimacy to, terrorist acts, a number of scholars during this period sought to demonstrate the way news media coverage most often functioned to the advantage of politicians and government officials, by delegitimising terrorist groups, providing more airtime to ‘official’ sources, and, most importantly, neglecting to report on the underlying causes and motivating factors.⁷ As David L. Paletz et al. noted at the time,

[t]he underlying objectives of the violence are rarely explained, almost never justified. When tactics are emphasised without discussions of motives, objectives, goals or precipitating social conditions, then context is discarded, and political justifications are denied. The terrorists are identified with criminal violence and seen simply as bent on terror’.⁸

Importantly, this ‘elite-driven’ perspective also received significant empirical and theoretical support across the political communications scholarship,⁹ thus reflecting the broader claim that those with the greatest levels of economic, political or cultural power also have the most secure access to the news media.¹⁰

Research carried out within the British context during this period, however, revealed a more complex picture. In particular, Philip Schlesinger et al.’s *Televising ‘Terrorism’* suggested that media format had a significant influence upon the content of terrorism-related coverage, noting that across the broadcasting spectrum representations of terrorism were by no means static or monolithic.¹¹ Thus, according to Schlesinger et al., ‘as you move across the forms of television, with their different production constraints, and their different public identities, there are systematic variations in the ways in which the question of political violence is dealt with’.¹² That said, however, the authors singled out television news, and in particular BBC news, as ‘one of the most “closed” forms of presentation’,¹³ with representations of terrorists

operating overwhelmingly within a definitional framework set out by politicians and members of the security services.¹⁴ Significantly, this over-reliance upon ‘official’ perspectives has also been identified in wider areas of the BBC’s output, with issues surrounding religion,¹⁵ politics¹⁶ and citizenship,¹⁷ the economy,¹⁸ war and conflict being dominated by such viewpoints.¹⁹

With the attacks of September 11th 2001, and the subsequent ‘war on terror’, research into the media-state-terror relationship has increased at a significant rate. Building upon these existing themes, much of the focus has been on the way terrorism-related news coverage is ‘framed’ in order to promote a particular understanding, causal interpretation or moral position.²⁰ Here, the debate has tended to centre around two contending positions: does news coverage work to the advantage of terrorist groups, or does it serve the interests of governments?²¹ According to Brigitte Nacos, for example, within the United States news coverage of terrorist acts most often plays into the hands of terrorist groups due to the fact that extended media attention over exaggerates the scale and significance of such incidents for audiences. As she asserts, ‘[a]s long as terrorists offer visuals and sound-bites, drama, threats, and human interest tales, the news media will report – and actually over report – on their actions and causes at the expense of other and more important news’.²² For others, however, U.S. news media have ‘played a mainly supportive role in entrenching the rhetoric of the “war on terrorism” in public discourse’,²³ thus naturalising and legitimising government policy ‘as a taken-for-granted common sense’.²⁴ Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin extend this notion, highlighting the fact that blanket news coverage serves to simultaneously ‘amplify’ and ‘contain’ the threat posed by terrorism, thus reinforcing the objectives of *both* terrorists and government actors.²⁵ Television news, in their words, provides the oxygen ‘that is required both by terrorists in disseminating terror and by those who proclaim to be engaged in fighting terror (either through assuaging or exacerbating threats depending on which serves their particular political and military objectives)’.²⁶

Importantly, one of the key factors influencing the dynamics of this relationship concerns the nature of the event being reported on. In particular, it is suggested that dramatic, seemingly random events can disturb the structural hierarchies underpinning the media-state-terrorism relationship, giving a platform to individuals and groups who might not

normally gain access to the news. Often labelled as the ‘event-driven’ news model, this viewpoint suggests that the relationship between news media institutions and political actors can be temporarily upturned when unanticipated incidents occur.²⁷ Steve Livingston and W. Lance Bennett define this phenomenon as ‘coverage of activities that are, at least in their initial occurrence, spontaneous and not managed by officials within institutional settings’.²⁸ For example, when a terrorist attack takes place political elites lose their ability to maintain control over the political and media landscape, and this provides opportunities and openings for alternative voices and viewpoints to be explored by journalists.²⁹ Critics point out, however, that not all events are alike, and that certain factors, such as the intensity of an event or its political distance from a given news organisation, will also have a significant influence over the way the news media ‘cover’ such issues.³⁰ Indeed, even when reporting on apparently random and unscripted events, Livingston and Bennett suggest that ‘the one predictable component of the coverage is the presence of official sources’, who seek to control and ‘reinstitutionalize’ such events, bringing them back under the influence of policymakers.³¹

Perhaps a more prominent feature within this body of literature, however, has been the ‘Islamicisation’ of terror within the post-September 11th 2001 period.³² As Des Freedman and Daya Kishan Thussu point out, the news media’s reporting throughout the ‘war on terror’ has had a distinctly ‘Islamic connotation’, with an extraordinary range of disparate groups and movements often subsumed into a singular, and seamless category of identification.³³ Notably, this focus has brought about a renewed interest in the work of Palestinian-American critic Edward W. Said, and, in particular his influential, proto-postcolonial text *Orientalism* (1978).³⁴ Said describes the process through which ‘the East’, or what he terms the ‘Orient’, is constructed within Western academic and cultural texts as a place of exoticism, fantasy and malevolence. This framework of knowledge functions to impose limits upon the way people see and speak about the Orient, diminishing its complexities into a simplified mass of stereotypical figures and locales. More crucially, however, Said maintains that this process of essentialising and stereotyping enables a particular notion of ‘the West’ to take shape; one that, importantly, stresses its ‘modern’, ‘developed’, ‘tolerant’ and ‘secular’ identity. This understanding of ‘the West’ serves to create the sense of a unified, cohesive identity that is constructed in *contrast*, and also in *opposition*, to

a corresponding notion of ‘the East’, something that, moreover, places Orient in a position of inferiority.³⁵

Indeed, while much of his analysis is primarily centred upon ‘literary’ representations of the East, and, in particular, those provided by nineteenth-century canonical British and French writers, Said contends that a reductive form of Orientalism continues to underpin contemporary representations of so-called ‘Islamic’ terrorist groups. As he asserts,

ever since the demise of the Soviet Union there has been a rush by some scholars and journalists in the United States to find in an Orientalized Islam a new empire of evil. Consequently, both the electronic and the print media have been awash with demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam with terrorism, or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny.³⁶

Despite being incredibly influential, it should be noted that Said’s work has been subject to a significant amount of academic criticism,³⁷ the most appropriate to this discussion concerns Said’s ‘denial of the Orient’s own power of representation and self-representation’.³⁸ In this regard, the fact that movements based in the Orient, such as al-Qaeda, not to mention Hamas, Hizbollah, and Islamic State, have developed their own media outlets with which to produce and disseminate their own powerful self-representations challenges many of the assumptions underpinning Said’s work. These violent self-representations often knowingly appropriate and subvert Orientalist stereotypes in order to capitalise on the fear and uncertainty engendered by such ways of seeing and speaking about the East, Islam and ‘Islamic’ terrorism.³⁹ More to the point, while still subject to traditional editorial gatekeeping practices,⁴⁰ some have suggested that increased access to new communication technologies has enabled groups such as al-Qaeda to circumvent established intermediaries and disseminate their messages direct to mainstream media organisations.⁴¹

Similarly, while many have been quick to highlight the ‘Orientalised’ nature of post-September 11th 2001 representations of terrorist phenomena,⁴² a number of scholars have also shown how the globalised, post-Cold War media environment can be understood to exhibit a greater range of tensions and overlapping, hybridised identities. For example, in her analysis of British newspaper representations of Muslims and Islam, Elizabeth Poole found that despite the presence of reductive, Orientalist-inspired stereotypes, when covering events within a national

context issues relating to national identity, inclusivity, and the internal complexity of Muslim communities often took precedence.⁴³ Likewise, in their analysis of post-July 7th 2005 newspaper reporting, Mark Featherstone et al. highlight representational ‘struggles in the negotiation between the British born Islamist and the foreign other’.⁴⁴ In the context of television news coverage of such issues, moreover, Christopher Flood et al. also reject any notion of a uniformly ‘Islamophobic’ or ‘Orientalist bias’ within European news media portrayals.⁴⁵ Notably, while the writers acknowledge the presence of a series of stable generic codes and thematic patterns associated with ‘Islamist’ terrorism, they single-out the BBC, in particular, for displaying the widest range of voices and perspectives.

NEWS MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF ‘AL-QAEDA’

Given the amount of scholarly attention to the post-September 11th 2001 media-state-terrorism relationship, and related issues concerning the representation of Islam and Muslim groups, it is somewhat surprising that so little research has focused on news portrayals of al-Qaeda. This is not to say that the topic has been completely overlooked, but that there is a lack of systematic research into the various ways in which this entity has been visually and verbally portrayed across the ‘war on terror’ period.

For the few studies that have looked into this issue, much of the attention has, perhaps understandably, focused on the figure of Osama bin Laden,⁴⁶ specifically the visual dimension of such portrayals, and has tended to echo the broader themes within this academic field. So, for example, Samuel P. Winch’s has described how news depictions of bin Laden ‘closely followed the lead of government officials’ by portraying the Saudi as an evil genius archetype with near-mythic abilities, knowledge and power.⁴⁷ Likewise, Myra Macdonald suggests that BBC News 24 coverage served to construct a ‘one-dimensional’ portrayal of bin Laden in the aftermath of the attacks in New York and Washington, focusing more attention on his appearance and non-Western clothing, as opposed to the more nuanced aspects of his character and background, such as his wealth, education and political beliefs.⁴⁸ Focusing on the BBC, and echoing the observations of scholars such as Said, she suggests that these simplified portrayals are more indicative of a deeply ingrained Orientalism within coverage of the September 11th 2001 attacks. As she asserts, ‘[c]onnotations of Islam’s medieval barbarism and pre-modern fanaticism were confirmed in his [visual] presentation’, with the threat posed

by al-Qaeda ‘contained within a familiar figure: male, bearded, driven by Islamic conviction, committed and visionary’.⁴⁹ These findings are further supported by the work of Hania Nashif⁵⁰ and Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin,⁵¹ who also highlight the reductive and stereotypical nature of Western media representations of terrorism, and, in particular, the way news reports consistently reduce al-Qaeda’s propaganda releases ‘to short, aggressive statements without political demands or a context of explanation’.⁵² In addition to reflecting many of the core themes within the media-state-terror literature, these findings are also consistent with the broader scholarship on the visualisation of war, conflict, and political violence, where it is argued that there is a tendency for the news media to focus on images that have a simple and immediate impact on audiences.⁵³

Others, however, emphasise the shifting nature of news portrayals. For Susan Jeffords and Fahed al-Sumait, for example, ‘media representations of bin Laden not only diverge but often contradict each other’ depending on the medium in which such representations are produced and their wider political, social, economic, cultural and religious contexts.⁵⁴ As they point out, within media accounts ‘there is not a single, knowable bin Laden’, but instead ‘multiple locations for representing and receiving’ this looming Figure.⁵⁵ Indeed, the unstable nature of bin Laden’s portrayals is something that is especially significant when considering the few studies that have specifically centred on representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. Here, the work of Rainer Hülse and Alexander Spencer is particularly noteworthy.⁵⁶ Focusing mainly on the German press media, the authors consider the various ways in which ‘al-Qaeda’ has been constructed through a series of metaphors which gradually shifted over the course of a four-year period. Thus, in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks and the March 11th 2004 Madrid train bombings the metaphors used constructed ‘al-Qaeda’ as an external, military threat. By contrast, the metaphors applied after the July 7th 2005 London bombings suggested an internal, criminal menace.⁵⁷ Perhaps more interestingly, Hülse and Spencer suggest that rather than simply describe al-Qaeda, these metaphorical constructions serve to constitute the very reality of this threat. Thus, in order to better understand media portrayals of the al-Qaeda phenomenon, in their words, ‘it is necessary to first accept that terrorism is a social construction, a discursive rather than material fact’.⁵⁸ Despite a sole focus on the linguistic and metaphorical dimension of these portrayals, this notion provides a crucial starting point for further analysis and conceptual development in regard to the BBC’s representation of al-Qaeda.

Aside from the insights generated within this existing research, it is evident that there remains considerable scope for further analysis. In the first instance, one of the dominant themes within the literature focus on debates over definitional and representational boundaries surrounding 'al-Qaeda', and non-state terrorism more broadly. For example, while some suggest that there is a trend towards reductive, often repulsive, Orientalist-inspired forms of representation, others point towards the shifting and unstable nature of such portrayals. As such, research should seek to focus on the representational strategies used to make sense of 'al-Qaeda' within news coverage, and the extent to which these shift during coverage of different kinds of event. Indeed, given that existing scholarship has tended to focus analysis on either the visual *or* verbal nature of such portrayals, attention should also focus on the *interaction* between these two communicative modes, with a view to better understand how word and image often work together in order to secure meaning.

Second, the literature also implies that news media portrayals of al-Qaeda, and the phenomenon of 'Islamic' terrorism more broadly, function as a site upon which a range of competing interests manifest themselves. Given the perspectives discussed above, there appears to be disagreement within the literature as to which whose 'interests' news media representations serve, and, importantly, how and when these interests are articulated. As a result, more research needs to be carried out into the power relations underpinning news media portrayals of al-Qaeda in order to understand how they can be mobilised for a particular purpose or strategic agenda, and also understand how these relations might be temporarily disturbed during different kinds of terrorist event.

Finally, and as noted above, Hülse and Spencer's research into the discursive construction of al-Qaeda, and its possible 'consequences', provides this study with a crucial starting point for further discussion and analysis. But due to the fact that much of their research is situated within a German context, there remains a lack of understanding in regard to the 'effects' of such portrayals in Britain. Similarly, the all-encompassing, 'non-instrumental' approach to media discourse adopted within their study means that they often present their findings as a singular and undifferentiated mass, glossing over subtle distinctions between the modes of representation offered by journalists, politicians, members of the public, the security services, and, indeed, the al-Qaeda movement itself, or their possible consequences.

CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Given these perspectives, the aim of the following section is to set out a conceptual and analytical framework through which to examine the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda. This framework builds upon the insights and silences within the body of literature reviewed above, and has its basis in the two sets of research questions outlined in the book's Introduction. These questions focus, first, on the manifest visual and verbal content of the BBC's representations (i.e. 'how is "al-Qaeda" visually and verbally represented within the BBC's coverage?' and 'how have these representations changed over the course of the "war on terror"?'), and, second, on the political functions and consequences of such portrayals (i.e. 'whose interests are served by adopting particular modes of visual and verbal representation?' and 'what consequences can be said to arise from these depictions?'). Once applied, each element of this conceptual and analytical framework will provide a clearer picture of the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda during the 'war on terror' period, and, importantly, show how these portrayals either remained stable or varied in significant ways.

ANALYSING THE BBC'S VISUAL AND VERBAL CONTENT: DISCOURSE, REPRESENTATION AND SUBJECT POSITIONING

As Hülse and Spencer make clear, in order to comprehend the process through which phenomena such as al-Qaeda have been made meaningful for citizens, 'it is necessary to first accept that terrorism is a social construction, a discursive rather than material fact'.⁵⁹ Particularly useful in this regard is Michel Foucault's development of the concept of 'discourse'. While he explicitly sought to avoid constructing a universal, all-purpose, 'grand theory' of discourse,⁶⁰ Foucault's general understanding of the concept is that of a highly regulated, yet constantly shifting, assemblage of statements and communicative symbols that serve to construct frameworks for thinking and acting within the world.⁶¹ As Stuart Hall explains, discourse is 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of *representing* the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment'.⁶² Much more so than words and statements, however, Foucault's understanding of discourse is much broader than language, due to the fact that discourses are also constituted in images, symbols and wider material practices that

circulate within society.⁶³ Viewed from this perspective, discourse can be understood as an all-encompassing ‘system of representation’ that attempts to fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world.⁶⁴

But rather than simply represent ‘reality’ and the phenomena within it, however, what is most significant about Foucault’s understanding of this concept is its *productive* nature, and, specifically, the way discourse *constitutes* the very nature of that reality by systematically forming the objects of which it speaks.⁶⁵ As he explains,

discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe (my emphasis).⁶⁶

In this regard, the mere act of representing ‘al-Qaeda’, according to Foucault’s understanding of the concept, serves to engender the al-Qaeda phenomenon itself, by making this dispersed and fragmented entity manifest, nameable and, thus, manageable.⁶⁷

Despite characterising discourse as a highly regulated system of representations, though, Foucault sought to emphasise the fact that discourses are not simply produced by a small minority of ‘elite’ figures and imposed coercively from above, but rather are often unstable and pluralistic in character. As he explains,

discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.⁶⁸

Instead of being fixed or static, therefore, Foucault suggests that discourses should not be regarded as singular, isolated ways of seeing and speaking about ‘reality’, but rather are dynamic sites of continual struggle and contest. As if to underscore such a claim, he referred to discourse as ‘the general domain of *all* statements’, meaning that, alongside the more dominant or hegemonic elements, each discourse contains within it the seeds for a series of rival and oppositional discourses.⁶⁹ Indeed, such

a notion is particularly significant for this study as it serves to highlight the fact that rather than be fixed in form and character, discourses, and the representations they engender, are always undergoing a process of negotiation, contestation and dialogue; whereby meaning is shaped in response to different events or contexts, and the emergence of new identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power.

By way of illustration, one of the most salient examples of a discourse is the complex assemblage of conflicts, political-ideological encounters and semiotic resources that has become known as the ‘war on terror’.⁷⁰ Although we should be clear that it is not self-contained or isolated from other explanatory discourses, in fitting with Foucault’s understanding of this concept, the ‘war on terror’ provides meaning to a range of disparate events so that their various contexts and complexities can be understood through a seemingly singular and unifying framework of knowledge. As Adam Hodges and Chad Nilep point out,

[t]he ‘war on terror’ discourse constrains and shapes public discussion and debate within the US and around the world as societal actors in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere evoke its language to explain, react to, justify or understand a broad range of political, economic and social phenomena.⁷¹

In this regard, the discourse of the ‘war on terror’ can be seen to produce its own forms of language and imagery, in which words such as ‘terrorist’ and ‘jihad’ or images of planes striking the World Trade Centre on September 11th 2001 are imbued with a particular meaning and inserted within a specific framework of understanding. Indeed, this framework draws ‘intertextually’ upon the existing cultural and historical materials that circulate within society, such as those identified by Said as surrounding ‘the East’, ‘Islam’ and non-state ‘terrorism’, for example, making use of these regulated ways of seeing and speaking about the world in order to stabilise knowledge about the conflict and provide its ‘reality’ with meaning. The discourse, moreover, is also generative of a systematic and highly regulated form of knowledge production, in which a particular understanding of ‘terrorism’ has begun to take shape. This is evident, for instance, in the proliferation of literature concerning forms of non-state terrorism,⁷² and in particular the notion of ‘Islamic’ terrorism,⁷³ and the al-Qaeda phenomenon.⁷⁴ Though open to contestation, this body of literature is replete with epistemological and silences

surrounding precisely who and what constitutes ‘terrorism’, thus deflecting attention from acts of political violence carried out by states.⁷⁵

More crucially, however, the discourse of the ‘war on terror’ is also highly productive in the way that it gives rise to its own subjects and objects, creating a series of simplified categories of identity, such as ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’, ‘Self’ and ‘Other’, that can be respectively occupied by those fighting within this conflict. It is in this sense, therefore, that al-Qaeda can be regarded as a phenomenon that emerges from *within* the discourse of the ‘war on terrorism’, as opposed to an entity that exists historically prior to, or separate from, it. As we shall see in the next chapter, the meaning of ‘al-Qaeda’ can be seen to be shaped by the cultural discourses and frameworks of knowledge and power that were first available in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks, and which have developed and expanded over subsequent years. This is not to say that the terror threat is not real, however, but rather that it is only through discourse that ‘al-Qaeda’ acquires a form that renders it coherent and identifiable. Discourse, therefore, helps to render al-Qaeda as an intelligible and, thus, manageable phenomenon.

In light of Foucault’s understanding of discourse, therefore, what is of central analytical importance in this book is the very (*in*)stability of ‘al-Qaeda’ as a discursive category, and the various ‘modes of representation’ that are employed to secure and stabilise its meaning for BBC audiences. Here, following Edward Wheatley, a mode of representation refers to ‘the rhetorical tones and patterns of meaning that inform texts’.⁷⁶ As such, analytical attention will be focused upon the regularities and formations of words and images surrounding ‘al-Qaeda’—that is, the clusters of terms, statements and visual representations appearing within the BBC’s coverage—and the way certain modes of representation are selected at the expense of others. Notably, and in light of the themes identified in the broader literature on the media-state-terrorism literature, attention will also centre upon the broader discourses and frameworks of knowledge used to bring meaning to this entity; such as those surrounding Islam and Orientalism, alongside related issues pertaining to immigration and belonging, for example.

In this sense, one of the most useful strategies for analysing the way discourse manifests itself within news media texts is to focus on the way audiences are positioned in relation to the visual and verbal representations appearing on-screen. Here, Roxanne Lynn Doty’s development of the notion of ‘subject positioning’ offers a particularly effective tool

with which to interrogate this process.⁷⁷ Drawing on Foucault's work, Doty suggests that in order to be widely understood by audiences, and thus accepted as 'true', a discourse must strictly manage and regulate the subjects, objects and representations contained within it by encouraging particular ways of identifying with such phenomena. This means assigning 'subject positions' to those watching and, importantly, those who are being reported on, and then ensuring that these positions are maintained and not compromised in any way. As she explains in relation to the family unit,

a traditional discourse on the family would contain spaces for a subject with traits conventionally defined as 'male' and another kind of subject with traits conventionally defined as 'female'. These subjects would be positioned vis-à-vis one another in a particular way, e.g. female subservient to male. Within the traditional discourse on the family it is impossible to think outside of these categories except in terms of deviance or abnormality.⁷⁸

Though it is important to note that rival discourses can disturb or unseat these positions (such as single-mother/father, adoptive, lesbian, gay or transgender parent families), the dominant 'family' discourse seeks to maintain these seemingly fixed, traditional subject positions in order to provide itself with meaning and structure its understanding of 'reality'.

Despite focusing her analysis on a different context, Doty's example is particularly relevant to BBC's representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon as it enables us to better understand the process through which knowledge about this entity is secured within a news bulletin. For example, in order to provide a report with meaning a 'News at Ten' item may use words such that inadvertently impose subject categories on those being reported on, or contrast images of stereotypically 'non-Western' figures with more 'familiar'-looking and 'conventionally'-dressed members of the political or security establishment, for instance.⁷⁹ While it is difficult to assess exactly how individual audience members will interpret the words and images being used, such subtle forms of positioning will have a significant impact on the way al-Qaeda understood by the BBC's audiences as they narrow the range of understandings and limit opportunities for alternative readings.

Overall, then, in drawing on Foucault's understanding of discourse as a 'system of representations', one that not only gives rise to that which it speaks but also manages, organises and positions the subjects and

objects contained within it, the first part of the conceptual and analytical framework enables us to shed light on the way ‘al-Qaeda’ is made meaningful for ‘News at Ten’ audiences. In so doing, this will help to generate a dynamic picture of the development of the BBC’s representations across the ‘war on terror’ period, and thus provide deeper insight into the extent to which these representations shifted in response to the various spatial, temporal and political contexts in which the broadcaster operated.

ANALYSING THE POLITICAL FUNCTIONS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE BBC’S REPRESENTATIONS: DISPOSITIFS AND TRUTH REGIMES

As noted above, Foucault’s understanding of discourse, and in particular the way they are formed and shaped, explicitly avoids simplistic, hierarchies of control and dominance, viewing processes of representation and knowledge-production, instead, as a sites of continual struggle and contest. Part of the reason for this is because Foucault had a complex, pluralistic understanding of the way power functioned in society.⁸⁰ Power, for Foucault, is not a thing one possesses, but a *relationship*, a ‘multiplicity of force relations’,⁸¹ between a variety of subjects whose involvement is determined on the position they occupy within the field of power/knowledge relations.⁸²

This is not to say, however, that discourses, and the representations they engender, do not function strategically. On the contrary, although Foucault had an intricate understanding of the way power worked, he always maintained an underlying assumption that social subjects possess a minimal level of agency, and that they can appropriate, an albeit limited, range of ways of seeing and speaking about the world in order to further their own strategic interests and objectives.⁸³ As Jonas Hagman explains, when it comes to enacting social and political representations there is always *some* degree of agency involved: ‘[a]t the minimum, agency is required to instantiate representations, and at best, it allows agents to reformulate social representations or to re-appropriate them for alternative ends’.⁸⁴ In this sense, phenomena such as al-Qaeda can be understood to be as much the *product* of political and cultural discourses in as much as they are, themselves, complicit in shaping and perpetuating them.

As such, rather than view discourse simply as an anonymous, all-encompassing force, with no particular shape, logic or direction,⁸⁵ Foucault explicitly called attention to the way particular frameworks of knowledge empowered certain groups within society.⁸⁶ Indeed, his discussion of the ‘formation of strategies’ enabled him to show how certain 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.⁸⁷

In view of the complexities of Foucault’s conception of power, and more specifically *whose* ‘interests’ it serves, the second part of the conceptual and analytical framework centres attention upon the political functions and consequences of the BBC’s representations. In doing so, this allows us, first, to focus on the way mediated representations can be said to serve the strategic interests of various groups engaged in the ‘war on terror’; that is, to consider how they serve both singular and multiple, competing objectives. And, second, helps us consider the broader social, political and cultural consequences that may arise from adopting one mode of representation over and above another.

Particularly useful, in this regard, is the notion of the ‘dispositif’.⁸⁸ Though he never advanced a complete definition of the term, Foucault developed this concept in his later work as a theoretical and methodological tool with which to explain how various forms of power can be understood to shape and influence discourse and their corresponding representations.⁸⁹ Thus, while discourses can be understood to be broad ‘system of representations’, containing the total range of words, images or statements about a given issue, Foucault characterised the dispositif as a complex ‘system of relations’ that exists between an extraordinarily diverse range of discursive and non-discursive phenomena. 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.⁹⁰

Though beyond the control of any single group or individual, dispositifs have a ‘dominant strategic function’ and emerge at a specific historical moments in order to fulfil an urgent political or societal need.⁹¹

Nevertheless, one of the consequences of such a sense of urgency and immediacy is that it brings together a variety of, often conflicting, individuals, groups and institutions into the same social ensemble, who work together, sometimes knowingly, most-times unwittingly, in order to address the problem at hand. In this sense, the dispositif can be viewed, to borrow the terminology employed by William E. Connolly,⁹² as a kind of ‘resonance machine’, in which different political groups and movements come together in ‘emergent and resonant, rather than efficient, relationships’.⁹³ Such an association can be seen to produce common goals and interests that, while sometimes divergent, often orientate themselves towards a common purpose. As Connolly explains, within this social ensemble,

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.⁹⁴

Here, the individual ideological, doctrinal, economic, political or religious differences of each group or element are suppressed as the machine, or in this case the dispositif, gives rise to uncertain and unintended consequences.

While much of the existing literature on this concept has tended 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,⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ So, for example, BBC news coverage of an ‘al-Qaeda’-related incident may draw together a broad range of individuals, institutions and discourses within its reporting; which include, amongst others, journalists, terrorist suspects, politicians, members of the police and security services, toxicologists and terrorism ‘experts’, discourses about Islam, terrorism, asylum and immigration. The relationship established between these heterogeneous elements, and, perhaps more importantly, their resultant representations of the terror threat, can be said to formulate a *dispositif*. Of course, though it is important to recognise the fact that news media institutions such as the BBC form only one part of the *dispositif*, in focusing on the representations and cultural performances that underpin such an ensemble allows us to directly observe the various shifts and transformations, the ‘curves of visibility and... of enunciation’, that help to support and sustain wider social and political structures.⁹⁷

As noted above, in addition to analysing the political functions and strategic interests underpinning the BBC’s representations, the second part of the analytical framework also seeks to consider the broader social, political and cultural consequences that can be said to arise from such portrayals. The reason for this is because Foucault’s understanding of discourse and power-knowledge relations describe processes that are both regulating *and* productive. That is, by helping to construct the boundaries and parameters of meaning for a particular phenomenon, for example, al-Qaeda, discourses establish the ideational conditions in which certain understandings are rendered conceivable, particular configurations of power are made possible, and distinct social actions are rendered appropriate.⁹⁸ This is not to say that discourses and representations function in a strictly positivist sense, for instance, by directly causing certain interpretations or resulting in specific policy outcomes. Our inability to directly experience causation makes it impossible to say for certain whether a particular representation *caused* an audience or policy-related outcomes.⁹⁹ Rather, and perhaps more realistically, discourses, and their representations of the world, help to constitute the frameworks and emergent meaning structures through which a particular set of understandings and actions become possible. As Albert Yee explains, discourses give rise to a limited range of possible outcomes ‘not by directly or inevitably determining them but rather rendering these actions plausible or implausible, acceptable or unacceptable, conceivable or inconceivable’.¹⁰⁰

While it is not possible to account for the total domain of interpretative or policy-related consequences emerging from the BBC's portrayals, something not achievable without recourse to detailed ethnographic research, Foucault's notion of the 'truth regime' provides a useful conceptual and analytical tool with which to consider the way particular modes of representation help to normalise or legitimise certain understandings and counterterrorism policies, thus constituting their 'conditions of possibility'.¹⁰¹ As he explains, 'truth' is not a fixed, permanent or universal state of being, but is, alternatively, something that cultures and societies have to work to produce.¹⁰² In his words,

[t]ruth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.¹⁰³

What becomes known as 'true', therefore, is the outcome of a series of exclusionary practices that function to establish distinctions between what becomes accepted, common-sense knowledge and what is deemed to be false, subjugated knowledge.

Nevertheless, in contrast to Foucault's rather singular and monolithic elaboration of this concept, within contemporary, liberal societies 'truth' is not singular but multiple in its form and effect, producing a number of competing truth regimes.¹⁰⁴ Crucially, it is in the news media where the discursive contest over 'truth' is most evident. As and O'Loughlin point out, news is both regulated and productive in all the ways described by Foucault¹⁰⁵: it is made up of a set of generic features that audiences can readily identify as belonging to the category of 'news'; it engenders a range of subjects—'Western'/'non-Western', 'Self'/'Other'—and objects—'the police', 'the military', 'the government' and 'the terrorists'—that help audiences make sense of, and thus position themselves, in relation to events occurring around the world; and, perhaps most importantly, in order to maintain and provide meaning to its on-screen 'reality', it must employ a set of mechanisms and techniques for verifying and legitimising its version(s) of 'the truth'. In the words of David Graddol,

TV news is both a knowledge system and a genre. That is, the news system represents a particular way of collecting and establishing ‘facts’ which are different from, say, the institutions of science or the courts, and there are conventional ways of organising and presenting these facts on television... In order to accomplish factuality, TV news must work hard to maintain the security of its knowledge-system, must establish the distinctiveness of the genre, and must use all the resources at its disposal for achieving high modality in its presentation.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, this discursive conflict can be seen to be congenital to the BBC’s identity as a ‘truth’-telling institution. As the nation’s foremost public service institution, the broadcaster is required to report on terrorism-related incidents in an independent and objective manner, providing its audiences with sufficient information for them to make democratic, critically informed decisions about the nature of a particular threat and how best to deal with it.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the BBC can be viewed as a site on which multiple, competing truth regimes struggle and vie for dominance.

In summary, in focusing on both the manifest visual and verbal content of the BBC’s representations, and, moreover, their broader, strategic interests and consequences, the two-part conceptual and analytical framework outlined here will work to generate a dynamic picture of the Corporation’s representations across the ‘war on terror’ period. More to the point, however, this framework will provide deeper insight into the way the BBC’s portrayals are themselves constitutive of ‘al-Qaeda’, showing how different spatial, temporal and political contexts produce multiple, competing versions of the terror threat.

CRITICALLY ANALYSING MULTIMODAL REPRESENTATIONS OF ‘AL-QAEDA’: A DETAILED METHODOLOGY

Given the conceptual and analytical focus of this book, that is, its pre-occupation with the manifest visual and verbal content of the BBC’s representations, their political and strategic functions, and the broader discursive consequences of such portrayals, the methodological approach used in this study aims to draw together both multimodal¹⁰⁸ and critical discourse analysis.¹⁰⁹ Rooted in the longer tradition of discourse analysis,¹¹⁰ these two interrelated methodologies help us to, first, better understand the way ‘verbal, visual and aural aspects of a medium

combine or are intentionally combined to achieve particular meanings',¹¹¹ and, second, show how 'relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control' are produced and maintained through visual and verbal forms of language.¹¹² Though in some ways ill-suited to Foucault's sceptical view of 'methodology', a technique he considered to be, itself, a *discourse* that predetermined arguments in the name of power and knowledge,¹¹³ both multimodal and critical discourse analysis can help to shed light on the conditions through which phenomena such as 'al-Qaeda' are made meaningful within media texts.

More to the point, both multimodal and critical forms of discourse analysis aim to expose the social and political practices that a discourse gives rise to, while also considering their discursive and ideological consequences. This view is contingent on the belief that 'texts can never be understood or analysed in isolation—they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context' in which they are created.¹¹⁴ While multimodal and critical of discourse analysis take their starting point as the complex interrelationship that exists between media representations and their social contexts, both approaches are especially useful for examining a wide range of audio-visual representations, particularly when those representations are amenable to considerable change and variability. With this in mind, the following section outlines the key stages through which this multimodal and critical discourse analysis takes place.

In order to begin, the first stage of the analysis involves an initial period of viewing and then *re*-viewing the material; something Stuart Hall refers to as 'soaking'.¹¹⁵ This process facilitates the primary identification of dominant patterns of representation and also enables a preliminary 'mapping out' of the broader discursive features of the BBC's portrayals. At this early stage, Gillian Rose suggests that it is essential that the analyst tries to forget, or disregard, any preconceptions s/he may have about the material, looking at the textual information with, what she terms, '*fresh eyes*'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, as Foucault makes clear, in his own methodological treatise, pre-existing categories and concepts,

must be held in suspense. They must not be rejected definitely, of course, but the tranquillity with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about by themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known and the justifications of which must be scrutinised.¹¹⁷

The central aim of this first stage of the analysis, therefore, is to gain a general understanding of the different ways in which the al-Qaeda phenomenon is represented in the coverage, and, moreover, to identify the moments where one mode of representation appears rather than another.

Following this preliminary stage of the analysis, it is necessary to then begin the more formal process of transcribing and cataloguing the BBC's 'News at Ten' reports. Importantly, this second stage of the investigation helps to manage the ephemeral nature of the televisual flow and ease the extraction of textual and subtextual information from the BBC's bulletins. One methodological strategy that is particularly useful in this regard is an approach outlined by Howard Davies and Paul Walton in their study, 'Death of a Premier: Consensus and Closure in International News' (1983).¹¹⁸ Here, detailed verbal and visual transcripts were generated for each broadcast and then placed alongside each other, in order to aid the analysis of recurrent visual images and themes, as well as metaphors, predicates and other patterns of verbal representation. Nevertheless, while the transcription of verbal content is relatively straightforward, and involves the methodical reproduction of all aspects of the spoken discourse contained within a report, with regard to visual content it is necessary to explain this process in more detail.

Building upon Davies and Walton's initial approach, screen-grab and image-capture software is used to break down the visual flow of the news report, with each new shot, camera angle or cut signalling a new unit of analysis.¹¹⁹ For example, if a sequence of images features Osama bin Laden, a new screen-grab will be taken each time there is a new cut in the sequence or when a camera angle changes. In doing so, this allows the analyst to track the changes within the visual channel of communication, and, thus, link these to shifts in the verbal channel. As Davies and Walton explain, '[w]hen the stills are mounted alongside a transcript of the news script, the initial task of transcription is complete... and it becomes possible to analyse relationships between constituent elements'.¹²⁰ While this strategy is certainly time consuming, with each report often taking several hours to fully transcribe and annotate, it enables us to dissect the continuous flow of the coverage and, importantly, explore the dialectical relationship between televisual words and images.¹²¹ This approach also helps to pin-point the precise moment when a particular word or image coincide or appear to be grouped together within a specific news report, making it easier to understand how 'al-Qaeda' is made meaningful through specific clusters of words

and images, and, moreover, highlight the discursive associations that are established through such assemblages. In addition, this method also facilitates more effective visual analysis, enabling the analyst to pay close attention to the way seemingly benign textual features, such as camera angle, shot sequence, zooming effects, visual framing and composition, or more explicit forms of difference, like dress or physical appearance, serve to help ‘position’ the BBC’s audiences and thus influence their understanding of al-Qaeda. It should be pointed out, however, that the analysis of these detailed visual and verbal transcripts should also be supplemented by periods of *re-viewing* the BBC’s news report as structured wholes, something that will prevent the analysis from losing sight of the broader form and flow of a televisual broadcast.

Once this process of painstakingly collating, transcribing and annotating all aspects of the BBC’s content is complete, a third, and final, phase of the analysis can take place. This involves coding or categorising the various modes of representation that appear within the BBC’s coverage in a more targeted and theoretically-informed manner. In particular, coding categories will be established in line with existing academic debates surrounding media representations of al-Qaeda and the broader phenomenon of ‘Islamic’ terrorism. For example, in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, a BBC correspondent might describe al-Qaeda as ‘an umbrella network of Islamic militants’,¹²² or characterise the perpetrators, more generally, as ‘Islamic extremists’,¹²³ ‘fanatical terrorists’¹²⁴ or ‘enemies of the civilised world’,¹²⁵ these terms will be grouped together under the same category, due to the fact that they call upon the same discursive repository. Similarly, if such labels appear alongside stereotypical images of bearded, keffiyeh-wearing ideologues or masked fighters training in a dusty, ‘non-Western’ setting, the images will also be considered as part of the same coding category. Whether intended or not, such words and images call into play a set of culturally-ingrained discourses surrounding Islam, terrorism and violence, which, in turn, help to stabilise the meaning of ‘al-Qaeda’ for news audiences within a seemingly familiar, and culturally recognisable, mode of representation.¹²⁶ More crucially, this final stage also involves reflecting on the broader social, political and cultural consequences that can be said to arise from these modes of visual and verbal representation. As Richard Jackson points out, one of the fundamental aims of any discourse analysis is to understand and interrogate ‘the politics of representation’, and in particular ‘the manifest political consequences of adopting one mode of representation over another’.¹²⁷

It should be emphasised, however, that discourse-analytical methods are not without their problems. Most significant of these relates to the subjective nature of the analysis, and the fact that there is no singular, or ‘true’, interpretation of a text.¹²⁸ As Gadi Wolfsfeld puts it, ‘[a]ttempting to interpret systematically other people’s interpretations is a risky way to make a living’, and, as such, there is always the possibility that the categories of representation identified in the analysis are likely to result from the interpretive bias of the researcher.¹²⁹ On a similar level, as an entirely ‘text’-based form of enquiry, discourse analysis is often conducted in isolation from the wider social relationships in which news texts are produced, consumed and negotiated.¹³⁰ That said, however, by 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.¹³¹

CASE SELECTION AND NEWS GENRE

Despite disproportionate levels of media and political attention, al-Qaeda’s terrorism is episodic and rarely occurs in Western nations such as Britain.¹³² As such, rather than carry out an expansive, longitudinal study into the way al-Qaeda has been represented throughout the entire ‘war on terror’ period, something that would result in broad, yet thinly researched study, the focus here will be on the analysis of four chronological case studies: the September 11th 2001 attacks, the 2003 Wood Green ricin plot, the July 7th 2005 London transport bombings, and the May 2nd 2011 capture and killing of Osama bin Laden.

For John Gerring, a case study is ‘*an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units*’ (emphasis in original).¹³³ In this manner, each case study, or ‘unit’, provides a specific level of insight into the broader issue of how the BBC sought to represent the al-Qaeda phenomenon during the ‘war on terror’ period. Indeed, as Robert K. Yin has noted, case studies are one of the best research strategies to adopt when seeking to analyse complex ‘individual, group, organizational, and social, political, and related phenomena’,¹³⁴ and, more crucially, when ‘the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’.¹³⁵ Such a methodological focus fits well with the central argument developed across the four subsequent chapters; namely, that ‘al-Qaeda’ is a phenomenon that emerges *within* the BBC’s news coverage, rather than exist separately from it.

For each case, two weeks of broadcasts were sourced and analysed through the British Film Institute and British Universities Film and Video Council's extensive archives, where off-air recordings of 'News at Ten' bulletins are recorded and stored for the public record. This material was also supplemented by piloted research sessions in smaller archives housed at universities in Cardiff, Glasgow and Manchester. While analysing two week blocs of news bulletins might seem a relatively small amount of material, especially when compared to recent quantitative studies of news media content,¹³⁶ the analytical and methodological expertise required for such projects are less suitable for uncovering the kinds of sub-textual, discursive meanings which emerge only from close, qualitative readings of smaller corpuses of media texts.¹³⁷

More specifically, each of the case studies analysed here have been selected due to the fact that they highlight 'paradigmatic' characteristics in regard to the way the al-Qaeda phenomenon has been represented over the course of the 'war on terror' period.¹³⁸ For example, Chapter 3 focuses in great detail on the shifting nature of the BBC's representations due to the fact that the September 11th 2001 attacks were the first event during the 'war on terror' period in which al-Qaeda was visually and verbally represented for the BBC's audiences. This event, therefore, provides a significant level of insight into the way 'al-Qaeda' took shape during the early stages of this conflict, and, in particular, the various discursive struggles that resulted over what this phenomenon is and what its adherents look like. Similarly, Chapter 4 focuses on the power relations underpinning the BBC's representations due to the fact that the Wood Green events best illustrate the extent to which the BBC's coverage can serve multiple, conflicting agendas. Chapter 5 focuses on the discursive consequences that can be said to arise from particular modes of representation due to the fact that the London transport bombings have had the most significant and lasting implications for counterterrorism policy in the United Kingdom. Indeed, the coverage of this event stands to exemplify many of the key features of the BBC's reporting during this period, and, as such, provides a clear platform from which to assess the different policy and audience-related consequences that emerge from these representations. Finally, while all of the empirical chapters focus on the broader representational shifts within the BBC's reporting, Chapter 6 focuses on the way its visual and verbal portrayals have changed in the aftermath of the death of Osama bin Laden. Despite each taking place in different spatial, temporal and political contexts, the diverse range of case

studies analysed here provides significant insight into the ways in which ‘al-Qaeda’ has been produced by the BBC across different stages of the ‘war on terror’.

Given the fact that these case studies deal with very different types of ‘al-Qaeda’-related incident (for example, a spectacular terrorist attack, an alleged terror plot, a case of multiple, synchronised suicide bombings, and the assassination of a high-profile terrorist suspect), it is important to pay close attention to the different genres that accompany each event, as their inherent stylistic features, tropes and conventions may impact upon subsequent portrayals. In the broadest sense, genre functions as an organising mechanism that subtly alters the role that the news media serve during the reporting of terrorism-related events. According to Hoskins and O’Loughlin, many of the events analysed for this book can be said to fall within the broad, all-encompassing genre of ‘security journalism’.¹³⁹ As they define it,

[n]ews reporting, in the form of security journalism, has performed some predictable functions in British society and culture... It has delivered regular representations of terrorist threats to a presumed national audience, showing ‘us’ the threat ‘we’ face, by offering coverage of Al-Qaeda leaders’ speeches, bomb attempts, criminal trials and ‘radical’ protesters in Britain.¹⁴⁰

While analytically and methodologically useful, research by Altheide¹⁴¹ and Flood et al.¹⁴² disaggregate this broad, overarching category by identifying a number of constituent features to terrorism-related news genres.

For example, Altheide suggests that ‘event type’ reports, which typically focus on emerging terrorism-related incidents such as plots and attacks, primarily function to the advantage of governments, due to the fact that they draw much of their information from elite sources and work with definitions and representations of terrorist groups that are closely aligned with ‘official’ perspectives.¹⁴³ Even here, however, and as noted within the literature on the media-state-terrorism relationship, not all events are alike, and certain factors such as the proximity or distance of an incident may impact upon the nature of the coverage and the role news media are expected to play.

By contrast, ‘topic type’ reports, which Altheide suggests are associated with some of the broader themes and issues that surround such

events, work more readily in the interests of news audiences since they provide greater levels of contextual information and engage in deeper levels of analysis.¹⁴⁴ So, for example, the BBC's role would be expected to differ greatly when reporting on an al-Qaeda-related attack, where the immediate emphasis is on preserving the basic structure and core values of a society,¹⁴⁵ as compared to reporting on the trial and sentencing of an al-Qaeda suspect, where the attention, though still focused on strengthening societal values, would be expected to be less urgent and more focused on providing the broader picture to such events.¹⁴⁶

More recent research by Flood et al. have brought these categories up to date. In particular, they identify a range of emergent news genres and format types present in news reporting of 'Islam'-related events, many of which focus on BBC coverage of instances of 'Islamic' terrorism. Here, for example, they identify a number of micro-genres, ranging from *'the terror incident'*, *'the terror alert'*, *'the legal story'*, *'the counter-terror initiative'*, and *'the analytical report'*, which help to organise and structure contemporary forms of security journalism.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, given the fact that many of the events analysed within this book fall within these generic categories, they are adopted, here, to help to shed further light on the way 'al-Qaeda' is made meaningful through apparently benign stylistic tropes and conventions.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH STRATEGIES

While the main focus of the book is on the analysis of BBC 'News at Ten' representations, in order to make sense of the overall findings and place them in context a number of secondary research strategies were employed. The first of which sought to examine speeches, statements, press conferences and broadcast material issued by both the British government and the al-Qaeda phenomenon during the overall time-frame covered in the analysis. In the case of the British government, this involved looking at speeches, press statements and policy documents that were issued in the two weeks after each event. 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 and other senior politicians are archived for the public record. These documents were vital in helping to establish the strategic objectives and interests of the British government during this period.

In terms 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 considered across the total period under analysis (2001–2011), rather than the two weeks after each event. 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.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, though it is important to acknowledge the limitations and inherent biases within any act of translation, this body of work constitutes the most authoritative texts on al-Qaeda's political and religious motivations.

A final research strategy involved conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 current and former BBC journalists and editors.¹⁴⁹ While we should be clear that such interviews merely offer an additional layer of institutionalised discourse to the analysis, they nonetheless provide deeper insight into the processes of news media production at the BBC, and thus shed light on the representational choices open to its reporters and editors when reporting on 'al-Qaeda'-related news events.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been, first, to discuss the key literature concerning news media representations of al-Qaeda, and the media-state-terrorism relationship more broadly, and, second, to construct an original conceptual and analytical framework through which to analyse the BBC's representations of 'al-Qaeda'. As we have seen, despite a significant amount of scholarly attention to the relationship between journalists, politicians and terrorists in the years after the September 11th 2001 attacks, it is remarkable that so little of this research has focused on the representational practices underpinning portrayals of al-Qaeda. Indeed, for those who have, there appears to be a lack of attention to both the visual *and* verbal aspects of such portrayals, and a wider confusion regarding the political functions and consequences of these representations. Building on this existing scholarship, the chapter has also outlined an original conceptual and analytical framework through which to consider the BBC's representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. As discussed, this framework builds upon the work of Michel Foucault and

focuses, first, on the manifest visual and verbal content of the BBC's representations and, second, on the political functions and consequences of such portrayals.

With these perspectives in mind, it is the aim of the following chapter to make use of the first component of the conceptual and analytical framework in order to investigate the visual and verbal representations of 'al-Qaeda' that appeared in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks.

NOTES

1. Richard Jackson, 'Constructing Enemies: "Islamic Terrorism" in Political and Academic Discourse', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2007), p. 417.
2. See Alex Schmid & Janny De Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage, 1982); Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism': Political Violence in Popular Culture* (London: Comedia, 1983); A. Odasuo Alai & Kenoye Kelvin Eke (eds.), *Media Coverage of Terrorism: Methods of Diffusion* (London: Sage, 1991); Pippa Norris et al. (eds.), *Framing Terroris: The News Media, the Government, and the Public* (London: Routledge, 2003); David L. Paletz & Alex P. Schmid (eds.), *Terrorism and the Media* (London: Sage, 1992); Ian Ross, 'Deconstructing the Terrorism—News Media Relationship', *Crime, Media, Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2007), pp. 215–225; and Des Freedman & Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media and Terrorism: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2012), for an overview.
3. See Gabriel Weimann & Hans-Bernd Bronsius, 'The Newsworthiness of International Terrorism', *Communication Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1991), p. 334.
4. See Alex Schmid & Janny De Graaf, *Violence as Communication: Insurgent Terrorism and the Western News Media* (London: Sage, 1982), for example.
5. See Bethami Dobkin, 'The Television Terrorist', in J. David Slocum (ed.), *Terrorism, Media, Liberation* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), pp. 128–131.
6. This is an issue that has spawned a voluminous body of work in its own right: See, Eqbal Ahmad, *Terrorism: Theirs and Ours* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001); Michael V. Bhatia, 'Fighting Words: Naming Terrorists, Bandits, Rebels, and Other Violent Actors', *Third World Quarterly*,

- Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005), pp. 5–22; and Omar Malik, *Enough of the Definition of Terrorism* (London: Chatham House, 2000), for some insightful examples.
7. David L. Paletz et al., ‘Terrorism on Television News: The IRA, the FALN, and the Red Brigades’, in William C. Adams (eds.), *Television Coverage of International Affairs* (Norwood: Ablex, 1982), p. 162. See also David L. Paletz et al., ‘The IRA, the FALN, and the Red Brigades in the *New York Times*’, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (1982), pp. 162–171, for example.
 8. David L. Paletz et al., ‘Terrorism on Television News’, p. 162.
 9. See Daniel Hallin, *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Edward Herman & Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988); W. Lance Bennett, ‘Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States’, *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (1990), pp. 103–127; John Zaller & Dennis Chiu, ‘Government’s Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises, 1945–1991’, *Political Communication*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1996), pp. 385–405; Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News, Foreign Policy and Intervention* (London: Routledge, 2002), for example.
 10. See Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Arnold, 1995), p. 40. See also Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News From the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
 11. Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising ‘Terrorism’: Political Violence in Popular Culture* (London: Comedia, 1983).
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 167. Schlesinger et al., describe the ‘official’ perspective as ‘the set of views, arguments, explanations and policy suggestions advanced by those who speak for the state. The key users of these official definitions of terrorism are government ministers, conservative politicians and top security personnel. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
 15. See Christopher Flood et al., ‘Between Ideology and Impartiality: The BBC’s Paradoxical Remit and the Case of Islam-Related Television News’, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), pp. 221–238. See also Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
 16. Greg Philo (ed.), *The Glasgow Media Group Reader Volume 2: Industry, Economy, War and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
 17. Justin Lewis, ‘News and the Empowerment of Citizens’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2006), pp. 303–319.

18. Mike Berry, 'The *Today* Programme and the Banking Crisis', *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013), pp. 253–270.
19. See Glasgow University Media Group, *War and Peace News* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985); Greg Philo & Mike Berry, *Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); *More Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), for notable examples.
20. See Robert M. Entman, 'Framing: Towards a Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1993), p. 52. See also Pippa Norris et al., *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government and the Public* (London: Routledge, 2003); Zizi Papacharissi & Maria de Fatima Olivera, 'News Frames Terrorism: A Comparative Analysis of Frames Employed in Terrorism Coverage in U.S. and U.K. Newspapers', *International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2008), pp. 52–74; Stephen D. Reece & Seth C. Lewis, 'Framing the War on Terror: The Internalization of Policy in the U.S. Press', *Journalism*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (2009), pp. 777–797; and Jamie Matthews, 'Framing Alleged Islamist Plots: A Case Study of British Press Coverage Since 9/11', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2015), pp. 266–283, for example.
21. Pippa Norris et al., *Framing Terrorism*, p. 3.
22. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counter Terrorism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 4.
23. Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terror: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2005), p. 172.
24. Stephen D. Reece & Seth C. Lewis, 'Framing the War on Terror', p. 777.
25. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
27. See Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict*; Regina Lawrence, *The Politics of Force: News and the Construction of Police Brutality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Steven Livingston & W. Lance Bennett, 'Gatekeeping, Indexing and Live-Event News: Is Technology Altering the Construction of News', *Political Communication*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2003), pp. 363–380; Piers Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, pp. 47–50, for an overview.
28. Steven Livingston & W. Lance Bennett, 'Gatekeeping, Indexing and Live-Event News', pp. 364–365.
29. Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict*, p. 25.
30. See Moran Yarchi et al., 'Promoting Stories About Terrorism to the International News Media: A Study of Public Diplomacy', *Media, War and Conflict*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2013), p. 267.

31. Steven Livingston & W. Lance Bennett, 'Gatekeeping, Indexing and Live-Event News', p. 376.
32. See Justin Lewis, 'Terrorism and News Narratives', in Des Freedman & Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media and Terrorism*, pp. 257–270.
33. Des Freedman & Daya Kishan Thussu (eds.), *Media and Terrorism*, p. 2.
34. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003). See also *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997).
35. See Stuart Hall, 'The West and the Rest', in Stuart Hall & Bram Gieben (eds.), *Formations of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), pp. 185–225.
36. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 347.
37. See Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999); Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Robert Irwin, *The Lust for Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Penguin, 2006), for example.
38. Mirt Komel, 'Re-orientalizing the Assassins in Western Historical-Fiction Literature: Orientalism and Self-orientalism in Bartol's *Alamut*, Tarr's *Alamut*, Boschert's *Assassins of Alamut* and Oden's *Lion of Cairo*', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2013), p. 528. See also Ajaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 172.
39. See Jared Ahmad, 'Nightmarish Visions? Shifting Visual Representations of the "Islamic" Terrorist throughout the "War on Terror"', in Sanaz Fotouhi & Medhi Zeiny (eds.), *Seen and Unseen: Visual Cultures of Imperialism* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 55–78, for example.
40. See Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, 'Remediating Jihad for Western News Audiences', *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), pp. 199–216.
41. See Ben O'Loughlin & Mina al-Lami, 'Jihadists Try to Make Friends on Facebook', *The Guardian* (January 12th 2009). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jan/12/facebook-jihadis> (Accessed May 30th 2017). See also Nathan Roger, *Image Warfare in the War on Terror* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Zohar Kampf & Tamar Liebes, *Transforming media Coverage of Violent Conflicts: The New Face of War* (Hampshire; Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), for further examples.
42. See Juan Carlos Antúnez & Ioannis Tellingis, 'The Power of Words: The Deficient Terminology Surrounding Islam-Related Terrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2013), pp. 118–139; Katherine Brown, 'Muriel's Wedding: News Media Representations of Europe's First Female Suicide Bombing', *European Journal of*

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43. Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 247.
 44. See Mark Featherstone et al., ‘Discourses of the War on Terror: Constructions of the Islamic Other After 7/7’, *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2010), p. 20 (Author’s original copy).
 45. Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security, and Television News* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 254–255.
 46. See Andrew Hill, ‘The Bin Laden Tapes’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2006), pp. 35–46; Susan Jeffords & Fahed al-Sumait (eds.), *Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World’s Most Wanted Man* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015), for examples.
 47. Samuel P. Winch, ‘Constructing an “Evil Genius”’: News Uses of Mythic Archetypes to Make Sense of Bin Laden’, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2005), p. 296.
 48. Myra Macdonald, *Exploring Media Discourse* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 184–185.
 49. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
 50. Hania Nashef, ‘The Blurring of Boundaries: Images of Abjection as the Terrorist and the Reel Arab Intersect’, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2011), pp. 351–368.
 51. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O’Loughlin, ‘Remediating Jihad for Western News Audiences: The Renewal of Gatekeeping’, *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), pp. 199–216.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
 53. Michael Griffin, ‘Picturing America’s “War on Terrorism” in Afghanistan and Iraq: Photographic Motifs as News Frames’, *Journalism*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2004), p. 384. See also David Machin, ‘Visual Discourses of

- War: Multimodal Analysis of Photographs of the Iraq Occupation', in Adam Hodges & Chad Nilep (eds.), *Discourse, War and Terrorism*, pp. 123–142; and Katy Parry, 'Media Visualisation of Conflict: Studying News Imagery in 21st Century Wars', *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2010), pp. 417–429, for further analysis.
54. Susan Jeffords & Fahed al-Sumait (eds.), *Covering Bin Laden*, p. xii.
 55. Ibid.
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149. The BBC journalists and editors interviewed for the book were as follows: Ben Brown, Jeremy Bowen, Gordon Corera, Mark Easton, Margaret Gilmore, David Jordan, Paul Lashmar, Aleem Maqbool, Jim Muir, Stephen Sackur, Keith Somerville and Peter Taylor. Due to a number of factors, one correspondent asked to remain anonymous in the final text.



The September 11th 2001 Attacks

As noted in the Introduction, despite the fact that al-Qaeda had ‘existed’ in some form or another for almost ten years prior to this event, the attacks of September 11th 2001 have done more than any other to shape Western understandings of this phenomenon. Indeed, it was in the aftermath of this event that the term ‘al-Qaeda’ began to acquire meaning, developing, as we shall see, out of an assemblage of words, images, symbols, narratives and explanatory discourses that would begin to constitute the very reality of the terror threat. While this event has already received a considerable level of academic and scholarly attention,¹ as noted in the previous chapter, very few studies have sought to specifically analyse news media representations of al-Qaeda during this period,² and in particular both the visual and verbal dimensions of such portrayals.

With this in mind, the chapter focuses on the way in which the BBC sought to represent al-Qaeda for British audiences in the immediate aftermath of the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. Its central argument is that, in the absence of any existing ontological and epistemological framework for knowing and understanding ‘al-Qaeda’, the BBC’s representations function as a dynamic and continually shifting site upon which a range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend. In particular, three competing modes of visual and verbal representation are identified in the analysis, which each correspond to a different understanding of the terror

threat. These are labelled the ‘Islamic’ mode, the ‘Personalised’ mode and the ‘Elusive’ mode of representation. More to the point, the analysis shows how these portrayals simultaneously draw upon and challenge the dominant discourses surrounding Islam, non-state terrorism, and the identities of terrorism suspects, providing the BBC’s audiences with a variety of often conflicting ways of seeing and speaking about this entity. In doing so, the chapter offers significant insight into the representational practices adopted by the broadcaster during the opening stages of the ‘war on terror’.

The chapter begins with a brief historical background to the September 11th 2001 attacks, providing information about the origins of the plot, its various stages of planning and preparation, and the backgrounds of those who executed it. It then moves to offer a broad overview of the BBC’s coverage, with technical information, such as report times and running order, supplied alongside more specific details about the broadcaster’s overall narrative to these events. Following this, the empirical analysis explores the three dominant modes of representation identified within the Corporation’s reporting and their implications for understanding al-Qaeda. It should be pointed out, however, that despite being analysed separately here, the boundaries separating these conflicting, at times complementary, modes of representation are porous and continually changing within the BBC’s coverage.

BACKGROUND TO THE SEPTEMBER 11TH 2001 ATTACKS

On the morning of September 11th 2001, three hijacked American airliners struck iconic targets in New York and Washington, with a final plane, believed to have been brought down when passengers overcame the hijackers, downed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. While the seemingly random nature of the attacks forced many to question who would carry out such an assault, many of those within the security services believed they were far from unexpected.³ The culmination of over three years of detailed planning, the attacks were carried out by nineteen hijackers—fifteen from Saudi Arabia, one from Egypt, one from Lebanon and two from the United Arab Emirates—who were each associated with the Saudi-born dissident Osama bin Laden.

Although unfamiliar to most British television audiences at the time, bin Laden had been quietly waging war against the United States for the previous ten years. Although his list of grievances encompassed

a vast historical trajectory, it was the presence of U.S. soldiers in Saudi Arabia, land of the two holiest sites in Islam, which most impelled bin Laden to action. In a series of communiqués throughout the 1990s, bin Laden and others sought to highlight the United States' military and civilian presence in Saudi Arabia, alongside its support of a host of dictatorial governments throughout the Middle East and military and economic backing of Israel, as the most decisive issues affecting the 'Muslim world'.⁴ His later 'World Islamic Front Statement Urging Jihad against Jews and Crusaders' (1998) contained a more explicit call to 'kill the Americans and plunder them of their possessions wherever and whenever they find them'.⁵ Alongside his public pronouncements, high profile attacks on U.S. targets in Kenya (1998), Tanzania (1998) and Yemen (2000) brought bin Laden further levels of media attention, funding and recruits. As one of a number of similar groups operating in Afghanistan at this time, al-Qaeda distinguished itself by focusing its terrorism on the United States, or what was referred to as the 'far enemy'.⁶ Indeed, despite comprising only a few hundred supporters, and resembling a small private army,⁷ this period saw al-Qaeda in its most organised, centralised and potent form.⁸

In particular, bin Laden's simple narrative resonated with a small group of students based around the al-Quds mosque in central Hamburg. Over the course of several months the group, initially consisting of Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Mohamed Atta and Marwan al-Shehhi, began to cultivate an increasingly narrow world-view, something that led them to make a collective decision to seek out opportunities to take part in 'jihad'. In early 1998 it is believed that the three men travelled to Afghanistan. On arrival, however, they were quickly singled out: Their close friendship, proficient knowledge of English, experience of life in the West, and, most importantly, lack of involvement in any criminal or terrorist-related activities, presented those in charge of the training camps with an unforeseen opportunity. The group were placed under the supervision of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, a Kuwaiti-born, 'freelance' militant,⁹ who had, two years earlier, approached bin Laden in order to obtain funding for an operation involving flying hijacked airliners into famous American landmarks.¹⁰ A rigorous training programme followed, at the end of which the group were summoned by bin Laden, who informed them personally that they were to become martyrs in a monumental attack against the United States.¹¹

On return to Germany, the group began enrolling on flight training programmes in the United States. They began arriving in America in January 2000. While these initial arrivals underwent separate flight training programmes in aviation schools in Arizona, San Diego, and Florida, bin Laden and his lieutenants selected 13 additional ‘muscle hijackers’ from training camps in Afghanistan. This second group began arriving in the United States in April 2001, where they were met by Atta and al-Shehhi and then organised into four teams according to English-speaking ability and experience of life in Western countries. Few of these men knew any of the details of the operation. The hijackers were instructed by Ramzi bin al-Shibh, one of the overall commanders of the operation, to avoid extremist circles and appear ‘clean shaven and well dressed’, so as to work against the expected stereotype of the ‘Islamic’ terrorist and thus avoid being singled out by security guards.¹² The targets were selected by Khaled Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi bin al-Shibh, and the date of the attack was chosen by Atta.¹³

At 8.46 a.m. on the morning of September 11th 2001, Atta flew American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. Seventeen minutes later, at 9.03 a.m., a second plane, United Airlines Flight 175, piloted by al-Shehhi, flew into the South Tower. While the world’s attention focused upon the events happening in New York, in Arlington, Virginia, American Airlines Flight 77, piloted by Hani Hanjour, crashed into the Pentagon. Finally, United Airlines Flight 93, flown by Ziad Jarrah, is believed to have been brought down by passengers in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at approximately 10.03 a.m. Nearly 3000 people were killed in the attacks, including the 246 people on the hijacked planes. The date coincided with the fifth anniversary of the conviction of Ramzi Yousef for his attempted bombing of the World Trade Centre in 1993.

OVERVIEW OF THE BBC’S ‘NEWS AT TEN’ COVERAGE

In order to gain insight into the way the al-Qaeda phenomenon was first represented by the BBC, two weeks’ worth of ‘News at Ten’ broadcasts were viewed, transcribed and analysed (September 11th–24th 2001). In total, over 9 hours of continual news coverage were examined, of which 29 reports dealt with either Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda or the search for the suspected hijackers more broadly. Due to the nature of the events occurring in America and elsewhere, in the first three days

of reporting the BBC extended the running time of its evening news programme from 30 to 45 minutes in order to cover the events in more detail. Despite this however, it is clear from the reporting that the Corporation's journalists and presenters struggled to find, in the words of Hoskins and O'Loughlin, an 'immediate, adequate, and consensual template through which to comprehend and also mitigate the attacks'.¹⁴ As the BBC's Ben Brown recalls,

[i]t is hard to emphasise now the way it made the world stop. And it did that in a way that hardly any other world event had ever done before in my lifetime. It was staggering, you know, watching the horror of what had happened, the number of people killed, and the then watching the collapse of those iconic towers.¹⁵

During this period, the BBC's reports covered a range of topics, fluctuating from items dealing with the search for missing people, the impact of the attacks on wider American society, the range of possible responses the United States might adopt, alongside the broader significance of these events for international relations, and, most importantly, the search for the hijackers and those who supported them. Notably, the items centring upon those responsible averaged around the 3 minute mark, with the longest appearing on September 11th 2001 itself and running at 4 minutes and 25 seconds long.¹⁶ The running order for these reports shifted throughout the period viewed, with pieces on the hijackers, bin Laden and al-Qaeda generally appearing within the first 3 or 4 reports. Crucially, aside from vague references to its 'anti-Americanism'¹⁷ and its hatred of 'U.S. foreign policy',¹⁸ not a single BBC bulletin sought to explicitly discuss al-Qaeda's own aims and grievances during the coverage, despite this information being available via bin Laden's high-profile interviews with Western journalists and widely accessible interviews with Pakistani and Arab media outlets. Similarly, despite showing repeated scenes from al-Qaeda propaganda videos and interviews with Osama bin Laden, neither bin Laden nor any other al-Qaeda operative can be heard to speak in any of the BBC's reports, a factor most likely influenced by the BBC's strict editorial guidelines for broadcasting material from terrorist propaganda videos.¹⁹

Notably, the term 'al-Qaeda' appears a total of 12 times over the entire two week bloc of recordings (with a mere 3 mentions during the first week of coverage and 9 in the second) and the phrase 'war on terror'

surfaces in 11 reports (with an increase in prominence after Tony Blair's declaration that 'Britain is at war with terrorism' during the September 16th 2001 broadcast). For those covering the attacks for the BBC, the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding labels such as 'al-Qaeda' had a significant impact upon their ability to explain to audiences who had carried out such an attack. As Stephen Sackur recalls,

as a former Middle East correspondent, I knew about bin Laden and his group, and had previously reported on his activities. But for many of us at the BBC, the term 'al-Qaeda' just wasn't widely used at the time and it didn't really mean anything to our audiences. We were much more used to reporting on other organisations like Islamic Jihad or Gamma Islamiya, groups that had a clearly defined structure, organisation and reputation on the international stage.²⁰

As we shall see, the exceptional nature of the September 11th 2001 attacks, the strangeness of the term 'al-Qaeda', and absence of any existing ontological and epistemological frameworks of understanding, ensures that the BBC's initial representations of serve as a site on which an array of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power struggle and contend. And, as a result, a number of different 'al-Qaedas' are made manifest within the BBC's reporting. Indeed, despite being presented in the following sections as three distinct modes of representation, what is most apparent about the BBC's portrayals is their porous and internally contradictory nature, with one mode of representation feeding into and, often, contradicting another.

THE 'ISLAMIC' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

What is immediately apparent about the first few days of coverage is the way al-Qaeda is constructed through a framework that appears to formulate clear associations between Islam, religious fanaticism and terrorism. Though it is important to point out that this mode of representation is temporary, and indeed swiftly moderated by the BBC, it would appear that in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks the most accessible framework for understanding 'al-Qaeda' is one that closely corresponds to Said's conception of Orientalism (1978). So, for example, during the first four days of coverage there are a series of descriptions of Osama bin Laden as a 'wealthy Arab fundamentalist',²¹

an ‘Islamic fundamentalist’,²² and an ‘Islamic militant’,²³ appearing alongside characterisations of al-Qaeda more generally as a group of ‘Arab fundamentalists’,²⁴ ‘Islamic and extremist groups’,²⁵ a ‘network of Islamic militants’,²⁶ ‘Islamic terrorists’,²⁷ ‘anti-American groups’,²⁸ ‘fanatical terrorists’,²⁹ ‘the fanatics’,³⁰ ‘the terrorist fanatics’,³¹ ‘disciples’,³² ‘Osama bin Laden’s followers’,³³ or, simply, ‘the followers’³⁴ and ‘enemies of the civilized world’.³⁵ As if to further emphasise al-Qaeda’s ‘fanaticism’ and ‘extremism’, and thus further conflate this entity with the notion of ‘Islamic’ terror more generally, within these early broadcasts there is very little discussion of al-Qaeda’s political aims or grievances, save for a number of vague, general statements, such as bin Laden ‘has vowed to destroy the United States’,³⁶ that he is ‘known to fund and train a network of anti-American terror groups’,³⁷ and that he ‘calls upon his followers to strike at America and Israel’.³⁸ These early statements are frequently accompanied during the coverage by grainy scenes from the *State of the Ummah* propaganda feature, an influential publicity film commissioned by bin Laden in early 2001, in which scores of masked, heavily armed militants are seen engaged training activities in the dusty Afghan hinterland.³⁹ As a result, ‘al-Qaeda’ is constituted, at least initially, as a dangerously atavistic, fanatical and religiously-motivated threat.

In particular, the ‘Islamic’ mode of representation can be seen in its most concentrated form during George Eykyn’s September 11th 2001 report.⁴⁰ Appearing third in the running order and lasting a total of 4 minutes and 25 seconds, the report, in a somewhat predictable fashion, opens with footage of a number of Palestinians firing guns into the air and loudly celebrating the ‘horror and carnage’ in the United States.⁴¹ Though these scenes are swiftly moderated by reference to Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat’s condemnation of the attacks,⁴² Said’s assertion that Arab people and cultures are most often represented through frameworks centring upon violence, irrationality and anti-Westernism finds significant support here.⁴³ Here, as if to further emphasise this point, the report quickly moves onto a brief interview segment with security analyst Paul Beaver, in which he suggests that ‘American pilots would not do this, but Arab fundamentalists may well be prepared to’.⁴⁴ Such scenes serve as a discursive preface to the following aspect of the report dealing with Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda phenomenon.

Echoing Beaver’s reductive pronouncement, and, moreover, invoking another Orientalist-inspired cliché, Eykyn introduces bin Laden as

a ‘wealthy Arab fundamentalist’, who ‘controls and finances al-Qaeda; an umbrella network of Islamic militants’.⁴⁵ Here, coinciding with the first appearance of the term ‘al-Qaeda’ during the BBC’s coverage,⁴⁶ the visuals depict bin Laden, bearded, bescarved, and wearing a military-style flak jacket, during an interview with Al-Jazeera’s Jamal Ismail.⁴⁷ Significantly, these images provide the BBC’s audiences with a potent visual manifestation of the term ‘al-Qaeda’, with bin Laden’s image standing to further emphasise the notion of ‘Islamic’ militancy, by way of his plain white turban, often worn by religious clerics, and his AK47 and faded military jacket. Indeed, at this stage in the BBC’s coverage, ‘al-Qaeda’ can be understood to be synonymous with the Saudi figure. Nevertheless, while the report goes on to offer a chronology of previous, al-Qaeda-related attacks on American targets, what is particularly significant about Eykyn’s report is the way in which bin Laden is positioned in relation to the BBC’s audiences and the other subjects appearing on screen.

As noted in the previous chapter, Doty describes how, in order to be widely understood a discourse must strictly manage and regulate the subjects and objects it constitutes, positioning one set of subjects in relation to an ‘Other’.⁴⁸ As she explains, ‘[w]hat defines a particular kind of subject is, in large part, the relationships that subject is positioned relative to other kinds of subjects’, something which helps audiences to understand, and identify with, those depicted on screen.⁴⁹ While this is typically discussed by way of reference to written or spoken forms of discourse, this brief report shows how subject positioning can also be powerfully enacted through visual images and, significantly, by way of forms of dress. In particular, this can be seen in the way the BBC inadvertently juxtaposes a short interview segment with Beaver alongside footage of bin Laden. The contrast between these two figures is stark; with Beaver pictured in a modern, urban setting and wearing a grey suit, and an ascetically-dressed bin Laden emerging out of a mud-bricked building into a chaotic scene of masked, heavily armed fighters. Though we should be clear that the BBC would struggle to find any images of the Saudi in which he is not seen wearing such clothing, bin Laden’s non-‘Western’ dress and appearance function discursively as a visual marker of his backwardness and fanaticism. This ‘traditional’ clothing is also supplemented in other reports, particularly those taken from al-Qaeda’s own propaganda videos, where he is pictured wearing the ceremonial *bisht*, a long brown woollen cloak typically worn by

Islamic scholars or the Saudi ruling classes,⁵⁰ or a faded, military-style camouflage jacket.⁵¹

The quality of the image confers an additional level of legitimacy onto the security analyst, in which a steady, brightly-lit profile shot of Beaver is swiftly followed by grainy, hand-held footage of bin Laden. While we should note that it is not clear whether such a severe contrasting of images is intended by the BBC, the opposition between these two figures serves to visually enact a form of subject positioning, in which the rational, expert-driven mindset of Modernity, typified by the contemporary setting and Beaver's grey suit, is contrasted against bin Laden's 'traditional' clothing and the pre-Modern mise-en-scene, something which functions to make these positions all the more explicit. As Jackson has argued in relation to the construction of 'terrorists' in Western societies, what is

[c]ritical to maintaining the nation-state and the collective identity of its citizens therefore, is the notion of *difference*; there has to be a series of identity markers to differentiate those who belong to the community and those who do not.⁵²

Here, drawing on the work of David Campbell,⁵³ Jackson highlights the way in which identity is not simply fixed or pre-given, but rather is something that is constructed in relation to difference.⁵⁴ Thus, an idealised notion of the 'Western' self finds itself constructed in relation to a simplified understanding of the 'Eastern' or 'Oriental' other. Importantly, this is a notion that Beaver clearly expounds when he suggests that 'American pilots would not do this, but Arab fundamentalists may well be prepared to'.⁵⁵ Such an explicit characterisation, coupled with the brief visual sequence described above, functions powerfully to maintain such seemingly entrenched subject positions, making it difficult for the BBC's audience members to think outside of such categories.

Interestingly, however, and in contrast to Said's belief that the terrorism of phenomena like al-Qaeda is often represented as not 'having any foundations in grievances, prior violence, or continuing conflicts',⁵⁶ and further evident of Foucault's belief that no discourse is ever total or monolithic,⁵⁷ after the initial Orientalist-inspired representations, the BBC's reporting begins, albeit tacitly, to explore some of the possible political motivations underpinning these attacks. In particular, there are a number of brief instances scattered across the coverage in

which the wider, contextual issues underpinning the terrorism of groups like al-Qaeda is discussed in further detail. For instance, despite being preceded by the same ‘extraordinary scenes’, broadcast the day before, of Palestinians celebrating the attacks in America,⁵⁸ the September 12th 2001 bulletin features a brief interview segment with Abdel Bari Atwan, editor of the London-based *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, in which he can be heard to ask ‘why is America is so hated in the Middle East and all over the Muslim world?’⁵⁹ Atwan suggests that ‘American foreign policy’ is part of the problem, advising the Bush Administration to ‘look at political solutions’ and ‘listen to their friends in Europe and the Middle East’.⁶⁰ This sentiment is echoed later in the broadcast in comments by the BBC’s chief political editor, Andrew Marr, who bluntly admonishes that the September 11th 2001 attacks ‘did not come out of a political and social void; it probably came from the Middle East and the Afghan war, and policies which Western governments were also involved in over the past 10–15 years’.⁶¹ Likewise, reports by John Simpson⁶² and Matt Frei⁶³ on September 14th 2001 provide further insight into the possible factors influencing the attacks; with specific references to the rallying call of the Arab/Israeli conflict. While such statements do not constitute a comprehensive assessment of al-Qaeda’s political aims and grievances, with no discussion of bin Laden’s *actual* criticisms against America, it is important to point out that as the BBC’s coverage develops its representations begin to draw upon a broader range of perspectives and cultural discourses.

THE ‘PERSONALISED’ MODE OF REPRESENTATION

Indeed, as the coverage moves beyond the first two days of reporting, the overtly ‘Islamic’ nature of these representations are swiftly moderated by the BBC as a new, more ‘Personalised’ conception of al-Qaeda begins to take shape. Reflecting Michael Stohl’s assertion that Western news media have a tendency to both ‘personalize’ and ‘psychologize’ terrorist violence,⁶⁴ as the days move on ‘al-Qaeda’ is increasingly portrayed as a hierarchical, centrally-administered entity that is directly controlled and financed by a single, all-powerful ‘mastermind’ figure.⁶⁵ This can be seen, for instance, in the increased number of possessive pronouns used by the BBC to link Osama bin Laden to the al-Qaeda phenomenon. Thus, we see a series of references to ‘Osama bin Laden

and his network', 'Osama bin Laden's network',⁶⁶ 'Osama bin Laden's terror network', 'Osama bin Laden's men',⁶⁷ 'Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network',⁶⁸ 'Osama bin Laden's network in Europe',⁶⁹ and 'his terrorist network in Afghanistan',⁷⁰ alongside a smaller number of descriptions, mainly attributed to figures within the Bush and Blair administrations, of al-Qaeda as a conventional terrorist 'organisation'.⁷¹ Such characterisations not only serve to provide this entity with a recognisable form and shape, they also, more importantly, function discursively to link the Saudi to the al-Qaeda phenomenon together, ensuring that the two become synonymous within the Corporation's coverage.

As if to confirm such a view, the 'Personalised' mode is also evident in the descriptions of bin Laden as an individual who has a significant level of influence over al-Qaeda's foot-soldiers. Here, references to the fact that he 'controls and finances al-Qaeda',⁷² that he is 'known to fund and train a network of anti-American terror groups from his base in Afghanistan',⁷³ that he has access to 'a huge amount of communications equipment' and 'can contact his supporters everywhere',⁷⁴ and, moreover, that he has the loyalty of several 'trusted lieutenants',⁷⁵ serve to bolster the belief that al-Qaeda is a seemingly traditional organisation, with a clear chain-of-command that extends directly to the Saudi. As we shall see, though the BBC's later representations move to challenge such an understanding, these descriptions call into play a series of, often highly simplified, assumptions about the structure, organisation and behaviour of clandestine political groupings, where it is often presumed that terrorist attacks can always be linked to, or influenced by, a clear 'mastermind' figure. As Stohl asserts, this kind of reporting functions to distort media coverage of terrorism and reduce 'structural and political problems to those of individual pathologies and personal problems'.⁷⁶

In terms of visuals, this conception of al-Qaeda is further supported through the near-continual visual referencing of bin Laden throughout the BBC's reporting. In particular, despite representations of other individuals and operatives, an image of the Saudi appears in every broadcast between September 11th–24th 2001, with the exception of the September 17th 2001 newscast where he is still referred to 14 times by journalists and commentators. Though it is evident, as noted above, that bin Laden's seemingly 'foreign' or 'traditional' appearance functions as a powerful marker of his difference, on a more practical level, the focus this individual works to further centre the viewers' attention and provide

audiences with a clear ‘enemy’ figure upon which to locate the source of the violence. This can be seen, for instance, in the repeated airing of supplemental footage from John Miller’s 1998 ABC interview with bin Laden. Appearing in a total of 8 reports during this period,⁷⁷ the shaky images depict an ascetically-dressed bin Laden walking at night amongst an unknown number of masked, anonymous fighters. Against this faceless backdrop, bin Laden’s presence is further amplified as the light from a single hand-held camera illuminates his long, white thobe and turban, whilst casting darkened shadows onto the masked mujahedeen that surround him. Those writing about the conventions of visual representation refer to this as the ‘personal code’,⁷⁸ a representational strategy that can also be seen to reflect a broader cultural tendency to view large-scale dangers as being orchestrated by sinister, all-powerful individuals.⁷⁹ Such a notion stands to further contain al-Qaeda within a highly identifiable and culturally familiar mode of representation, thus allaying fears surrounding who, what, and, crucially, where such a threat might be located.

Interestingly, and as if to further challenge the reductive, Orientalist-inspired nature of the ‘Islamic’ mode, the ‘Personalised’ category also appears, at least tacitly, to downplay the association between Islam and terrorism seen earlier in the coverage. This is evident, for example, in the subtly shifting characterisations of bin Laden from that of an ‘Islamic militant’ to a more neutral-sounding ‘Saudi dissident’,⁸⁰ a ‘Saudi-born business man’,⁸¹ or, more commonly, as the ‘prime suspect’ behind the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.⁸² Although references to bin Laden’s fundamentalism and militancy continue, these labels appear to attribute a level of legitimacy to this figure when compared to the more reductive predicates that appear earlier in the coverage. In fact, the references to al-Qaeda’s political and historical grievances described above, are themselves frequently presented in a highly individualised manner. So, for instance, BBC journalists make references to the fact that ‘*bin Laden* has vowed to destroy the United States’,⁸³ that ‘*he* is known to fund and train a network of anti-American terror groups’,⁸⁴ and that ‘*he* calls upon followers to strike at America and Israel’ (my emphasis).⁸⁵ Rather than provide audiences with insight into the material factors motivating the attacks, in attributing these acts of violence to bin Laden himself the BBC misleadingly serve to reduce al-Qaeda’s broader social, economic and political motivations to the personal protestations of one man.

THE 'ELUSIVE' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

Despite the BBC's attempts to construct al-Qaeda ways that can be easily understood by its audiences, appearing alongside the 'Islamic' and 'Personalised' modes of representation is a far more complex and, what can be termed, 'Elusive' conception of this phenomenon. Here, concerns about the form, size and shape of the terror threat begin appear within the BBC's coverage, alongside a deeper set of fears regarding identity of its operatives, and bin Laden's broader operational role within al-Qaeda. Crucially, it is this absence of a recognisable, and culturally familiar, framework of understanding that results in, what we might term, the disintegration of 'al-Qaeda'; a process that gives rise to the more ambiguous image of an 'Elusive' movement of disparate, shadowy, and seemingly ordinary, assailants.

This mode of representation is first evident in the sense that al-Qaeda cannot fit within the conventional categories of portrayal described above, where it is characterised in increasingly uncertain terms as an 'unseen enemy',⁸⁶ an entity without a definite 'shape',⁸⁷ an enemy that wages war by 'stealth',⁸⁸ or as a disparate grouping of 'shadowy terrorists' spread-out across the globe.⁸⁹ Drawing heavily on the deliberately vague terminology employed by figures within the Bush administration,⁹⁰ al-Qaeda is also described on a number of occasions as 'a new kind of enemy',⁹¹ a type of enemy America 'has never faced before',⁹² and one that, perhaps more importantly, is 'faceless'⁹³ or 'elusive' in nature.⁹⁴ Such descriptions, while challenging the belief that al-Qaeda is a hierarchically-organised, centrally-administered threat, serve to highlight the difficulties in identifying exactly who its operatives are and what they might look like.

Significantly, while these metaphorical constructions are in part associated with the reductive, Orientalist-inspired 'Islamic' mode of representation described above, the rhetorical trope of the shadow archetype has its discursive origins in the gothic narratives employed by eighteenth and nineteenth century authors such as Edmund Burke and Edgar Allen Poe,⁹⁵ and, more specifically, in the work of Carl Jung, who used the metaphor of the shadow to represent the primitive and animalistic realm of the human unconscious.⁹⁶ Although not always considered to be negative trait, shadow-associations frequently draw upon unfavourable conceptions of darkness, cowardice, violence, and evil; with shadow characteristics often regarded as those aspects of the human character that 'the Self' actively seeks to repress and deny.⁹⁷ Indeed, it has been argued

that during times of war and political conflict shadow metaphors are a powerful and recurrent discursive trope projected onto those who are regarded as cultural outsiders.⁹⁸ As Robert H. Hopke has suggested,

instead of repressing or denying the shadow, we may also project the shadow onto others, attributing to other people those nasty, unsavoury qualities that we would like to deny in ourselves. Shadow projection can thus result in paranoia, suspiciousness, and a lack of intimacy, all of which afflict individuals, groups, and even entire nations.⁹⁹

Notably, it is this crude form of projection that can be seen during this period, not only in the comments by Bush, but also individuals within the Blair administration, who describe al-Qaeda as ‘the new evil in our world’,¹⁰⁰ as people ‘not deterred by human decency’,¹⁰¹ and as individuals who have ‘no regard whatever for the sanctity or value for human life’.¹⁰² Thus, in the absence of knowledge about al-Qaeda, political elites and media commentators appear to project into the vacuum their deepest fears and anxieties about this entity.

More importantly, however, the uncertainty over what al-Qaeda is, and in particular what its adherents look like, is further exhibited through the appearance of a broader range of images and visual representations within the BBC’s reporting. In this regard, the emergence of a series of seemingly normal, everyday images of Mohamed Atta¹⁰³ and Ziad Jarrah,¹⁰⁴ alongside CCTV, mugshot and silhouette-style images of other suspected hijackers and accomplices,¹⁰⁵ can be said to draw upon a much deeper discursive repository, challenging the ‘Islamic’ and ‘Personalised’ modes of representation highlighted above, thus transforming al-Qaeda from a distant, foreign threat, to a more ‘familiar’, albeit less distinctive, enemy within. Although there are attempts to emphasise the foreign identity of the hijackers, for example through descriptions of the men as ‘Middle Eastern’ in appearance,¹⁰⁶ here the terrorist subject is recognised less by the appearance of embodied or sartorial signifiers that indicate difference and Otherness, such as beards, faded combat fatigues and keffiyeh scarves, and more by their apparent ‘normality’ and ‘everyday’ character.

Such a notion finds itself powerfully articulated with the appearance of a family portrait-style photograph of Ziad Jarrah during a news item by Asia Correspondent Matt Frei.¹⁰⁷ Although the term ‘al-Qaeda’ is conspicuous in its absence, the report provides considerable insight into the

shifting categories of identity attributed to this phenomenon in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks. First seen as a physical artefact in the hands of his grieving father, Jarrah's photo forms the visual centre-piece to the 2 minute and 20 second report and draws powerfully upon discourses of domesticity and familiarity typically seen in family portrait photography.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, his image is immediately recognisable due to its almost banal iconicity: we all have similar images scattered around our homes and domestic spaces. Its unmodulated, sky-blue backdrop, further lends the image a relaxed, calm quality, with the colour blue calling on culturally signifying notions of honesty, decency and loyalty¹⁰⁹ and Jarrah's round, wire-rimmed spectacles, further eliciting stereotypical notions of mildness and intelligence.¹¹⁰ His uncle goes on to describe how he

went to the best schools, he was raised gently, he was the only boy in the family, he is the kind of lovely boy to his parents, to his family, he always likes to have fun.¹¹¹

As if to support this view, footage is shown of the 26 year-old dancing, whilst surrounded by smiling women, at a cousin's wedding in Beirut. The grainy, hand-held images run counter to al-Qaeda's own propagandistic home-video footage, described earlier, in which rows of masked, anonymous fighters are seen taking part in synchronised training exercises in Afghanistan's dusty landscape. The report's narrator quietly underscores the ambiguous nature of these images, suggesting that 'this is not the behaviour of an Islamic fundamentalist'.¹¹² In particular, the presence of these seemingly 'everyday', 'normal' forms of imagery can be said to function as a direct challenge to the 'Islamic' mode of representation described earlier, giving rise to a much more complex understanding of the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and the identities of those who formulate its ranks. Here, rather than be located in the dangerous and darkened spaces of the Orient, the terrorist 'Other' becomes a figure that permeates liberal, multicultural societies, and is, moreover, almost indistinguishable from the Western 'Self'.

Significantly, and in a clear visual echo of the way footage of bin Laden is earlier positioned in opposition to the interview segment with Paul Beaver, the final moments of Frei's news report curiously contrast Jarrah's family portrait photograph against a propaganda image of bin Laden, seen in a refugee camp in Beirut. The visual disparity between

these two images is clear, and functions to powerfully illustrate the opposing discursive constructions of this phenomenon witnessed thus far; an entity that is simultaneously external *and* internal, foreign *and* familiar. Importantly, Frei highlights the fact that both these figures come from affluent backgrounds, with bin Laden, ‘the son of a Saudi billionaire’, and Jarrah, and the September 11th 2001 hijackers more generally, having access to forms of wealth and education that are uncommon in the Middle East.¹¹³ Indeed, such contrasting forms of imagery work against the seemingly simple and straightforward subject positioning as analysed above, giving rise to a variety of possible categories of identity with which to attach to ‘al-Qaeda’. Ominously, and as if to further bring the threat closer to home for the BBC’s audiences, Frei’s report is immediately followed by an item on extremism within the United Kingdom, in which outspoken members of the seemingly singular ‘Muslim community’ chillingly note that British military bases are also deemed legitimate targets by al-Qaeda’s shadowy sympathisers.¹¹⁴

On a related level, the uncertainty over exactly who and what al-Qaeda is further conveyed in the belief that bin Laden has little operational authority over such an entity. Here the BBC’s representations can be seen to draw upon the discursive terms and constructions employed by senior figures within the Bush and Blair administrations, who seek to take advantage of the ambiguity surrounding ‘al-Qaeda’ in order to disseminate their own far-reaching interpretation of who and what the threat is. This notion is first seen, for instance, in Colin Powell’s claim that it is ‘not enough to get one individual; although we will start with that one individual’,¹¹⁵ an ominous statement that shows that U.S. officials were already looking beyond bin Laden in its fight against terror. Such a claim is further articulated in the BBC’s own analysis, moreover, with Washington correspondent, Stephen Sackur, noting that ‘[y]ou cannot go out and round bin Laden up, he’s not the real problem, it’s a network all over the world’.¹¹⁶ Further statements by the U.S. Secretary of Defence, who characterises al-Qaeda as ‘a broad network of individuals and organisations’,¹¹⁷ the President, who describes it as a ‘global terror network’,¹¹⁸ and the Attorney General, who refers to al-Qaeda as a ‘network’ that is ‘supported and sustained by a variety of foreign governments’, also serve to underscore the broad nature of the threat.¹¹⁹ As if to further echo these claims, British Prime Minister Tony Blair also reinforces the idea that al-Qaeda is much larger than bin Laden,

stating that the conflict is ‘not about one man; it’s about a very large organisation’.¹²⁰

Though this is in no way to suggest that the BBC’s representations simply function as a mouthpiece for state discourse, such portrayals serve to lend support to the belief that ‘al-Qaeda’ is a disparate, conspiratorially-spreading threat that can be located wherever figures such as George W. Bush or Tony Blair see fit. Indeed, as the Prime Minister pointed out two weeks after the attacks,

I’ve made it clear there are really two parts to this agenda. The first is action in respect to bin Laden, his associates, and the Taliban regime that is harbouring him. The second part is, then, to take action against all the other aspects of international terrorism; how it’s financed, how it’s controlled, what are the organisations driving it, how they cross frontiers, how they acquire their weapons, and that is something that we turn to as well.¹²¹

In portraying al-Qaeda as an ‘Elusive’, shadowy and disparate threat, therefore, the BBC helps, albeit inadvertently, to legitimise the vague and far-reaching policy objectives mobilised by the Bush and Blair administrations in the days and weeks after September 11th 2001.

CONCLUSION

With the exception of Jane Corbin’s 1998 *Panorama* documentary, ‘Death to America’, and a handful of newspaper articles by journalists such as Robert Fisk, for many British citizens the events of September 11th 2001 would have most likely been the first instance in which they had heard terms such as ‘Osama bin Laden’ and ‘al-Qaeda’ used with such force and frequency. In returning to the BBC’s coverage of this event, therefore, the chapter allows us to consider the very production of ‘al-Qaeda’ as an object of discourse, knowledge and power. As we have seen, given the uncertainty surrounding who and what ‘al-Qaeda’ is, the BBC’s representations can be said to draw upon the various discourses and frameworks of knowledge that circulated in the aftermath of these attacks. But once these explanatory discourses are questioned within the coverage, however, it becomes harder for the Corporation’s journalists and correspondents to give meaning to ‘al-Qaeda’, resulting greater levels of concern and ambiguity.

Despite drawing on a tradition of deeply hostile representations of the East and Islam, for the BBC, and conservative commentators such as Paul Beaver, the advancement of the 'Islamic' mode of representation would seem to be the most logical way of viewing al-Qaeda in the immediate aftermath of such a massive terrorist attack, as it helps to reduce the complexity of the events occurring in America and maintain the discursive boundaries between the Western 'Self' and its non-Western, terrorist 'Other'. This view builds upon the belief that one of the key roles of the news media during terrorist attacks is to maintain the social order and minimise harm to the basic structure and values of a given society.¹²² Thus, in containing the terrorist threat within a seemingly familiar, and culturally recognisable, mode of representation the BBC constructs an image of the enemy that can be readily identified and quickly understood by its audiences. Here, 'al-Qaeda' is externalised as an entity that is recognisable by its bearded, keffiyeh-wearing operatives, and one that is safely relegated to the dark, dusty and chaotic landscapes of the Orient, as opposed to the clean, bright and ordered cities of the Occident.

With the shift towards a more 'Personalised' mode of representation, however, this can be seen to be an attempt by the broadcaster to make sense of al-Qaeda in view of its strict editorial guidelines and public purpose commitments. Here, BBC producers would have been aware of the dangers of associating al-Qaeda's actions with the beliefs and practices of Britain's different Muslim communities, and would have sought to avoid ways to avoid such explicit connections: the reports focusing on the impact of the terror attacks on Muslims in Britain and the United States clearly serve to confirm such unease.¹²³ The BBC's editorial guidelines, which caution against overly simplistic depictions of religion, culture and terrorism,¹²⁴ are evident during this period and help explain the shifting characterisations of bin Laden, from that of an 'Islamic militant' to the more subtle and measured 'Saudi dissident'. More crucially, the significant visual focus on bin Laden throughout the coverage also helps explain such a shift, as his image helps to provide the BBC's audiences with a clear image of the enemy, while, at the same time, tacitly severing the link between al-Qaeda's violence and the broader Muslim community in Britain and beyond. The BBC's Home Affairs Editor Mark Easton sheds light on the possible motivations behind this shift. As he asserts,

I think there was a sense at the BBC after 9/11 to want to find a vocabulary that would not suggest that Islam, or Muslims in general, were involved in the activities of al-Qaeda and other extremist organisations. And we searched around for all kinds of words that would help to get this basic point across. I'm not sure that we were always entirely successful, and we changed our minds on certain words and terms as our understanding developed, but I think that, in the end, it was important to make a clear distinction between al-Qaeda and the wider Islamic community.¹²⁵

In the aftermath of the events of September 11th 2001, such responsibility and sensitivity is certainly admirable, and evident of the seriousness in which the BBC views the perceived 'effects' of its own content on audiences. And yet, as argued above, the 'personalisation' of al-Qaeda and its violence functions to reduce a whole host of historical and political contexts into a simplified, and one-dimensional, image, which belies the complexity of this phenomenon.

At the same time, however, once more information is made available about the nature of al-Qaeda and the identity of the 19 hijackers the BBC's representations are characterised by increased levels of fear, uncertainty and ambiguity. Here, the discursive stability of the 'Islamic' and 'Personalised' modes of representation is substantially weakened, as a more diffused, fragmented and, in some ways, familiar-looking vision of al-Qaeda begins to emerge within the BBC's coverage. This anxiety, surrounding who and what 'al-Qaeda' is and where its shadowy fighters might be located, compels the broadcaster to draw upon a broader range of discourses and frameworks of knowledge in an attempt to contain this entity within a recognisable form. And yet in doing so, the 'Elusive' mode of representation works to diffuse the threat posed by al-Qaeda and violently destabilise the delicate boundaries between the (non-terrorist) 'Self' and the (terrorist) 'Other', opening up a space for politicians to exploit this ambiguity and uncertainty for their own benefit. Nevertheless, while the political motivations underpinning these shifting modes of visual and verbal representation have only really been explored in a tacit sense, here, the aim of the next chapter is to enquire in greater detail how the BBC's portrayals are mobilised for political purposes and, more specifically, how they work in the interests of certain groups within the 'war on terror'.

NOTES

1. See Roger Silverstone, 'Mediating the Catastrophe: September 11 and the Crisis of the Other', in Barbie Zelizer & Stuart Allan (eds.), *Journalism After September 11* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 75–82; Myra Macdonald, *Exploring Media Discourse* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 184–185; Stephen Chermak et al., *Media Representations of September 11* (London: Praeger, 2003); Gwen Bouvier, "'Breaking News": The First Hours of BBC Coverage of September 11 as a Media Event', in Tomasz Pludowski (ed.), *How the World's Media Reacted to 9/11: Essays from Around the Globe* (Washington: Marquette Books, 2007), pp. 51–83, for example.
2. See Rainer Hülse & Alexander Spencer, 'The Metaphor of Terror'. See also Alexander Spencer, *The Tabloid Terrorist*; and 'Metaphorizing Terrorism', for engagements with the verbal and metaphorical aspects of these portrayals.
3. See Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars*, for an in depth analysis of the CIA and FBI's prior knowledge of al-Qaeda and bin Laden's attempts to attack the United States.
4. See Michael Scheuer, *Osama bin Laden*, pp. 93–97.
5. See Osama bin Laden, 'Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries' (1996), in Gilles Kepel & Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words*, pp. 47–50.
6. See Fawas Gerges, *The Far Enemy*.
7. Fawas Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*, p. 66.
8. Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 55.
9. Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 112.
10. Thomas H. Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York: Norton, 2004), p. 148. See also Yosri Fouda & Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror: The Truth Behind the Most Devastating Terrorist Attack the World Has Ever Seen* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2003), for interviews with Mohammed and bin al-Shibh concerning the initial planning for the attacks.
11. Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower*, p. 310.
12. Thomas H. Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 245.
13. Yosri Fouda & Nick Fielding, *Masterminds of Terror*, p. 140.
14. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, p. 102.
15. Telephone interview with Ben Brown (July 28th 2017).
16. See George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
17. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).

18. Abdel Bari Atwan, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
19. See BBC Editorial Guidelines, 'Hijacking, Kidnapping, Hostage-Taking and Sieges'. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-war-practices-hijacking/> (Accessed March 27th 2017), for example.
20. Telephone interview with Stephen Sackur (June 16th 2017).
21. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
22. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).
23. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001) and 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001).
24. Paul Beaver, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
25. Orla Guerin, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
26. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
27. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
28. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
29. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
30. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).
31. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
32. Matt Frei, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001).
33. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
34. James Robbins, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).
35. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
36. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
37. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
38. James Robbins, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).
39. See Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001) and James Robbins, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001), for example.
40. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) and *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997), for example.
44. Paul Beaver, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
45. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
46. There is no reference to 'al-Qaeda' during the 'News at Six' broadcast on September 11th 2001.
47. See 'Osama bin Laden's 1998 Interview', *The Guardian* (October 8th 2001). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/oct/08/afghanistan.terrorism15> (Accessed April 4th 2017).
48. See Roxanne Lynn Doty, 'Foreign Policy as Social Construction'.
49. Ibid., p. 306.

50. See Peter Sissions, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001) and John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001), for example.
51. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001); Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001); Adam Mynott, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Tom Carver, 'News at Ten' (September 23rd 2001), for examples.
52. Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terror*, p. 61.
53. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States' Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1992), p. 9.
54. See Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, 'Appropriating Islam: The Islamic Other in the Consolidation of Western Modernity', *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2003), pp. 25–41, for further elaboration of the way the identity of the 'Self' is constructed in relation to difference.
55. Paul Beaver, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
56. See Edward W. Said, 'The MESA Debate: The Scholars, the Media and the Middle East', *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (1987), pp. 85–104, p. 89. See also *Covering Islam*, p. xxii.
57. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 34.
58. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
59. Abdel Bari Atwan, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
60. *Ibid.*
61. Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
62. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
63. Matt Frei, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
64. See Michael Stohl, 'Old Myths, New Fantasies and the Enduring Realities of Terrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), p. 7.
65. See James Robbins, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001); and Peter Sissions, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001); Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); Peter Sissions, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001), for example.
66. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
67. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 16th 2001).
68. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001) and Gavin Hewitt, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001), for example.
69. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001).
70. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 21st 2001).
71. See Colin Powell, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001); Donald Rumsfeld, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Donald Rumsfeld, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); Tony Blair, 'News at Ten'

- (September 20th 2001); Jack Straw, 'News at Ten' (September 21st 2001); Donald Rumsfeld, 'News at Ten' (September 23rd 2001), for example.
72. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
 73. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
 74. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).
 75. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Colonel Mike Dewar, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); and Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001), for example.
 76. Michael Stohl, 'Old Myths, New Fantasies and the Enduring Realities of Terrorism', p. 8.
 77. See George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001); Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001); Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001); Fiona Bruce, 'News at Ten' (September 16th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Adam Mynott, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001); and Tom Carver, 'News at Ten' (September 23rd 2001), for examples.
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 80. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
 81. Darren Jordon, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001).
 82. See Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); Darren Jordon, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001); George Alighiah, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001); Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001); Darren Jordon, 'News at Ten' (September 23rd 2001), for examples.
 83. George Eykyn, 'News at Ten' (September 11th 2001).
 84. Justin Webb, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
 85. James Robbins, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001).

86. Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); Stephen Eisenberg, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001); Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001), for example.
87. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001)
88. See Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); George W. Bush, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001), for example.
89. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001); and Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001).
90. See Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terro*, pp. 142–150.
91. See Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001) and Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
92. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001).
93. George W. Bush, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
94. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001).
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103. See John Sopel, 'News at Ten' (September 13th 2001); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
104. Matt Frei, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001).
105. See Tom Carver, 'News at Ten' (September 16th 2001); Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (September 19th 2001); Gavin Hewitt, 'News at Ten' (September 20th 2001); Gavin Hewitt, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001), for example.
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115. Colin Powell, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001).
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117. Donald Rumsfeld, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001).
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The January 5th 2003 Wood Green Ricin Plot

By early 2003, although the U.S.-led ‘war on terror’ had expanded well beyond the borders of Afghanistan, much of the threat was presumed to lie within distant, ‘Oriental’ geographies and locales. All of this was to change, however, in the early hours of January 5th 2003 when reports of a sinister al-Qaeda plot to spread poisons around the capital made Britain a central arena in the conflict. Acting on intelligence shared by Algeria’s security services, anti-terror police, immigration officers, and a team of government scientists raided a series of addresses in the Wood Green area of North London. They found, what was initially believed to be, small traces of the dangerous toxin ricin in a pestle and mortar, alongside recipes for producing other lethal poisons such as solanine, cyanide, nicotine poison, and botulinum, and large quantities of cash. The authorities quickly declared the find to be evidence of an extensive al-Qaeda plot that had direct links to its leadership in Afghanistan, with the Prime Minister, in particular, drawing direct links between the alleged plot and the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The claim was echoed throughout the British press over the course of the following few days.¹

Due to the controversy surrounding these events—in particular, its use as evidence in the build up to the invasion of Iraq—the Wood Green case provides unique insight into the political functions of the BBC’s portrayals and the way they are mobilised for political purposes during the ‘war on terror’. Drawing on the concept of the *dispositif*, the chapter

considers the shifting power relations underpinning representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and how they, often unwittingly, serve the interests of different groups. As noted in Chapter 2, while Foucault described the *dispositif* as broad ‘system of relations’ between a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and non-discursive elements,² it is within the news media that such an apparatus is at its most visible. That is because mediated representations of terrorism form a single point of convergence between the various components that make up the *dispositif*. As such, the representations appearing during the Wood Green coverage can be understood to form part of an emergent *dispositif* that draws together a wide range of discursive parts: from discourses surrounding the ‘war on terror’, Orientalism, asylum and immigration, for example, to representatives of social and political institutions, such as senior politicians, members of the security services, toxicologists, terrorologists and terrorist groups, alongside some of the more conventional features of television discourse, such as title screens, studio settings, interview segments, piece-to-camera narration, sequential jump-cuts, location shots and the use of archival footage.

The chapter begins with a brief historical background to the Wood Green ‘plot’, its context and aftermath. This is followed by a broad overview of the BBC’s coverage of these events, with information about report lengths and running order supplied alongside more specific information regarding the broadcaster’s shifting narrative to these incidents. The chapter then moves on to discuss the concept of the *dispositif* in more detail, highlighting the two main groups who benefit from the BBC’s coverage, before outlining the findings of two weeks’ worth of ‘News at Ten’ bulletins following the initial discovery of ricin (January 5th–18th 2003). In contrast to the previous chapter, however, it should be noted that the events analysed here focus on events within the United Kingdom, rather than the United States. According to Hillel Nossek, news media tend to cover events differently depending on whether a conflict is internal or external to the nation state, with distant events understood to be reported on in a professional and detached manner, while national events are often viewed through ideological or nationalistic lenses.³ As such, the BBC’s proximity to the events in Wood Green and Manchester is likely to have a significant influence on the way the broadcaster covers these incidents, something that can be said to impact on its portrayals of al-Qaeda.

BACKGROUND TO THE WOOD GREEN RICIN PLOT

At around 6 a.m. on the morning of January 5th 2003, police and anti-terror officials raided a suspected makeshift chemicals weapons factory in the Wood Green area of North London. While much of the flat's contents appeared innocuous enough, amongst the various items found were a locked sports bag containing over £4000 in cash and a series of handwritten recipes which contained detailed instructions for the production of several of potentially deadly toxins. Further examination of the flat revealed a number of natural ingredients that could be harnessed to produce poisons detailed in the recipes.⁴ Initial tests on other items seized from the flat suggested the presence of ricin, a poison believed to be 'six thousand times as potent as cyanide'.⁵ More concerning, however, was the fact that the individual at the centre of the police investigation, a 28 year-old Algerian known as Nadir Habra, later identified as Kamel Bourgass, was missing from the scene. Within days of the raid, senior elements within the ruling Labour party had connected the Wood Green arrests to the al-Qaeda 'network', a claim unwittingly supported by an assemblage of government departments, health agencies and intelligence services.⁶ These claims were further amplified through the news media, with the *Daily Mirror's* 'Its Here' headline being, perhaps, the most alarmist.⁷ Nevertheless, despite being incorporated into the narrow historical parameters of the 'war on terror', the alleged plot had far more complex origins in the brutal, ten-year long civil war in Algeria.

Christened 'little Algiers', the area around Blackstock Road and Finsbury Park slowly became a haven for those fleeing the civil war throughout the 1990s, with the number of Algerians seeking asylum rising dramatically during this period. Relations between the British security services and exiled members of various Algerian dissident groups were close around this time, leading to the establishment of an unofficial 'covenant of security' between the authorities and the leaders of these groups.⁸ From this secure UK base, these groups would recruit, organise, and finance operations in Algeria and the Continent, something that earned the capital the sobriquet 'Londonistan' during the late 1990s. Indeed, many of the most influential figures in these groups had trained in al-Qaeda-linked camps in Afghanistan during the late 1980s and early 1990s. The nascent relationship between these diverse groups provided the initial conditions of possibility for an emergent dispositif,

but what remained absent during this time was an ‘urgent need’, or ‘dominant strategic function’, to unite each disparate element.⁹

Much of this changed, however, in the post-September 11th 2001 security environment. The early focus for government counterterrorism efforts was on the ‘foreign’ aspects of al-Qaeda the threat, a factor which saw increased cooperation between the British security services and a number of overseas intelligence and security agencies.¹⁰ In particular, Algeria received massive levels of military and financial support and intelligence from the United Kingdom and other western governments.¹¹ 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 2002.¹² Under interrogation, 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. 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. By chance the police later stumbled across the man at the centre of the alleged conspiracy, Kamel Bourgass, during a series of unrelated immigration arrests in Greater Manchester. When Bourgass realised that he had been identified he lashed out at those guarding him, grabbing hold of a kitchen knife and stabbing four police officers. Tragically, Detective-Constable Stephen Oake, a forty year-old Manchester-based police officer, died at the scene.

As these events were taking place, however, senior officials within the Bush and Blair administrations were finalising their case for war with Iraq. While very much a U.S.-led intervention, the war was dependent upon the support offered by Britain and its allies.¹³ The release of dossiers on Iraq’s WMD capability by the Blair government, on September 24th 2002 and February 3rd 2003, explicitly sought to highlight the connections between Saddam Hussain, international terrorism and WMD.¹⁴ These documents were accompanied by a government-sanctioned campaign to prepare media and public opinion for war and promote information about Iraq’s WMD capabilities, alongside its broader connections to international terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda.¹⁵ 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 endorsed hours after by British Foreign

Secretary Jack Straw.¹⁶ Incidentally, the first attacks on Baghdad on March 20th 2003 were also the first date that British politicians were informed that no ricin had been discovered at the Wood Green flat; a fact that would not be made public until the April 2005 trial.¹⁷

OVERVIEW OF THE BBC'S 'NEWS AT TEN' COVERAGE

Closely following the conventions of, what Christopher Flood et al. refer to as, the '*terror incident*' news genre,¹⁸ the Wood Green events dominated the 'News at Ten' agenda during the first two days of coverage (January 7th–8th 2003), with the ricin plot temporarily displacing the coverage surrounding the build-up to the invasion of Iraq. Appearing first in the running order on both days, and lasting 9 minutes 10 seconds and 5 minutes and 14 seconds, respectively, a sense of impending threat is evident in the BBC's reporting, with the BBC's correspondents and commentators repeatedly speculating over the size and scale of the plot, and, importantly, its connection to al-Qaeda's leadership. Interestingly, despite caution on behalf of the security services with regard to who or what is behind the alleged plot, the BBC's reporters and correspondents repeatedly make reference to 'al-Qaeda', with the term appearing 8 times during the first two days of reporting before disappearing until the arrest of Bourgass on January 14th. The term appears 11 times in total across the two-week period.

According to David Jordan, current Director of Editorial Policy, part of the reason the BBC's journalists and correspondents used this label related to the context they were situated within. As he explains,

although as a general rule, you wouldn't use the term 'al-Qaeda' to describe plots by people who had no relationship with al-Qaeda, at the time I recall the general motivation for terror plots in the UK and elsewhere seemed to be very much linked to the al-Qaeda philosophy and approach. So, in this case, I think people might be forgiven at the time for thinking that's where the inspiration was coming from. Just as it is quite clear that the inspiration for the Twin Towers attack was also taken from that source.¹⁹

BBC documentary film-maker Peter Taylor adds to this, suggesting that the term functioned as a reference point for audiences during the early years of the 'war on terror'. As he asserts,

I would only ever use the term “al-Qaeda” if I were describing an individual who had sworn the oath of allegiance to bin Laden, what you call the *bayat*... But what I have said, however, and I am very careful with the words I use to describe individuals and organisations, is if they may be al-Qaeda sympathisers, or subscribed to the global bin Laden ideology of al-Qaeda, or if they were al-Qaeda supporters, I would use the word ‘al-Qaeda’ then because that is a point of reference for the audience. But I don’t say al-Qaeda ‘members’... We have to be very careful in delineating ‘al-Qaeda members’ from those who support ‘al-Qaeda’.²⁰

Despite a lack of concrete evidence linking the plotters to the broader al-Qaeda movement, therefore, the BBC’s references to this entity functioned pragmatically to centre attention and provide audiences with an identifiable reference point.

Also noteworthy about the first few days of coverage is the heavy presence of ‘expert’ commentators within the BBC’s coverage. For example, we see a host of military, security and terrorism experts, such as Magnus Ranstorp,²¹ Reda Hassaine,²² Richard Cobbold,²³ Nigel Churton²⁴ and Jean-Francois Daguzan,²⁵ appear alongside medical and health-care professionals, like Alastair Hay²⁶ and Pat Troop,²⁷ who each offer a variety of perspectives on the Wood Green events. Importantly, the appearance of such figures within the BBC’s reporting is distinct from that of the September 11th 2001 coverage, and is indicative of the ‘war on terror’s’ productivity and incitement to knowledge surrounding terrorism-related issues. Indeed, as if to further reflect this development, it is during this time that we see the emergence of the ‘Security Correspondent’ within the BBC’s growing line-up of presenters. Created just under a year before the Wood Green incidents, with a specific remit to follow up on ‘9/11 stories for the main news bulletins’,²⁸ Frank Gardner’s piece-to-camera reports book-end the Wood Green coverage, appearing first during the January 7th item and then at the end of the January 15th bulletin.

Despite their significance for domestic affairs, however, it is interesting to note that the BBC paid much less attention to the Wood Green incidents than to the events of September 11th 2001, with less than an hour of continuous reporting dedicated to the Wood Green plot over the course of the entire two week period. Indeed, while the Wood Green events initially dominated the BBC’s coverage, by January 9th 2003 the story had been relegated to sixth-place in the ‘News at Ten’ running order. Lasting only 1 minute and 41 seconds, and following reports

on the build up to the Iraq war, escalating gun crime in London and a related item on a 15-day long domestic siege in London, a story on the failing British economy, and, finally, a report on child exploitation around the world, the Wood Green events are discussed briefly through links to an ongoing anti-terrorist operation by French intelligence agencies. Most significantly, there is also no reference to ‘al-Qaeda’ during this short item, with the Wood Green plot now described more vaguely as the work of an ‘Algerian network’.²⁹ Indeed, despite the fact that members of the ‘cell’ are believed to still be at large in the United Kingdom, the January 10th, 11th and 12th broadcasts feature no reference to events in Wood Green, and the brief mention on January 13th 2003 merely notes the court appearances of those arrested in the initial raid and the further questioning of ‘five men and one woman’ in Bournemouth.³⁰ Here, the BBC’s focus shifts back towards the build-up of troops for the coming invasion of Iraq, with reports focusing on this issue appearing in the January 10th, 11th and 13th broadcasts. Aside from a brief reference by Tony Blair during a January 13th report, where the Prime Minister highlights the links between Iraq, the trade of WMD and international terrorism, no connections are made to the Wood Green arrests.³¹

With the murder of DC Oake on January 14th 2003, however, the impetus returns to the BBC’s reporting and an additional layer of complexity is heaped upon these events. Here, the focus shifts from that of a suspected al-Qaeda plot to a murder case. Not surprisingly, the length of the reports increase again, with the events in Manchester dominating the opening 7 minutes and 18 seconds and last 2 minutes of the January 14th 2003 broadcast and the first 13 minutes and 30 seconds of the January 15th 2003 broadcast. Despite a sense of resolution to its reports, with the alleged ‘mastermind’ behind the plot now arrested, there is a renewed interest in the broader connections behind the events in Wood Green, with BBC correspondents continuing to speculate over the size, scale and reach of the ‘network’ and the alleged connections to al-Qaeda’s leadership in Afghanistan.³² Concerningly, the BBC gives substantial voice to alarmist fears regarding the link between terrorism and immigration, something Andrew Marr does well to play down.³³ Finally, it should be noted that due to the murder of DC Stephen Oake, mid-way through the second week of coverage, the government imposed reporting restrictions on the poisons plot and related arrests to ensure that resultant trials were kept fair.³⁴

SERVING THE SAME INTERESTS?

Before outlining the patterns of representation seen during this case study, it is worthwhile briefly returning to the conceptual and analytical framework, as outlined in Chapter 2, in order to help explore the shifting power relations seen during the BBC's coverage. In particular, Foucault's concept of the *dispositif* is especially useful in making sense of the way its representations inadvertently work in the strategic interests of certain groups. Distancing it from his earlier analyses and archaeologies of 'discourse',³⁵ Foucault characterised the *dispositif* as a large-scale, social ensemble that emerges in response to an urgent and pressing need, such as the threat posed by terrorism.³⁶ More specifically, for Foucault, the *dispositif* is a particular arrangement or alignment of power relations, what he describes to as a 'system of relations', between a variety of discursive and non-discursive phenomena.³⁷ Though beyond the control of any one group of institution, the fact that Foucault 'calls it a rational and concerted intervention indicates that it is something more than just a chaotic turbulence of forces', and thus can be said to possess a particular logic or strategic focus.³⁸ Indeed, following William E. Connolly, the *dispositif* should be viewed as a kind of 'resonance machine',³⁹ in which different political groups and movements come together in 'emergent and resonant, rather than efficient, relationships'.⁴⁰ Such a relationship produces common goals and interests that, while sometimes divergent, often orientate themselves towards a singular purpose.⁴¹

As the analysis outlined below seeks to demonstrate, of all those involved in the Wood Green incident, two groups in particular stand to gain the most from the BBC's representations; these are the various individuals, groups and organisations that comprise the al-Qaeda movement, and the small number of politicians that formed the head of the British executive during this time. Though it is certainly problematic to regard these two groups as being fixed in form, identity and ideological outlook, there is sufficient reason to view them as having a shared set of strategic objectives during the events analysed. It should be clear, however, that the point here is not to suggest that the BBC is in some way deferential or subservient to these two groups, but rather to show how the strategic orientation of the *dispositif* produces representations that have, in the words of Nikolas Rose, 'unpalatable functions' and unintended consequences.⁴²

In regard to al-Qaeda, for example, Fawas Gerges has shown how its central leadership had suffered catastrophic military and logistical setbacks around the time of the Wood Green events, with the capture or killing of many of its senior military commanders and religious officials. As he explains,

[b]etween 2001 and 2003 there existed a window of opportunity: al-Qaeda was in disequilibrium and there was genuine goodwill worldwide towards the United States. The period from 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.⁴³

Faced with this state of affairs, one of the overarching strategic interests promoted by those self-identifying as 'al-Qaeda' was to project a singular, yet flexible, propaganda image to its enemies. This would not only help unite the disparate elements that comprised the al-Qaeda phenomenon, but also enable its failing central command to capitalise on the levels of fear and uncertainty that followed terror attacks around the world. Any media coverage of such attacks would help, therefore, reinforce and relay the threat to a much wider audience. As Christina Hellmich points out,

while it may lack a coherent structure in reality, the group benefits from pretending or appearing to be more organised and structured than it really is, essentially creating a propaganda image which strikes fear into national governments and the general public, but is disproportionate to the group's true size and effectiveness.⁴⁴

For key thinkers within the broader Jihadi movement, such as Abu Musab al-Suri, this 'leaderless' strategy would also be highly effective in drawing Western nations into a series of distant, intractable conflicts in places such as Iraq or Afghanistan, where the various groups that comprise al-Qaeda would slowly exhaust their enemies through a strategy of attrition.⁴⁵ As bin Laden himself noted not long after the Wood Green incidents,

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.⁴⁶

On a related level, while some would be sceptical of the notion of a singular ‘British executive’, with Foucault himself calling attention to complex nature of contemporary, liberal political systems,⁴⁷ several studies have shown how foreign and domestic counterterrorism policy within the U.K. corresponded to the interests of an incredibly small number of influential politicians around the time of the Wood Green events.⁴⁸ As Steven Kettell points out, successive electoral losses during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s ensured that, over time, the underlying structure of the Labour party became increasingly centralised, elitist and hierarchical in nature in the years building up to the ‘war on terror’. Importantly, this process of centralisation and consolidation of decision-making enabled counterterrorism policy decisions to be shaped by shrinking number of politicians.⁴⁹ Indeed, one of the key interests motivating this group was to highlight the links between a range of distant and disparate threats, and then draw these together into a singular and unifying narrative. As 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.⁵⁰

These connections were repeatedly emphasised by the Prime Minister in statements and press conferences throughout the January and February 2003 period, where he sought to emphasise the interlinked threat posed by Saddam Hussain, the terrorism of al-Qaeda, and WMD.⁵¹ Faced with massive legal and public opposition to war in Iraq, such a strategy helped to legitimise the actions of the Blair government in the build up to the ground invasion on March 20th. During this period, 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 Iraq, al-Qaeda and the proliferation of WMD.⁵² Such a campaign, as noted above, was designed primarily to

alert citizens to the connections between a range of disparate threats and ‘prepare public opinion’ for war.⁵³

Nevertheless, to say that these two groups share the same goals or set of political interests, despite engaged in open ‘war’ with one another, is a particularly contentious claim, and is one that would be immediately rejected by both parties. And yet, for Foucault, the very nature of the *dispositif* engenders such a tangled and internally contradictory relationship, because each element enters into ‘resonance or contradiction’ with the other producing effects an outcomes that are beyond the control of any single actor.⁵⁴ Thus, despite being in a state of prolonged conflict, the emergence of such an ensemble 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. Indeed, what the analysis outline 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’.⁵⁵

CONSTRUCTING AN ‘ELUSIVE’ ENEMY

As if to demonstrate the confluence of interests between these two groups, what is most significant about the representations appearing during the Wood Green events is the way the BBC constructs al-Qaeda as an ‘Elusive’, almost shapeless threat that is dispersed across the United Kingdom and beyond. Although it is important to point out that such a category of representation is an unintentional by-product of the BBC’s need to report on these events, given the aims of both al-Qaeda and the British executive during this time, the appearance of this singular, yet nebulous, mode of representation serves to powerfully reinforce and underscore the propaganda objectives of the two groups.

Such a mode of representation is first evident in the levels of uncertainty expressed by BBC journalists over the sheer size and scale of the alleged plot. Thus, it is suggested that there is a ‘race’ to find those responsible,⁵⁶ that there may be ‘other people out there trying to do the same thing’,⁵⁷ that ‘bigger quantities could be in the hands of terrorists who are still at large in the country’,⁵⁸ that ‘police are still searching for at least two members of the group’,⁵⁹ and that there may be ‘a much wider network’ at large with links to Europe, North Africa, Iraq

and Afghanistan.⁶⁰ Frank Gardner's comments during the January 15th 2003 broadcast are most symptomatic of this view, with the Security Correspondent ominously noting that 'MI5 and other intelligence services simply don't know how big the network is that they're trying to track down'.⁶¹ While this could be read as an acknowledgement of the security services' inadequacy in tracking down the plotters, such statements serve to amplify the nature of the threat and reinforce the belief that al-Qaeda is a shadowy and disparate entity with no clear form or shape.

As if to further bolster this 'Elusive' conception of the terror threat, the BBC's reporting also features a series of references to al-Qaeda's secretive, cell-like structure, with terms such as 'cells',⁶² 'sleeper cells',⁶³ and 'terrorist cells',⁶⁴ working to advance the belief that unknown number of terrorists are in hiding across the United Kingdom. Here, 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, works to further the notion that al-Qaeda operatives are at loose across the United Kingdom, waiting for orders from bin Laden and his lieutenants.⁶⁵ Indeed, the additional belief that the Wood Green events constitute a sinister, and 'spreading', 'web'-like plot draws upon the same discursive repository, with the boundaries surrounding the al-Qaeda phenomenon becoming increasingly vague and unclear as the coverage develops.⁶⁶ Curiously, and as if to reinforce the importance of this category of representation, senior figures within the al-Qaeda movement emphasised the importance of adopting evasive, furtive and secretive methods around this period, with bin Laden, in particular, urging his supporters to 'resort to *dissimulation*'⁶⁷ when carrying out acts of terror and 'to use their intelligence in killing [the enemy] *secretly*' (my emphasis).⁶⁸

The slippage by the BBC's journalists between the terms 'al-Qaeda' (×11), at its peak during the first two days of reporting, and the broader, more diffuse 'network' metaphor (×11) is also significant in this regard. While most likely the result of the uncertainty surrounding the Wood Green events, the appearance of such a label enables the threat posed by the alleged plotters to become increasingly fluid in nature, thus facilitating broader connections to be made to Afghanistan and Iraq. As Mark Featherstone et al. point out, 'the central premise of the contemporary terror network is that it is unofficial, fluid and impossible to pin down'.⁶⁹ Thus, within the 'Elusive' mode of representation, the inherent

dynamism and flexibility embedded within the ‘network’ metaphor ensures that the boundaries surrounding the Wood Green incidents are dangerously extended so that they overlap and become associated with an increasing range of disparate fears and threats.⁷⁰

Indeed, such a notion is especially evident in comments broadcast during the opening January 7th 2003 bulletin, where London correspondent, Ben Brown, describes how ‘[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’.⁷¹ Given the local nature of the Wood Green plot, not to mention the lack of verifiable information from the security services about such a link, it is curious that these connections are made within the BBC’s reporting. Seen within the context of the looming invasion of Iraq, however, Brown’s casual remark serves to cement the connections between al-Qaeda, Iraq and the Wood Green incidents that were repeatedly emphasised by the Prime Minister during this time. The fact that these connections are emphasised moments after claims by Tony Blair that ‘[i]t is only a matter of time before terrorists get hold of it [WMD], and, as the arrests that were made earlier today show, the danger is present and real and with us now’ only further stand to support such a notion.⁷²

These discursive connections find further support through frequent references to the September 11th 2001 attacks and the narrow historical timeframe of the ‘war on terror’. 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 linked to recent developments in the ‘war on terror’. Nevertheless, as outlined above, the actions of the Wood Green plotters can only be understood by way of reference to the civil war in Algeria, and the subsequent relationship between the security services there and in the United Kingdom. Appearing a total of 8 times over the course of the coverage, references to the September 11th 2001 attacks shift between the popularised and shortened versions of ‘September 11th’⁷³ or ‘9/11’,⁷⁴ to the ‘post September 11 fight against terrorism’,⁷⁵ ‘the new post-9/11 threat’,⁷⁶ or, on a number of occasions, simply ‘post-September 11’.⁷⁷ The BBC’s Home Affairs Correspondent, Margaret Gilmore, is the first to explicitly highlight the 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’.⁷⁸

According to Richard Jackson, the popular shortening of September 11th 2001 to ‘September 11’ or, more commonly, ‘9/11’ is a powerful discursive practice that serves to ‘erase the history and context of the events and turn their representation into a cultural-political icon’.⁷⁹ Though the BBC can, in part, be forgiven for being caught-up in the overall narrative of the ‘war on terror’, as David Jordan’s earlier comments imply, within such a narrative, the historical factors which led many Algerians to settle in the United Kingdom are obscured and left silent within the discourse. Indeed, the conciliatory relationship that existed between Britain’s security services and dissident groups based in London prior to these events is also effaced, with only Gardner’s curt admission that ‘[i]nitially they didn’t think that these people posed a problem’ serving to acknowledge such a state of affairs.⁸⁰

On a more subtle level, beyond the language used in the BBC’s coverage, al-Qaeda’s ‘Elusive’ nature is further communicated through the near-total *lack* of images and visual representations seen during the period analysed. Despite a brief, four second sequence of grainy footage during the January 8th 2003 broadcast, in which a number of Algerian militants are seen climbing out of a military-style vehicle, at no point during this first week of coverage do any images of those behind the alleged plot appear in the BBC’s coverage.⁸¹ Though this is most likely a result of there being no visuals available to broadcast, in the absence of a corresponding image, the term ‘al-Qaeda’, and the broader ‘network’ metaphor, becomes an empty signifier which invites the BBC, and its audiences, to imagine what ‘it’ is and what its operatives look like. Thus, rather than draw limitations around the power of al-Qaeda, its sheer *invisibility* becomes its most potent asset, imbuing the Corporation’s coverage with a considerable sense of concern and anxiety, and thus perpetuating the belief that there is an elusive network of al-Qaeda terrorists hiding in towns and cities across the United Kingdom.

Art historian W. J. T. Mitchell explains this process, pointing out that 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’, because such invisibility helps to facilitate other, more imaginative, forms of representation.⁸² He continues, ‘[t]he law against the representation of something in words or images must, in effect, always break itself, because it must name, describe, define – that is, represent – the very thing that it prohibits’.⁸³ While this is not to say that the BBC deliberately prevents its audiences from having visual

access to al-Qaeda, 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, in the absence of any fixed points of reference, journalists, politicians and citizens are able to project their deepest fears and fantasies into the void that is 'al-Qaeda', encouraging further speculation about the nature of the threat posed to the United Kingdom.

Notably, this lack of images further contrasts with the immaterial, asomatous nature of ricin as a substance. 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 a 'failure of the heart'.⁸⁴ Echoing the writings of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, the post-September 11th 2001 security environment appears to have given rise to

the spectre of an 'immaterial' form of warfare where the attack is invisible –viruses, poisons which can be anywhere and nowhere. On the level of visible material reality, nothing happens, no big explosions; yet the known universe starts to collapse, life disintegrates.⁸⁵

Written over a year before these events,⁸⁶ Žižek's observations eerily foreshadow the Wood Green incidents, with its invisible perpetrators and poisons, not to mention the non-existent plot, and find themselves echoed in the everyday remarks of an unnamed witness, who suggests that '[i]t could be next-door to you and you wouldn't know, would you? You know, it's just the way we live now, we're living on a knife edge'.⁸⁷ Perhaps more important here, however, is Žižek's suggestion that 'the greatest task will be to identify the enemy and his weapons', a notion that further stands to underscore the BBC's veiled representations of this phenomenon and the implicit suggestion that al-Qaeda operatives are both everywhere and nowhere.⁸⁸

Interestingly, despite the lack of images within the BBC's reporting, the emergence of a series of discourses surrounding asylum and migration in some ways serve to limit the ideational boundaries surrounding 'al-Qaeda', and thus contain the threat within a particular subset of the population. First evident in the slippery references to 'Algerians',⁸⁹ 'North Africans'⁹⁰ and 'asylum seekers' more generally,⁹¹ and increasing

significantly with the capture of Kamel Bourgass on January 14th, the presence of such frameworks of knowledge help to maintain the belief that al-Qaeda constitutes a largely foreign threat, therefore, preserving the distinction between the (internal) 'Self' and the (external) 'Other'. Notably, while it is important to point out that the Labour government explicitly sought to minimise any connections between terrorism and Britain's asylum and migration policy during this time,⁹² the presence of such, and, by default, notions of belonging and *un*belonging, help to secure a particular understanding of the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and thus further distance the threat from the United Kingdom.

The confluence of interests between al-Qaeda and the British executive is particularly evident during a brief exchange between chief news reader, Michael Buerk, and the BBC's Security Correspondent, Frank Gardner, during the January 7th 2003 broadcast. Following a short interview segment with Margaret Gilmore, the Home Affairs Correspondent, Buerk turns to Gardner and inquires 'what are the intelligence services saying about a discovery of this kind and the threat from al-Qaeda?'⁹³ In typical BBC style, Gardner begins cautiously, explaining that the security services are remaining silent with regard to who or what is behind the alleged poisons plot. As he admits, 'whatever evidence they may or may not have about a possible link with al-Qaeda, they're not sharing that with the public or with me'.⁹⁴ Indeed, such an approach would seem wise, given the fact that little evidence has emerged at this stage to point to a terrorist plot, let alone suggest a link to al-Qaeda. Despite this, however, Gardner goes on to emphasise the broad nature of the threat by blurring the boundaries between al-Qaeda and the threat posed by 'Islamic' extremism more generally, describing how the authorities are 'investigating any possible links with other suspected Islamic extremists, not just in Britain but throughout Europe'.⁹⁵ He goes on to magnify the threat posed by al-Qaeda, describing how they have 'a large number of sleeper cells' and people 'at loose in Europe', who use 'false identities, false passports, and use a number of safe houses'.⁹⁶ Perhaps more worryingly, he goes on to describe how 'al-Qaeda's leadership... took a strategic decision to include Britain in the targets they would like to attack', and that 'they're now looking to target Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, as well as Australia'.⁹⁷

While Gardner's comments may now seem eerily prescient, one year before the Madrid train bombings and two years prior to the London transport bombings, what is most evident in these speculative claims is

the way in which they serve to directly feed into, and mutually reinforce, the interests of al-Qaeda and the state, tying both these ‘groups’ together in a strange, mutually conditioning symbiosis. Significantly, the more the Security Correspondent, or ‘Insecurity Correspondent’, as some have labelled him,⁹⁸ highlights the dangers posed by al-Qaeda, the more he serves to unwittingly reinforce the positions of these two groups; providing al-Qaeda with a potent propaganda image, while at the same time lending legitimacy to the upcoming invasion of Iraq. Of course, these fears become all too real with the capture of the purported ‘mastermind’ behind the plot and the tragic death of DC Oake, but to describe this incident as the work of an al-Qaeda suspect, again, merely serves to feed back into this symbiotic, mutually-beneficial cycle.

CONCLUSION

The coverage surrounding the events in Wood Green, and later Manchester, provide the ideal case with which to assess the shifting power relations underpinning the BBC’s representations, and, in particular, the way in which portrayals of al-Qaeda are mobilised for political purposes. What is most significant about these representations, however, is the way they give rise to a conflicting, yet mutually-reinforcing, alliance between elements within al-Qaeda and the British executive, whereby each side gains from the coverage devoted to this event. Thus, rather than correspond to the interests of a single group, these representations function according to a broader, albeit unstable, strategic logic, whereby the BBC’s portrayals constitute the endpoint of a broad ‘system of relations’ between a range of individuals and institutions.

While they omit to mention the role of the news media in this process, such a state of affairs is acknowledged by Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, who argue that,

[t]here 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.⁹⁹

To repeat, this is not to say that the BBC is knowingly complicit in such a relationship, but rather that the mere act of reporting on the Wood Green events helps to sustain this mutually constitutive bond, thus enabling the broadcaster to become ‘hijacked’ by *both* al-Qaeda and their political rivals.¹⁰⁰

In addition to revealing the political dynamics of these representations, however, these events provide further insight into the nature of the BBC’s representations over the course of the ‘war on terror’ period. In particular, despite their vague and uncertain character, with fear-driven discourses surrounding the (*in*)visibility of terror suspects, the association between al-Qaeda, Iraq and WMD, and indeed broader anxieties concerning asylum and illegal immigration appearing within the coverage, what is most significant about such representations is their very *stability* during this period. Indeed, much more so than any of the other case studies analysed in this book, the representations analysed here appear in their most fixed and settled form, with remarkably few competing modes of representation appearing within the coverage. While such representational stability can, as suggested above, be attributed to the conditions surrounding the alleged plot, the chapter also sheds light on the way the Bush and Blair administration’s ‘war on terror’ had become the dominant political paradigm for interpreting and explaining events around the world during this time. At a little over 15 months after the September 11th 2001 attacks, the language and symbolism of the ‘war on terror’ had become so embedded within British political and media discourse that opposing ways of seeing and speaking about ‘al-Qaeda’ are rendered silent within its reporting. In this context, despite its much respected ‘neutrality’ and ‘independence’, the BBC cannot help but be caught-up in the discursive logics and strategies governing the ‘war on terror’, inadvertently reinforcing its underlying interests and power relations.

According to documentary filmmaker Peter Taylor, however, the BBC actively sought to resist such rhetoric in its reporting. As he points out,

I think the BBC was sceptical of the label, and I certainly was sceptical, which is why I called it the ‘so-called war on terror’, because if you say ‘*so-called* war on terror’ it does not imply that you agree with the description. It’s really important that journalists stand outside of expressions like that, because if you use it the danger is that you are seen to be part of it, and above all what BBC journalists have to do, and journalists in general,

is maintain independence, because it's that independence that is what gives our work credibility (emphasis in original).¹⁰¹

While the findings outlined here contradict Taylor's claim about the BBC's use of the 'war on terror' label, at least in the coverage seen during this period, he does raise an important point about the dangers of being, in the words of one BBC correspondent, 'sucked into the narrative'.¹⁰²

Significantly, however, in the same way that the BBC's representations provide the al-Qaeda phenomenon with a disparate, albeit continually shifting, form and structure, which, as a result, serves to work to the advantage of those participating in the 'war on terror', they also, importantly, engender the conditions in which certain interpretations and counterterrorism policies are made more conceivable. This is not to say that the broadcaster's representations directly cause certain audience interpretations counterterrorism policies, but rather that they formulate the ideational conditions of possibility for a limited number of political outcomes. With this in mind, the analysis now turns consider the July 7th 2005 London transport bombings in order to consider what consequences can be said to arise from the BBC's depictions of al-Qaeda.

NOTES

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...', *Daily Mirror* (January 8th 2003), pp. 1–3; Mike Sullivan, 'Factory of Death', *The Sun* (January 8th 2003), p. 1, for examples.
2. See Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', pp. 194–195.
3. See Hillel Nossek, 'Our News and Their News: The Role of National Identity in the Coverage of Foreign News', *Journalism*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2004), pp. 343–368.
4. See Lawrence Archer & Fiona Bawdon, *Ricin! The Inside Story of the Terror Plot That Never Was* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. 114, for an overview of the plot and aftermath.
5. Lorenzo Vidino, *Al-Qaeda in Europe: The New Battleground of International Jihad* (New York: Prometheus, 2006), p. 182.

6. See David Miller, 'The Propaganda Machine', in David Miller (ed.), *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), pp. 85–87.
7. Jeff Edwards, 'It's Here...', *Daily Mirror* (January 8th 2003), pp. 1–3.
8. See Mark Curtis, *Secret Affairs: Britain's Collusion with Radical Islam* (London: Serpents Tail, 2010), pp. 256–276; See also Michael Clarke, 'The Contract with Muslims Must Not Be Torn Up', *The Guardian* (August 26th 2005). Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/aug/26/terrorism.religion> (Accessed May 5th 2017); Raffaello Pantucci, *We Love Death as You Love Life: Britain's Suburban Terrorists* (London: Hurst & Co., 2015), pp. 148–151.
9. Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', p. 195.
10. Steve Hewitt, *The British War on Terror: Terrorism and Counterterrorism on the Home Front Since 9/11* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 93.
11. See Jeremy H. Keenan, 'Security and Insecurity in North Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 33, No. 108 (2006), p. 276. See also Jeremy H. Keenan, 'Africa Unsecured?' and 'Algerian State Terrorism and Atrocities in Northern Mali', *Open Democracy* (September 25th 2012). Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/jeremy-h-keenan/algerian-state-terrorism-and-atrocities-in-northern-mali> (Accessed May 5th 2017).
12. Lawrence Archer & Fiona Bawdon, *Ricin!*, p. 94.
13. Alan Doig et al., 'Marching in Time: Alliance Politics, Synchrony and the Case for War in Iraq, 2002–2003', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (2007), p. 25.
14. See Eric Herring & Piers Robinson, 'Deception and Britain's Road to War in Iraq', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2014), pp. 213–232. See also Piers Robinson, 'Learning from the Chilcot Report: Propaganda, Deception and the "War on Terror"', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2017), pp. 47–73, for further analysis.
15. See Steven Kettell, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq* (London: Zed, 2010), pp. 58–59.
16. Jack Straw, 'Straw's Full Response', *The Guardian* (February 5th 2003). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/feb/05/foreignpolicy.iraq> (Accessed May 5th 2017).
17. Lawrence Archer & Fiona Bawdon, *Ricin!*, p. 79.
18. See Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News*, pp. 168–172.
19. Telephone interview with David Jordan (August 12th 2016).
20. Skype interview with Peter Taylor (August 23rd 2016).

21. Magnus Ranstorp, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
22. Reda Hessaine, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
23. Richard Cobbold, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
24. Nigel Churton, 'News at Ten' (January 9th 2003).
25. Jean-Francois Daguzan, 'News at Ten' (January 9th 2003).
26. Alastair Hay, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
27. Pat Troop, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
28. See Frank Gardner, *Blood and Sand* (London: Bantam Books, 2006), p. 292.
29. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 9th 2003).
30. Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (January 13th 2003).
31. Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (January 13th 2005). See also Tony Blair, 'PM Press Conference' (January 13th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20080909021345/http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page3005> (Accessed August 13th 2017).
32. See Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
33. See Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
34. See 'Terror Trial had Blanket News Ban', *BBC News* (online). Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4441903.stm> (Accessed June 4th 2016).
35. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.
36. See Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', p. 195. See also Claudia Aradau & Rens Van Munster, 'Governing Terrorism Through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2007), pp. 89–115.
37. Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', p. 194.
38. Jeffrey Bussolini, 'What Is a Dispositif?', p. 92.
39. William E. Connolly, 'The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine', pp. 869–886.
40. Luiza Bialasiewicz et al., 'Performing Security', p. 408.
41. William E. Connolly, 'The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine', p. 871.
42. Nikolas Rose, 'The Formation of the Psychology of the Individual in England 1870–1939', Unpublished PhD Thesis (London: University of London), p. 116.
43. Fawaz Gerges, *The Rise and Fall of Al-Qaeda*, p. 29.
44. Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 49.
45. Daniel Byman, *Al-Qaeda, The Islamic State and the Global Jihadist Movement* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2015), p. 51.
46. Osama bin Laden, 'Full Transcript of bin Laden's Speech', *Al Jazeera* (November 1st 2004). Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/archive/2004/11/200849163336457223.html> (Accessed May 8th 2017).

47. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France 1977–1978*. Trans. Graham Burchell (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 144.
48. See Steven Kettell, ‘Dilemmas of Discourse: Legitimising Britain’s War on Terror’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2013), p. 266. See also Steven Kettell, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq* (London: Zed, 2010); Mark Curtis, *Secret Affairs*; Steven Kettell, *New Labour and the New World Order* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2011); Timothy Edmunds et al., *British Foreign Policy and the National Interest* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
49. Steven Kettell, *Dirty Politics*, pp. 50–51.
50. 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).
51. 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 2016); 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 2016); 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 2016); 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 2016); 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 2016); Tony Blair, ‘PM Press Conference’ (February 19th 2003). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20061101012618/http://number10.gov.uk/page3007> (Accessed December 27th 2016).
52. Steven Kettell, *Dirty Politics*, pp. 58–59.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
54. Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', p. 195.
55. Laura Basu, 'British Satire in the Thick of It', *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2014), p. 93.
56. Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
57. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
58. Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
59. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
60. George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (January 14th 2003).
61. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
62. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
63. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
64. Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
65. See Ian S. Lustick, *Trapped in the War on Terror* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 38; See also Regina Bendix & John Bendix (eds.), *Sleepers, Moles, and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Societal Integration and Differing Meanings of Freedom* (Lund: University of Copenhagen Press, 2003), p. 5, for further analysis.
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71. Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
72. Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
73. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
74. Jean-Francois Daguzan, 'News at Ten' (January 9th 2003).
75. George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (January 14th 2003).
76. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
77. See Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 9th and 14th 2003).
78. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
79. Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terror*, p. 7.
80. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003).
81. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
82. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 63.

83. Ibid.
84. See Niall Dickson, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003); Alastair Hay, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
85. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 37.
86. The actual essay appeared on a website originally housed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on October 7th 2001. See Slavoj Žižek, 'Welcome to the Desert of the Real'. Available at: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/welcome-to-the-desert-of-the-real/> (Accessed August 5th 2017).
87. Unnamed Witness, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
88. Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 37.
89. See Michael Buerk, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 9th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 14th 2003); Kevin Bocquet, 'News at Ten' (January 14th 2001); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003), for example.
90. See Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003); Peter Sissons, '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), for example.
91. See Michael Buerk, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003); Reda Hessaine, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003); Peter Sissons, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); David Blunkett, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Oliver Letwin, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003); Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (January 15th 2003), for example.
92. See Jeff Huysmans & Alessandra Buonfino, 'The Politics of Exception and Unease: Immigration, Asylum and Terrorism in Parliamentary Debates', *Political Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2008), pp. 766–788, for example.
93. Michael Buerk, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
94. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Frank Gardner, *Blood and Sand* (London: Bantam Books, 2007), p. 302.

99. Joesba Zulaika & William A. Douglass, 'The Terrorist Subject: Terrorism Studies and the Absent Subjectivity', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2008), p. 29.
100. See Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, p. 18.
101. Skype interview with Peter Taylor (August 23rd 2016).
102. Telephone interview with anonymous BBC correspondent (August 20th 2016).



The July 7th 2005 Transport Bombings

Not long after the Wood Green trial, Britain was to experience terror on a scale not seen since the Second World War. Occurring just before 9 a.m. on the morning of July 7th 2005, three near-simultaneous explosions rocked the heart of London's busy transport network. Though many thought, in the initial confusion, that the blasts were the result of a possible gas leak, a fourth explosion at 9.47 a.m., on a packed bus in Tavistock Square, confirmed suspicions that they were the work of terrorists. Despite the levels of shock and horror felt by many across Britain, however, for those within the intelligence and security services the timing, location, and identities of the perpetrators came as no surprise. As early as May 2004 secret Whitehall documents 'revealed that the government had been "warned of a thousand-strong groundswell of al-Qaeda sympathisers in the UK, actively engaged in terrorist activity"', with intelligence agencies in France, Spain, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States all warning of a possible attack.¹ Notably, during the coverage of the Wood Green plot, and also its 2005 trial, the BBC itself had reported on the possibility that al-Qaeda might seek to attack 'large numbers of people on a target like the London Underground'.²

For Mark Easton, who reported extensively on these events, the fact that the bombings were carried out by four British citizens led to a major shift in perceptions of al-Qaeda, and in particular the long-held belief that it was an entity uniquely comprised of noncitizens. As he explains,

I think that undoubtedly 7/7 was an important moment for Britain in terms of understanding the 'home-grown' nature of the threat. And it made us, that is journalists, academics and politicians and others, think much harder about how we could create a society where people were prepared to act in that way. People who were born in the UK, were educated here, and had previously been, you know, normal and non-violent... And I also think that it is absolutely right after such an appalling series of attacks that we reflect really hard on what this tells us about our society and the things that helped create that situation, and indeed what we could and should do to try and prevent this happening again.³

Given the impact of these events on understandings of the terror threat, the aim of this chapter is to consider the broader social, cultural and political consequences that can be said to arise from the BBC's representations. It should be clear, however, that the point here is not to suggest a direct, causal relationship between the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda and particular audience interpretations or counterterrorism policies. Media representations do not have effects in a directly positivist sense; that is, where a representation is an independent variable and a policy is the dependent variable.⁴ Considering the sheer number of individuals involved in the production, circulation and reception of these representations a direct causal link would be impossible to measure. Rather mediated representations of terrorism help to construct the boundaries of political possibility, via the engineering of a series of roles, qualities, behaviours and identities, which then help to create a knowledgeable basis for social and political action. According to this logic, the process of selecting one mode of representation over and above another has profound and lasting consequences for citizens' understandings of the terror threat as they can make certain counterterrorism policies appear to be more logical or appropriate than others.

With this in mind, the analysis shows how the BBC's coverage gives rise to two competing 'truth regimes' surrounding the July 7th 2005 attacks, each with their own preferred ways of seeing and speaking about the terror threat. In the first, 'al-Qaeda' is portrayed in reductive terms as an external, foreign danger primarily driven by ideological and extremist religious factors; a category or representation described as the 'Islamic' mode. In the second, 'al-Qaeda' is viewed as an internal, shadowy menace, comprised of an unknown number of British citizens angered by aspects of Western foreign policy in the Middle East and Asia; a mode of portrayal identified in the analysis as the 'Elusive'

mode. As we have seen elsewhere in this book, although presented separately here, the boundaries separating these two categories are incredibly porous, with one mode of representation often feeding into and intersecting with the next.

Following the structure outlined in the preceding chapters, the first section provides a historical context to the July 7th 2005 attacks, with information about the origins of the four bombers, and their relationship to al-Qaeda's senior leadership and other terror groups active in Britain at the time. This is followed by a broad overview of the coverage of these events, with technical details about report times and running order supplied alongside information regarding the BBC's narrative to these events. The chapter then briefly outlines the two truth regimes present within coverage, and their respective modes of representation, before turning to the analysis of two weeks' worth of 'News at Ten' broadcasts following July 7th 2005 attacks and highlighting the possible consequences that can be said to arise from the BBC's portrayals.

BACKGROUND TO THE JULY 7TH 2005 ATTACKS

At approximately 8.50 a.m. on the morning of July 7th 2005 a large explosion rocked a packed London Underground train between Liverpool Street and Aldgate Station, killing 8 people and injuring 171 others. Seconds later two further bombs exploded on trains at Edgware Road Station, killing 7 and injuring 163 people, and on the line between Kings Cross and Russell Square Station, killing 27 and injuring 340 people. Nearly an hour later, at 9.47 a.m., and just as many believed the horror had ended, a further explosion occurred on a bus in Tavistock Square, killing 13 people and injuring over 110 others. While many assumed, in the first few days after the bombings, that they were the work of a network of foreign-born extremists, it gradually emerged that the attacks were carried out by four British citizens. Within five days of the attacks the bombers' identities were revealed as thirty year-old Mohammad Sidique Khan, twenty-two year-old Shehzad Tanweer, eighteen year-old Hasib Hussain, and nineteen year-old Abdullah Shaheed Jamal, also known as Jermaine Lindsay.⁵

Growing up in the economically deprived area of Beeston, West Yorkshire, it is thought that three of the four bombers, Khan, Tanweer, and Hussain, were drawn closer together through an informal social network of people based around the Hardy Street and Stratford Street

mosques, the Iqra Bookshop and the Hamara Healthy Living Centre. As seen in other working-class Pakistani communities in the United Kingdom,⁶ the three men experienced a profound crisis over their identities and position in British society, something which worked to draw them closer together and create a sense of embattled solidarity.⁷ The group's fourth member, Jamal, also experienced a turbulent youth; with his parents separating at an early age and his mother leaving England for his ancestral Jamaica when he was seventeen. Looking to the Jamaican-born preacher Abdallah al-Faisal for inspiration and guidance, Jamal converted to Islam in 2000 and immediately became active in mosque's around the Huddersfield and Dewsbury area. It is during this time that he came into contact with the others.

Notably, the years period prior to the bombings saw massive structural changes within the broader al-Qaeda movement. While the war in Iraq led to a massive influx of funding and recruits for the broader 'network of networks', the presence of Coalition troops in Afghanistan had severely disrupted al-Qaeda Central's physical base. This forced al-Qaeda's senior leadership to adopt short-term, tactical alliances with other groups and terrorist networks based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Northern Pakistan. Such changes had a considerable influence on al-Qaeda's choice of targets and, importantly, its choice of operatives, with more Pakistani, Bangladeshi and South Asian volunteers seeking training and spiritual guidance from its core leadership.⁸ As we saw with the those who carried out the September 11th 2001 attacks, the London bombers appear to have been, what Aidan Kirby has referred to as 'self-starters', or 'an autonomous clique', whose initial motivation and ideological development occurred without substantial outside influence.⁹

Sometime in July 2003, it's believed that Khan, along with a number of men arrested as part of a later plot to blow up the Ministry of Sound nightclub and the Bluewater shopping centre, attended a terrorist training facility in the FATA.¹⁰ Facilitated by an American-Pakistan, Mohammed Junaid Babar, and run by a local tribal leader linked to the Kashmiri separatist groups Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, the group gained experience using explosives and small arms. While not officially affiliated with al-Qaeda, the incestuous and well-established infrastructure shared by these two groups, and also members of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), helped to facilitate connections with

al-Qaeda's core leadership.¹¹ Crucially, the time spent at the training camp also served to draw the group together as a unit and reinforce their determination to carry out attacks in the United Kingdom.¹²

Upon returning to Britain, the group sought to further isolate themselves from friends and family members. Witnesses described how Khan, Tanweer, and Hussain had formed an extremely close-knit group, and were regularly seen together using the gym beneath the Hardy Street mosque, at karate lessons at the Hamara Centre, and also went swimming together frequently at the Armley Leisure Centre.¹³ The sense of closeness amongst the group, alongside their isolation from the rest of British society, both 'mainstream' and 'non-mainstream', appears to have been crucial in the radicalisation process, serving to further inspire and galvanise their resolve. It also created a level of fascination and mystique amongst their peers, with Burke noting how many second-generation British Pakistanis saw 'jihad' as an 'alternative lifestyle choice', something that symbolised adventure, rebellion, and danger,¹⁴ and, importantly, provided many young men with a completely different set of aspirations than their seemingly predetermined roles as Beeston's next shopkeepers, taxi drivers and waiters.¹⁵

Despite high-profile arrests in April 2004 of a number of individuals closely linked to Khan and Tanweer, the two men travelled to Pakistan later in November for six weeks.¹⁶ It is understood that the two attended a Lashkar-e-Toiba run, al-Qaeda-linked, training camp in Malakand, Northern Pakistan, where they received further weapons and explosives training and, although it has never been firmly established, further instruction from senior al-Qaeda operatives.¹⁷

After returning to the United Kingdom, all four of the bombers made several trips to London during the next six months, visiting landmarks close to the four proposed bombsites. On February 22nd 2005, Khan and the others purchased their first bomb-making materials from Huddersfield Hydroponics, visiting forty-five similar outlets over the next few months to purchase acetones, hair dyes and other commonly available chemicals.¹⁸ Around the time, witnesses noted little outward signs of what was to come, aside from one individual noting that Tanweer's hair had been bleached blonde towards the end of June, something which prosecutors believe to have been caused whilst preparing the compounds. The bombs were estimated to cost only a few hundred pounds and were based on instructions readily available on the Internet.¹⁹ On

June 28th 2005, Khan, Tanweer and Jamal, who was noted to have begun to spend increasing amounts of his time with three Yorkshire men, made a final trip to London, visiting many of the sites that were to be targeted on the July 7th attack. In the following week, the four men visited various friends and family members, with each of the men showing little outward signs of abnormality.²⁰

At 6.49 a.m. on the morning of July 7th 2005, all four bombers arranged to meet in the car park of Luton station. Minutes later, they were caught on CCTV entering the station, all four of which can be seen to be wearing 'bulky rucksacks' and, according to eyewitnesses, looked as if they were 'going on a camping holiday'.²¹ They boarded the 7.40 a.m. Thameslink train to Kings Cross, which arrived, slightly late, at the city at around 8.20 a.m. At 8.24 a.m., outside a Boots chemist, the men said goodbye to each other, hugging euphorically as if celebrating an occasion, before each going their separate ways.²²

OVERVIEW OF THE BBC'S 'NEWS AT TEN' COVERAGE

For the analysis, two weeks' worth of BBC1 'News at Ten' broadcasts were sourced through archives at the British Film Institute (July 7th–20th 2005). Due to the scale of the attacks, not to mention the fact that they were understood to be the first ever suicide bombings in Western Europe, the BBC devoted a significant proportion of its coverage to these events, with the reporting dominating the entire July 7th 2005 broadcast and subsequent days taking up the first 20 minutes or so of weekday coverage. In fact, the London attacks appeared first in the 'News at Ten' running order up until July 17th 2005, when it appeared third after reports about the death of ex-Prime Minister Ted Heath and a short report on the war in Iraq. During this time, the BBC covered a range of topics related to the attacks: shifting from visceral reports dealing with the victims of the bombings and their impact upon those living in and around London, and indeed British community relations more broadly, to the wider search for the perpetrators and any possible accomplices. In total, over 3 hours of continual news footage were examined, of which 51 reports dealt with the London bombings and their aftermath, and 30 focusing on the search for those responsible.

The BBC's focus on Islam and Muslims is particularly apparent during the first few days of coverage, with two reports, one lasting 2 minutes

and 51 seconds²³ and the other exactly 2 minutes, dealing explicitly with the impact of the attacks upon Britain's 'Muslim community'.²⁴ Though it is tempting to read this as a tacit admission of guilt on behalf of the Corporation, in line with its editorial guidelines,²⁵ and indeed its broader Public Purpose commitments concerning the need to fairly and accurately portray Britain's minority groups, it is clear that the BBC is at pains to show the extent to which the bombings affected both Muslim *and* non-Muslim citizens.²⁶ This notion is particularly evident in the reporting of the death of Shahara Islam, a twenty year-old Muslim killed in the Tavistock Square bus bombing, during the July 8th 2005 broadcast.²⁷

For Mark Easton, the London bombings presented significant challenges for BBC correspondents and producers during this period. As he explains,

we thought really hard about the language we used, we thought really hard about who we spoke to, we thought about who, if anyone, was truly representative of a particular community, you know, we thought about all these questions. We thought about whether we were talking to the right people, for example, were the Muslim Council of Britain the right organisation to get an understanding of how people were thinking, or did we need to work harder, to do our own opinion polls and speak to people on the ground, so to speak, in youth centres, mosques, and so on? So we were doing all of those things simultaneously, and thinking really hard about how we can get a handle on the situation'.²⁸

Alongside the focus on Britain's Muslim community, considerable attention is also devoted during the coverage to establishing the identity of the perpetrators and, perhaps more unexpectedly, their motivations. Here, for example, questions surrounding the origins of those responsible are repeatedly voiced within the coverage, with Margaret Gilmore and Frank Gardner, in particular, inquiring 'were they foreign or were they home-grown British?'²⁹ Indeed, while the first four days of coverage are marked by the absence of images of the attackers, a description of one of the perpetrators as 'olive-skinned' by an eyewitness provides some insight into the identity of those who carried out the attacks.³⁰ More unusually, the BBC also explores, albeit briefly, the connections between the bombings and Britain's role in Afghanistan and Iraq, with Frank Gardner quoting directly from a statement released by an al-Qaeda affiliate during the first day of reporting.³¹ Further links between the

bombings and Britain's policies within the 'war on terror' are discussed across the coverage in a surprisingly persistent manner.³²

Significantly, the term 'al-Qaeda', first suggested by the Foreign Secretary in the immediate aftermath of the attack,³³ also features heavily within the first two days of coverage (×14); with this label subtly changing to the more vague 'terrorists linked to al-Qaeda' by the July 11th 2005 broadcast.³⁴ The additional linguistic shift around this time, from the initial, knee-jerk 'terrorists' to the, less value-laden and more neutral-sounding, 'bombers', is also revealing,³⁵ something that enables the BBC balance the need to report on the London attacks with its strict editorial guidelines on coverage of 'terrorism-related' issues.³⁶ Importantly, the belief that the attackers may still be at large in the country is raised on several occasions,³⁷ and this fear is further heightened in claims, initially raised by former Metropolitan Police chief Lord Stephens, that 'the bombers were most likely to be British'.³⁸

With the discovery of significant quantities of explosives in Burley, Leeds on June 12th this fear is further actualised, and we see a greater level of attention centre on the likelihood that the four bombers were British. Here we see a significant shift in the BBC's representations of al-Qaeda, with the emphasis changing from the threat posed by an external, foreign 'Other', to that of a more familiar, internal 'Self'. The further announcement that the main suspects were indeed British-born, but also of *Pakistani*-origin, also leave little doubt as to the ethnic and religious identity of the bombers. Though the BBC seeks to tread a cautious line around this time, repeatedly interviewing 'shocked',³⁹ 'moderate' Muslims,⁴⁰ there is an increased emphasis on the shadowy presence of 'radical' or 'extremist' groups 'in the midst' of Britain's seemingly monolithic 'Muslim community'.⁴¹ With the appearance of passport and portrait-style images of the four bombers during the July 13th and 14th broadcasts, however, the tone of the BBC's coverage shifts again, with its reports highlighting their 'normality' and 'Britishness', something brought about through the increase in interviews with friends, neighbours and family-members.⁴² Most notably, it is here where we see greater levels of discursive contestation within the BBC's representations; with a clear tension between the portrayal of the perpetrators as simply 'British-born and bred', and the view, promoted by the Prime Minister, that they were U.K. citizens that were also motivated by a *foreign*, 'violent ideology'.⁴³

SHIFTING REGIMES OF ‘TRUTH’ AND REPRESENTATION

Before discussing the BBC’s coverage of this event, it is necessary to briefly return to the conceptual and analytical framework in order to understand how certain modes of visual and verbal representation create the conditions for particular audience and policy-related interpretations. The previous chapter showed how the constellation of power relations emerging during the Wood Green ricin events served to produce an alignment of interests between elements within the British executive and the al-Qaeda phenomenon, whereby both groups stood to gain from the BBC’s portrayals. By the time of the July 7th 2005 attacks, however, the ‘system of relations’ underpinning this dispositif had shifted considerably, giving rise to a whole range of new discourses and formations of knowledge surrounding the al-Qaeda phenomenon.

One of the most significant factors, in this regard, was the impact that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were having on public opinion.⁴⁴ Although both conflicts initially received favourable levels of news coverage in Britain, especially in the build-up to both invasions,⁴⁵ as the protracted nature of these wars became more apparent public support began to steadily decline.⁴⁶ In the case of Iraq, moreover, revelations surrounding the way the Bush and Blair governments justified the case for war, and in particular the tenuous links between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda and the eventual failure to find weapons of mass destruction after the fall of Baghdad, further entrenched public opinion in the U.K.⁴⁷ Within counterterrorism circles, moreover, these wars also had considerable impact upon perceptions of the terror threat, with some warning that home-grown, domestic terrorists had become a bigger danger than from those abroad.⁴⁸ A report circulated amongst senior members of the Labour party explicitly stated that U.K. foreign policy had become one of the main drivers behind recruitment by terrorist organisations.⁴⁹ As such, at nearly four years into the war in Afghanistan and over two years into the Iraq conflict, the public and political criticism that had generated around these two wars helped to produce a marked shift in the ‘war on terror’s’ underlying discourses and representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon.

Particularly useful in making sense of this shift, and the representations it gives rise to, is the concept of ‘truth regime’.⁵⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, in much the same way that Foucault suggested that ‘truth’

is discursively produced within culture and society, news must, itself, adhere to a set of rules and governing assumptions so as to maintain stability within its on-screen ‘reality’.⁵¹ This can be seen, for example, in the self-legitimizing codes, semiotic conventions and representational practices adopted within news media reporting that serve to maintain a specific relationship between the audience and those depicted on-screen.⁵² As Stuart Hall explains,

[t]he facts must be arranged, in the course of programming, so as to present an intelligible ‘story’: hence the process of presentation will reflect the explanations and interpretations that seem most plausible, credible or adequate to the broadcaster, his [or her] editorial team and the expert commentators he [or she] consults. Above all, the known facts of a situation must be translated into intelligible *audio-visual signs, organised as a discourse*. TV cannot transmit ‘raw historical’ events as such, to its audiences: it can only transmit pictures or, stories, informative talk or discussion about, the events it selectively treats (emphasis in original).⁵³

In addition to maintaining its own epistemological boundaries and ‘truth’-telling mechanisms, moreover, news must also negotiate between the multiple, competing truth regimes that circulate around particular events.⁵⁴ Here, the professional ideology of ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ underpinning the production of news seeks to balance a series of, sometimes complementary, often incommensurate, ‘truths’.

Crucially, this process of negotiation is especially evident in the days after the London bombings. In particular, we see the emergence of two competing truth regimes surrounding the attacks, each with their own, preferred ways of seeing and speaking about the terror threat. In the first, ‘al-Qaeda’ is constructed as an *external* threat driven by a foreign, dangerous and, uniquely, evil ideology. Although not primarily attributed to a single, cohesive group, this ‘Islamic’ mode of representation can be linked to statements from senior figures within the Blair administration, alongside terrorism and security ‘experts’ and former policing officials who feature within the BBC’s reporting. As we saw in Chapter 3, such a mode of representation draws upon discourses surrounding Orientalism, and the emerging concept of radicalisation, in order to secure and stabilise the meaning of ‘al-Qaeda’ for audiences. In the second, ‘al-Qaeda’ is portrayed as an *internal* enemy within, but one that, by contrast, appears to be driven more by aspects of British and American foreign policy in

Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine. While in many ways reliant upon the same frameworks of knowledge, within this 'Elusive' mode of representation al-Qaeda is made sense of through a broader set of discourses surrounding Britishness, normality and deviance. In contrast to the 'Islamic' mode, this category of representation can be linked to the perspectives of ordinary British citizens, such as neighbours, friends and family members of the four bombers, as well as the views of journalists and dissident ministers and backbenchers within the Labour party.

It should be clear, however, that the point here is not to say that one mode of representation is more accurate or truthful than the other, but rather to draw attention to the way each category of portrayal helps to produce the conditions of possibility for very different audience and policy-related outcomes.

THE 'ISLAMIC' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

In similar respects to the coverage seen during the September 11th 2001 attacks, appearing in the hours after the London bombings we see the emergence of a mode of representation that explicitly calls into play discourses surrounding Orientalism, irrationality and religious extremism; what is termed, here, as the 'Islamic' mode. Though not exclusively attributed to this group, the emphasis by figures within the Blair administration to al-Qaeda's religious, as opposed to political, identity serves to reinforce a truth regime that views the London attacks as less of a reaction to Britain's activities overseas and more a consequence of the inherent violence and backwardness of Islamic peoples. Given the concerns about the impact of these attacks on societal cohesion in Britain, however, it should be noted that these representations are matched by genuine efforts by the BBC to distance the actions of al-Qaeda from the beliefs and practices of the wider Muslim community, something that, moreover, helps to maintain an uneasy distinction between 'good' Muslims and 'bad' terrorists.

In the first instance, this truth regime can be seen in the belief that the London bombings were carried out by individuals primarily motivated by an irrational and religious worldview. Thus, we see statements pertaining to the fact that 'only al-Qaeda would hate us so much as to do something like this',⁵⁵ and that the attacks illustrated the 'ruthlessness'⁵⁶ and 'fanaticism' of the bombers.⁵⁷ Comments by Tony Blair further emphasise such an assessment, with the Prime Minister

describing how ‘these people act in the name of Islam’, and that it is important to stand firm in the face of ‘those who would impose their *fanaticism* and *extremism* on all of us’ (emphasis added).⁵⁸ Most notably, the BBC’s reporting also features descriptions of the perpetrators as ‘Islamic terrorists’⁵⁹ and ‘radical Islamists’,⁶⁰ alongside more broader characterisations of them as ‘men who acted in *Allah’s* name’,⁶¹ people who ‘despise moderation and kill in *Allah’s* name’,⁶² or persons ‘consumed with fanatical hatred’ (emphasis added).⁶³ Gordon Corera’s subsequent description of al-Qaeda’s senior leadership as people located in the ‘*wild* borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan’ lends additional support to such a notion,⁶⁴ inadvertently reinforcing colonial-era stereotypes of the ‘savage’, ‘wild men’ of the Orient, and in some ways distancing the threat from the United Kingdom (emphasis added).⁶⁵ While the BBC gradually moves to neutralise any subsequent descriptions of the perpetrators by way of a series of references to ‘extremists’,⁶⁶ ‘fanatics’,⁶⁷ ‘fundamentalists’,⁶⁸ and ‘radicals’,⁶⁹ the presence of such labels within these opening reports serve to foreground the religious nature of al-Qaeda’s terrorism and the dangerous world-view that inspires it.

In terms of visuals, the ‘Islamic’ mode is further sustained through the repeated appearance of images connoting al-Qaeda’s radical, non-Western identity. Thus we see scenes from al-Qaeda ‘martyrdom’ videos,⁷⁰ sequences of edited footage from its *State of the Ummah* propaganda film, in which unknown numbers of masked militants are seen holding guns and Koran’s aloft,⁷¹ images of al-Qaeda’s bearded and turbaned senior leadership,⁷² and repeated scenes of children praying in madrassas in Pakistan.⁷³ Interestingly, despite the BBC’s efforts to distance al-Qaeda’s violence from Britain’s Muslims, the link between Islam, violence and extremism is unwittingly emphasised via the increased visual focus on Muslim communities in London and Beeston in the days after the bombings, for example through repeated scenes of people praying in Mosques or madrassas.⁷⁴

As if to supplement these Orientalist-inspired representations, we also see the emergence of a series of discourses surrounding the notion of ‘radicalisation’ within the BBC’s coverage.⁷⁵ Used relatively infrequently before the September 11th 2001 attacks, critics have highlighted a significant increase in the use of language and imagery surrounding the concept of ‘radicalisation’ within news coverage following the July 7th 2005 attacks, where it is used to help explain the transition that individuals undergo before carrying out acts of violent terrorism.⁷⁶ As Hoskins and

have pointed out, this discourse, and its accompanying ‘clustering’ of words and images, calls into play a series of loosely-connected concepts surrounding paedophilia, vulnerability, normality and deviance, and, as such, has become key part of the ‘rhetorical structure’ of the ‘war on terror’.⁷⁷

To demonstrate, we see descriptions of the bombers as receiving ‘ideological support’ from individuals in Afghanistan or Pakistan,⁷⁸ alongside references to the fact that they have been ‘controlled’,⁷⁹ ‘brainwashed’,⁸⁰ ‘radicalised’⁸¹ or ‘infected by the bin Laden ideology of global jihad’.⁸² More to the point, there are also a number of overtly politicised references to al-Qaeda’s ‘evil’,⁸³ ‘entrenched’,⁸⁴ and ‘violent ideology’ appearing within the BBC’s reporting.⁸⁵ Comments by one ‘terrorism expert’ perfectly encapsulate the narrative logic of the radicalisation discourse. As he explains,

[t]hey’re invited to more private meetings, they’re shown video tapes, they’re treated well, they’re sent on trips abroad and, of course, they are radicalised when they are sent to madrassas, to the religious schools in Pakistan, and of course they are often given training in explosive and somebody handles them, and then finally presses the button and tells them to go out and perpetrate an atrocity.⁸⁶

Importantly, such statements not only draw upon one-dimensional, Orientalised constructions of the external, foreign terrorist ‘Other’,⁸⁷ they also serve to further strengthen and legitimise the broader truth regime emerging within the BBC’s coverage that views the bombings as the consequence of a foreign, dangerous and radicalised ideology. Thus, by focusing on the irrational and religious causes of al-Qaeda’s terrorism, these representations and associated discourses serve to depoliticise its violence and silence the role of British foreign policy as one of the central factors in the July 7th 2005 attacks.⁸⁸

In terms of the consequences of the ‘Islamic’ mode, though we should express caution when suggesting that this category has direct, causal effects, in foregrounding al-Qaeda’s religious identity and motivations the BBC’s representations help to inform the broader discourses and meaning structures through which ‘al-Qaeda’ becomes known and understood. In particular, one of the most immediate outcomes of such representations is the stabilising and discursive reinforcement of a particular understanding of British national identity; one that has, itself,

been challenged with the revelations surrounding the identities of the bombers. Jackson explains this process of identity construction, arguing that:

Western societies have over the past few decades come to define themselves in opposition to terrorism, to the point that ‘terrorism’ now functions as a negative marker – a negative ideograph – of Western identity. Whatever the terrorists are, we are the opposite; the terrorists hate freedom, we love freedom; they are anti-democratic, we are pro-democratic; they destroy life, we value life.⁸⁹

Thus, in the most basic terms, the broadcaster’s representations help to maintain the discursive boundaries that are integral to the ‘writing’ of national identity, demarcating the ontological boundaries that separate the ‘Self’ from the ‘Other’, ‘familiar’ from ‘foreign’, ‘inside’ from ‘outside’, which have been challenged by the London attackers.⁹⁰ More crucially, these simplified boundary-drawing practices can be deemed to be essential for the legitimisation of the far-reaching counterterrorism measures that were enacted in the aftermath of the London bombings, as they help to maintain the belief that such policies will only impact on the lives of those deemed to be non-citizen ‘Others’. As Marie-Helen Maras points out,

[t]he measures governments implement against *them* are accepted on the assumption that these restrictions do not and will not apply to *us*. That is, by selectively targeting a clearly defined set of “others”, these measures assure citizens that their own liberties are not in jeopardy. The limited target of such measures also makes them easier for the majority to accept because they are not sacrificing their own civil liberties.⁹¹

In addition to this, by foregrounding al-Qaeda’s religious and ideological identity, the ‘Islamic’ mode can also be said to engender a particularly limited understanding of the religion of Islam to take root, something that is likely have extremely damaging consequences for community relations. Research carried out in the aftermath of the London attacks, for example, saw a significant increase in negative perceptions of Muslim citizens.⁹² Most notably, opinion polls carried out during this period provide evidence of a hardening in public attitudes towards British Muslims, with many studies revealing how the proportion of citizens perceiving this religion to be a threat to western liberal democracy

rose steeply from 32% in 2001 to 53% in 2006.⁹³ This is not to say that the BBC's representations alone were responsible for such a worrying shift in public perceptions, merely that the focus on the religious underpinnings of al-Qaeda's terrorism in much of the coverage during this period enabled certain interpretations to be regarded as more conceivable or logical than others in the minds of audiences.

Indeed, in portraying al-Qaeda as 'fanatical' terrorists and emphasising its religious, as opposed to political, motivations, these representations function to legitimise a set of highly problematic policing and counter-terrorism strategies that disproportionately focus on Muslim citizens. For example, by emphasising the role of religion, and religious spaces, as a central factor in the radicalisation process, the 'Islamic' mode of representation serves to constitute Britain's diverse Muslim communities as 'suspect' in nature, and as seedbeds for religious extremism and fanaticism.⁹⁴ Notably, despite consistent evidence downplaying the links between religion, religious places of worship and terrorism,⁹⁵ this focus has been a central component in the *PREVENT* strand of Britain's *CONTEST(I)* counter-terrorism strategy, which specifically examines the role of mosques, religious schools and communities in encouraging and fostering extremist beliefs,⁹⁶ something that has, moreover, resulted in increased levels of pressure on groups deemed to be 'extremist' in their outlook.⁹⁷

Similarly, such levels of suspicion has also led to the disproportionate targeting of young Muslim men under Section 43 (s43) and 44 (s44) of the Terrorism 2000 Act; namely, the power to 'stop and search'.⁹⁸ Although it is difficult to establish the percentage of Muslims targeted, due to the fact that the police do not record the religious identity of those stopped and searched, there is thought to have been a 'six-fold increase' in searches on suspects described as 'Asian' between 2001/2002 and 2006/2007.⁹⁹ For many Muslims, particularly young men, being stopped and searched, whether under s43, s44, or indeed other policing powers, is thought to have been the single most frequent and regular form of contact with police during this period, something which serves to further contribute to the levels of cultural alienation and perceptions of racial and religious discrimination felt by many within this broad social group.¹⁰⁰ To repeat, the point here is not to say that these representations directly caused such policies to materialise, but, more simply, that the association between Islam, extremism, terrorism and violence that are generated feed into a broader truth regime that makes specific policy responses appear to be more logical than others.

THE 'ELUSIVE' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

With the revelation on July 12th that the bombers are, for the most part, British-by-birth, however, the BBC's representations begin to take on a more intangible, and yet in many ways more recognisable, form. In particular, we see the (re)emergence of an 'Elusive' mode of representation within the BBC's coverage, whereby al-Qaeda is portrayed as a disparate movement made up of an unknown number of shadowy, yet ordinary-looking, assailants. In contrast to the previous appearance of this representational mode during Chapter 4, here discourses surrounding Britishness and familiarity, normality and deviance are layered upon one another in an attempt to secure the meaning and identities of 'al-Qaeda'. In doing so, however, the 'Elusive' mode can be linked to the emergence of a competing truth regime evident within the BBC's coverage that views the London bombings as less of a consequence of irrational, religious beliefs, and more a result of Britain's role in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we shall see, however, such complexity functions to transform 'al-Qaeda' from a largely foreign, external danger, to a more familiar and pervasive threat within, a shift that has significant consequences for perceptions of this entity.

The 'Elusive' mode is first evident in the levels of uncertainty expressed by the BBC's journalists over the precise origins of the attackers. For example, we see questions such as 'were these people linked directly to the core of al-Qaeda... or were they acting on their own'¹⁰¹; 'were they foreign or were they home-grown, British, and thus more difficult to detect'¹⁰²; 'were the bombers home-grown, British terrorists effectively, or was this a hit-team that came in from abroad'¹⁰³ 'was this part of a network, possibly European-based'¹⁰⁴; or 'were they working under someone else's orders?'¹⁰⁵ Drawing on the tension between the visibility and invisibility of al-Qaeda operatives, this category of representation is further evident in the repeated use of phrases such as 'extremists in their midst',¹⁰⁶ 'radicals in their midst',¹⁰⁷ and those 'born and brought up in our midst' by BBC journalists and interviewees,¹⁰⁸ a notion that underscores the furtive nature of the threat and the fact that al-Qaeda suspects formulate a largely *in*-visible presence within Britain.

Interviews with friends and neighbours of the four bombers lend additional support to this notion, with statements such as '[w]e couldn't believe that these people were living among us',¹⁰⁹ that '[p]eople here are really surprised and shocked to learn that the bombers have apparently

been living here among them',¹¹⁰ and that that the bombers themselves 'came from ordinary respectable families who knew their neighbours and lived alongside people of all races'.¹¹¹ These statements appear alongside descriptions of the bombers as 'British',¹¹² 'British-born-and-bred',¹¹³ 'British by birth',¹¹⁴ or, moreover, the fact that they are 'British-born suicide bombers',¹¹⁵ 'British suicide bombers'¹¹⁶ or 'Britain's first suicide bombers'.¹¹⁷

Here, the sheer complexity of the BBC's representations becomes further evident as we see the emergence of discourses surrounding Britishness and familiarity, normality and deviance appear within its coverage. As one 'terrorism expert' surmises, al-Qaeda are

recruiting people who are born within Western Europe, who come from good solid middle-class backgrounds, who have no criminal records, who possess all the Western social skills and who can fit very neatly into society.¹¹⁸

As if to further underscore the 'Britishness' of the four men, not to mention their seemingly 'middle-class' attributes, descriptions by friends and family members of the bombers also emphasise their apparent 'normality'. For example, an associate of Tanweer notes how '[h]e was just a nice lad', who liked to play typically 'British' sports such as football and cricket,¹¹⁹ while a neighbour describes him as 'just a normal kid, you know, like the rest of them round here... just *normal*' (emphasis added).¹²⁰ The resultant tensions, between the apparent visibility and invisibility of the bombers within their communities, their Britishness, and, moreover, their concurrent normality and deviance, significantly broaden conceptions of who and what 'al-Qaeda' is, thus encouraging greater levels of fear and insecurity in the aftermath of the London attacks.

Contrasting with the near-total lack of images seen during the coverage of the Wood Green plot, al-Qaeda's 'Elusive' nature is further communicated through the profusion of seemingly 'ordinary' images of the four bombers. Here, the 'News at Ten' reports feature an extraordinary range images and visual representations, varying from passport-style photographs to school portrait-style pictures, family album-style snapshots and screen-grabs from police CCTV footage, each depicting the bombers engaged in seemingly normal, everyday practices. In the first instance, these visual artefacts call upon a set of deeply held socio-cultural

discourses surrounding notions of familiarity, normality and deviance, which, as we shall see, have powerful consequences for the way 'al-Qaeda' is understood by audiences and policymakers alike. More broadly, however, they also help to subtly reinforce the emerging 'truth' within the BBC's coverage that al-Qaeda's terrorism can be directly linked to the anger and discontent felt by many young British Muslims over the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and beyond.

The first of these visual representations appears during the July 13th 2005 broadcast, and features a school portrait-style image of Shehzad Tanweer, the Aldgate Station bomber. Taken from *The Sun* newspaper's July 13th 2005 headline article, provocatively entitled 'The Brit Bomber',¹²¹ the image stands in stark contrast to some of the other visual representations as described above. Though it appears as if the image has been cropped in such a way that it is difficult to make out Tanweer's school uniform, the photographs' iconographic nature leaves the viewer with little doubt as to its context. More controversially, the iconic and culturally resonant qualities of this image might be said to act against straightforward forms of subject positioning, as discussed in Chapter 3, with the possibility that audiences might identify with those depicted onscreen, recognising an aspect of themselves or their own experiences.

With his head tilted slightly to the left, a gesture known as 'head canting',¹²² Tanweer affects stereotypically 'submissive' pose common in secondary school photographs,¹²³ something that makes the Aldgate Station bomber appear more like an 'innocent', almost 'angelic'-looking, schoolboy, rather than someone responsible for the death of seven people. Significantly, the photograph would also not look out of place with the pictures of the London bombings' multicultural and ethnically-diverse victims shown later in Margaret Gilmore's the report on the investigation into the attacks.¹²⁴ The verbal characterisations of Tanweer, mentioned above, as 'just a nice lad',¹²⁵ 'just a normal kid',¹²⁶ 'a sweet guy',¹²⁷ and a typical 'British teenager',¹²⁸ only stand to further this assessment. Moreover, though the relationship between gender and head canting is particularly contentious,¹²⁹ studies have shown that the practice is understood to signify typically 'feminine' forms of non-verbal communication,¹³⁰ and thus reinforce culturally constructed notions of 'innocence', 'vulnerability' and 'helplessness'.¹³¹ Notably, the suggestion by Azzy Muhammed, a close friend of Tanweer's, that he may have been 'brainwashed' further stands to support this notion.¹³²

As noted, the presence of such seemingly normal, almost mundane, imagery feeds into a broader truth regime seen within the BBC's reporting, whereby the London bombers can be understood to be driven less by their radical and fanatical beliefs, and more by a set of deeply-held *political* grievances. This notion is particularly evident in several reports that highlight the way Western policy in the Middle East is driving discontent within Britain's Muslim community.¹³³ For example, in one news item a teenager points out that, '[i]t doesn't help when there are these Americans and English going into *our* countries and killing *our* brothers and sisters' (emphasis in original).¹³⁴ As the narrator, Mark Easton, points out, such statements are from '[y]oung Muslims in West Yorkshire who condemn the bombings, but condemn the West for its causes'.¹³⁵ In another, questions are raised by another youth about the impact of Western 'oppression overseas'.¹³⁶

Beyond the perspectives of young, British Muslims, moreover, the links between the bombings and U.K. policy in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine are repeatedly voiced across the two weeks of coverage. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the bombings the BBC's Security Correspondent describes how the attacks are considered to be 'revenge against the British government for... its massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan',¹³⁷ going on to describe how the group has threatened 'more attacks if Britain and other countries don't pull out of Iraq and Afghanistan'.¹³⁸ Similarly, interviews with several Middle East-based journalists emphasise the fact that Britain's role in Iraq is likely to be a key motivating factor behind the attacks.¹³⁹ The belief that 'Britain's role in Iraq could also be relevant' is acknowledged during a report by Diplomatic Correspondent Bridget Kendall's July 16th 2005 report.¹⁴⁰ Here, Labour backbencher John McDonnell is featured severely condemning the Blair government and its role in Iraq. As he asserts,

[w]e must be ruthlessly honest, and so I'll just say to the Prime Minister and other ministerial commentators, please do not try to tell us that the war in Iraq played no part: this assertion is simply intellectually unsustainable.¹⁴¹

Although these statements are rather short-lived within the BBC's coverage, they do at least acknowledge the fact that the attacks were motivated by a greater range of factors than previously acknowledged. Much more, however, coverage of this nature stands to further support

an emergent ‘truth’ that, albeit briefly, enables al-Qaeda, and the figure of the ‘Islamic’ terrorist more broadly, to stand outside of the culturally constructed frameworks through which the violent, radical ‘Other’ is traditionally understood in Western news media accounts.¹⁴² Though we should be clear that not all the BBC’s audiences would accept the ‘truth’ of such representations, these images can be said to provide the discursive conditions for an understanding of al-Qaeda that could fundamentally disrupt and destabilise the entire social fabric.

In terms of the consequences of such a mode of representation, Deborah Jermyn suggests that media representations of normality and deviance fulfil a deep cultural need to manage and fix ‘difference’, something that, in the process, helps societal elites to manage and sustain the fragile status quo.¹⁴³ Focusing on the visual dimension, she argues that while most televisual representations of crime and criminality typically employ mugshot-style images, sometimes those used fall into the domestic and idyllic category of family portrait photography, something that ‘makes them more fascinating, more shocking, than the “mugshot”, since it places the “deviant” in the realm of the ordinary’.¹⁴⁴ Such everyday, quotidian forms of imagery appear to depict typical British teenagers and young adults in familiar spaces and engaged in the kinds of ordinary social activities that can be identified with by a range of audience members, regardless of their own, unique cultural backgrounds. Thus, rather than depicting the stereotypical terrorist ‘monster’, these portrayals represent individuals who formulate an integral feature of everyday, multicultural British society; that is, the kinds of people who can be seen in any city, or on any street, bus, or tube station in Britain. Indeed, by emphasising the political context underpinning the July 7th 2005 bombings, and in particular the impact the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have had on a generation of young British Muslims, the BBC’s audiences are presented with a much wider range of explanations for al-Qaeda’s terrorism than seen elsewhere in this study. In portraying al-Qaeda and its adherents in this way, that is, as ordinary members of British society, the BBC’s visual and verbal representations serve to powerfully undermine dominant cultural and political constructions of the terror threat and, perhaps more significantly, dangerously broaden conceptions of who and what this phenomenon is; depicting a decentralised and ‘Elusive’ entity that could, more ominously, have cells and recruits anywhere in the United Kingdom. Such a mode of representation can be understood to forcefully destabilise Britain’s delicate social fabric and destroy the deep,

culturally embedded discourses that serve to distinguish ‘normal’ from ‘deviant’, ‘citizen’ from ‘terrorist’. Notably, while there are a number of attempts by the BBC to defamiliarise these images, editing them in such a way as to eliminate their iconicity, ultimately it is difficult to forget the fact that these are images of ordinary British citizens as opposed to being foreign-born suspects.¹⁴⁵

At a broader level, the ‘Elusive’ mode of representation not only engenders new ways of seeing the threat posed by al-Qaeda, but also helps to create the discursive conditions for new ways of managing such a threat. Here, the ‘Elusive’ mode of representation can be seen to construct the discursive conditions for a series of policy responses that focus less attention upon the role of religion and religious spaces and more upon Britain’s position in the ‘war on terror’, and, importantly, its role in fomenting the kind of anger that led four, apparently normal, men to carry out such atrocities. In particular, this category of representation provides the conditions through which a number of ‘alternative’, non-military approaches to combating al-Qaeda can be considered, such as addressing the grievances held by such groups and, perhaps controversially, negotiating with those who form part of this movement.¹⁴⁶ Thus, rather than constitute the Muslim community as an enemy within, such a response would, perhaps more pervasively, view the entire population as a potential security threat, producing a series of antiterrorism and security measures that would invade every aspect of daily life and regard each individual citizen as an object of security.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to explore the social, cultural and political consequences of the BBC’s representations of al-Qaeda. In particular, it has shown how the coverage of the July 7th 2005 bombings gives rise to two competing truth regimes surrounding this phenomenon, which each provide the discursive conditions of possibility for a limited range of audience and policy-related outcomes. Given the significant amount of public and political criticism that had coalesced around the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan during this time, and indeed the ‘war on terror’ more broadly, it should not be surprising that there is so much variation in the BBC’s reporting of this event. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the aim of this chapter has not been to show which category of representation is the more accurate portrayal of al-Qaeda. Nor is to

say which mode of representation was most influential within the BBC's reporting. Such claims can only be carried out through an extended ethnography of audience responses, something that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, the central aim has been to consider the political functions and consequences that can be said to arise from the certain modes of representation. Indeed, by drawing upon the various discourses and cultural materials that circulate within society during this period, these representations subtly encourage certain understandings to take root. Thus, the 'Islamic' mode of representation can be said to engender a particularly narrow understanding of al-Qaeda, and in particular its core beliefs, resulting in counterterrorism policies which constitute Britain's seemingly monolithic Muslim community as an 'enemy within'. By contrast, the 'Elusive' mode of representation can be understood to give rise to a particularly pervasive understanding of al-Qaeda and the threat it poses. The focus on the bombers as, apparently normal, British 'lads', motivated by the United Kingdom's military presence in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, helps to create the conditions for a more pervasive understanding of the threat posed by this phenomenon, and, as such, is likely to result in policies that view the entire population as 'suspect'.

In truth, however, rather than remain separate, both categories of representation can be said to be reliant upon one another in the way they engender certain interpretations or policies to take shape. This is because exceptional and excessive counterterrorism policies are often mobilised on the assumption that they do not apply to everyone in society, but rather are reserved for a small minority of 'Others'. And yet, as Maras, citing David Cole points out,

the argument that only the rights of *others* are targeted, and as such, *we* "need not worry, is in an important sense illusory", for what governments do to *others*, "provides a precedent for what can and will be done to" *us* tomorrow.¹⁴⁷

NOTES

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3. Telephone interview with Mark Easton (November 30th 2017).
4. Alexander Spencer, *The Tabloid Terrorist*, p. 89.
5. See Home Office, 'Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on July 7th 2005' (London: The Stationary Office, 2006), pp. 4–5, for the 'official' account.
6. See The Bradford Congress, *The Bradford Commission Report: The Report of and Inquiry into the Wider Implications of Public Disorders Which Occurred on 9th, 10th, and 11th of June 1995* (London: Stationary Office, 1996), p. 78; Ali Wardak, *Social Control and Deviance: A South Asian Community in Scotland* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 143.
7. See Shiv Malik, 'My Brother the Bomber', *Prospect Magazine* (June 30th 2007). Available at: <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/my-brother-the-bomber-mohammad-sidique-khan> (Accessed September 17th 2017). See also Bill Durodié, 'Fear and Terror in a Post-political Age', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2007), pp. 427–450, for further discussion of the profound crisis of identity experienced by the bombers.
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9. Aidan Kirby, 'The London Bombers as "Self-Starters": A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 30, No. 5 (2007), p. 415.
10. Rachael Briggs et al., 'Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack: What the Coroner's Inquests Revealed About the London Bombings', *Royal United Services Institute* (London: RUSI, 2011), p. 4.
11. Stephen Tinkel, *Storming the World's Stage: The Story of Lashkar-e-Taiba* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 162–164.
12. See Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, pp. 202–203.
13. Rachael Briggs et al., 'Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack', p. 10.
14. Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 202.
15. Shiv Malik, 'My Brother the Bomber'.
16. Rachael Briggs et al., 'Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack', p. 6.
17. Stephen Tinkel, *Storming the World's Stage*, p. 163.
18. Rachael Briggs et al., 'Anatomy of a Terrorist Attack', p. 7.
19. Steve Hewitt, *The British War on Terror*, p. 73.
20. Home Office, 'Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on July 7th 2005', p. 3
21. Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, *The London Bombings*, p. 46.
22. Karen McVeigh & Alexandra Topping, '7/7 Inquest Witness Saw Bombers "Celebrate like Sports Team" Before Attack', *The Guardian* (October 13th 2010). Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/oct/13/7-7-bombers-celebrating-sports> (Accessed 6th June 2017).
23. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005).

24. See Robert Pigott, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005).
25. See BBC Trust, 'BBC Editorial Guidelines', p. 26.
26. See BBC Trust, 'BBC Public Purpose Remit: Representing the UK, Its Nations, Regions and Communities' (2007). Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare/publicpurposes/pdf/purpose_plan_communities.pdf (Accessed July 9th 2017). See also BBC Trust, 'BBC Public Purpose Remit: Sustaining Citizenship and Civil Society' (2007). Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/insidethebbc/whoweare/publicpurposes/pdf/purpose_plan_citizenship.pdf (Accessed July 9th 2017).
27. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005).
28. Telephone interview with Mark Easton (November 30th 2017).
29. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005). See also comments by Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005).
30. Richard Jones, 'News at Ten' (July 9th 2005).
31. See Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
32. See Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 11th 2005); Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005); Bridget Kendall, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005); Daniel Sandford, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005), for example.
33. See Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
34. See Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 11th 2005).
35. See comments by Margaret Gilmore and Fiona Bruce, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005), for example.
36. BBC Online, 'Editorial Guidelines: Language When Reporting Terrorism' (2016). Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/terrorism-language/guidance-full> (Accessed July 9th 2017).
37. See Fiona Bruce, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005); Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 11th 2005), for example.
38. Fiona Bruce, citing Lord Stephens, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005).
39. See Unnamed Witness, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005).
40. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005).
41. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005); Fiona Bruce, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005); Daniel Sandford, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005), for examples.
42. See Catherine Marsdon, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
43. Bridget Kendall, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005).
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 47. See Rachael Gribble et al., 'British Public Opinion After a Decade of War: Attitudes to Afghanistan and Iraq', *Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2015), pp. 128–150.
 48. See Steve Hewitt, *The British War on Terror*, p. 78.
 49. See Home Office, *Young Muslims and Extremism* (2004). Available at: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/security/library/report/2004/muslimext-uk.htm> (Accessed December 15th 2017).
 50. Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', p. 131.
 51. See in particular John Hartley, *Tele-Ology: Studies in Television* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 45–63.
 52. Stuart Allan, *News Culture*. 2nd Ed. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010), p. 113.
 53. Stuart Hall et al., 'The "Unity" of Current Affairs Television' (1975), in Ann Grey et al. (eds.), *CCCS Selected Working Papers Series: Volume 2* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 339.
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 55. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
 56. Gavin Hewitt, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
 57. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
 58. Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005), emphasis added.
 59. Lord Stevens, cited by Daniel Boettcher, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005).
 60. Paul Wood, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005).
 61. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005), emphasis added.
 62. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005), emphasis added.
 63. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005).
 64. Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005), emphasis added.
 65. See also Joseba Zulaika & William A. Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables and Faces of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 149–190.
 66. See Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); John Pienar, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005);

- Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005); Fiona Bruce, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005).
67. John Pienar, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
 68. Unnamed Witness, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005).
 69. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005).
 70. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005).
 71. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005), for example.
 72. See Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005).
 73. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005); Bridget Kendall, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005), for example.
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 76. See Mark Sedgwick, 'The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion', p. 480.
 77. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, 'Pre-Mediating Guilt: Radicalisation and Mediality in British News', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2009), p. 82.
 78. Crispin Black, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
 79. Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
 80. See Azzy Muhammed, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); Daniel Sandford, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005).
 81. See M. J. Gohel, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 6th 2006).
 82. M. J. Gohel, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
 83. See Jane Hill, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005); Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005).
 84. Tony Blair, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005).

85. Bridget Kendall, 'News at Ten' (July 16th 2005).
86. M. J. Gohel, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
87. See Mark Featherstone et al., 'Discourses of the War on Terror', p. 18.
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The May 2nd 2011 Killing of Osama bin Laden

In the years after the London attacks, media attention to the al-Qaeda threat had slowly begun to wane. Indeed, as the two Black Hawk helicopters hovered in the darkness over Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad compound in the early hours of May 2nd 2011, much of the world's media attention was focused on the protests and demonstrations escalating in North Africa and the Middle East. The product of decades of calls for reform and greater political transparency, these uprisings were covered extensively by the BBC,¹ and other Western media outlets,² where they were characterised as signalling a seismic shift in world politics. For many of those involved, the name Osama bin Laden was an anachronism, the remnant of a bygone era that had needed to be left in the past. Despite the foiling of several al-Qaeda-inspired terror plots in the UK and USA, for many within the security and counterterrorism industry the terror threat was believed to be slowly declining: al-Qaeda's core leadership had suffered significant setbacks and losses; the broader 'network of networks' had become increasingly contained by localised conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen; and, more than anything else, the al-Qaeda 'brand' itself had been severely tarnished by the actions of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Iraqi affiliate.³ Thus, the announcement by U.S. officials that Osama bin Laden had been captured and killed in a secret operation by American special-forces in a leafy, hill-station in northern Pakistan was met with considerable shock and surprise.

In view of the significance of bin Laden's death for understandings of al-Qaeda and the 'war on terror' more generally, the final empirical chapter focuses on the representations that emerge in the aftermath of his capture and killing on May 2nd 2011. It should be noted that considerable amount of academic attention has centred around this event, much of which has focused on news media coverage,⁴ and, in particular, its visual dimension.⁵ This chapter adds to this emergent literature by considering the broader implications of bin Laden's death for representations of the al-Qaeda phenomenon. In particular, the analysis shows how 'al-Qaeda' is made simultaneously visible and invisible for the BBC's audiences in the days and weeks after this event. While efforts are made to highlight the threat posed by al-Qaeda's British and European 'followers', the BBC's foregrounding of the 'Personalised' and 'Islamic' modes of representation, at the expense of the 'Elusive' mode, functions to powerfully distance the threat posed by al-Qaeda to British citizens, thus repairing the damage done to the social order in the years after the July 7th 2005 attacks. Indeed, in playing down the 'Elusive' category, however, it is suggested that the process of making al-Qaeda seen in certain ways serves, implicitly, to contain the threat and therefore minimise the levels of fear and anxiety that can be said to circulate in the aftermath of the death of bin Laden.

The chapter starts with a brief historical background to this event and the broader, post-July 7th 2005 security environment. This is followed by an overview to the BBC's reporting and the shifting narratives of the raid offered by policymakers in Pakistan and America. The chapter then moves to discuss the findings of two weeks' worth of BBC 'News at Ten' bulletins following the announcement of bin Laden's death (May 2nd–15th 2011). Given the fact that incident primarily took place in Pakistan, with broader implications for the United States, it is expected that the BBC's geographical and historical proximity to these events will impact on the role the broadcaster serves, the kinds of questions its journalists ask, and the forms of representation seen.

BACKGROUND TO THE KILLING OF OSAMA BIN LADEN

Part of the reason that the capture and killing of bin Laden was met with such surprise was due to the fact that al-Qaeda no longer held the same levels of fear and anxiety within policy-making circles than it had done in the early years of the 'war on terror'. In particular, massive increases in

drone strikes in the Afghanistan–Pakistan border area had reduced the ability of al-Qaeda’s core leadership to organise and recruit fighters,⁶ and the flow of funds were slowly drying up as U.S. counterterrorism operations became ever more sophisticated in targeting terrorist finances. In a letter to its Iraqi affiliate, for example, Ayman al-Zawahiri even went so far as to request money because he now received far fewer donations from supporters and sympathisers than ever before.⁷ In fact, much of the focus during this time was on the actions of al-Qaeda’s Yemeni franchise, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), where attention centred on the unifying figure of Anwar al-Awlaki, rather than bin Laden. Despite substantial levels of media and political attention, however, AQAP was an incredibly disparate and fractious entity. By the time of bin Laden’s killing, for example, the group had executed few successful attacks in the West, with Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab’s unsuccessful attempt to down an airliner on Christmas Day 2009 and the failed 2010 ‘cargo planes plot’ cited as its most high-profile actions. Notably, in the words of Christina Hellmich, much of the information on AQAP provided by Western counterterrorism agencies is ‘short-lived, contradictory and frequently contested’.⁸

In the United Kingdom, moreover, the emergence of a new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition around this time also had a significant impact on perceptions of the terror threat in Britain. On taking seat in government, the Coalition immediately issued a review of all counterterrorism legislation, most specifically those that impacted upon the rights and liberties of British citizens, and sought to reverse the apparent ‘authoritarianism’ of the previous government.⁹ Such concerns were raised by the incoming Home Secretary, Theresa May, who argued that

[n]ational security is the first duty of government but we are also committed to reversing the substantial erosion of civil liberties. I want a counter-terrorism regime that is proportionate, focused and transparent. We must ensure that in protecting public safety, the powers which we need to deal with terrorism are in keeping with Britain’s tradition of freedom and fairness.¹⁰

At the same time, however, despite appearing to drop the more egregious aspects the Blair and Brown administration’s ‘war on terror’ rhetoric, the new Coalition government continued to exploit the threat posed by ‘international terrorism’, labelling it as the most significant

danger facing the United Kingdom. For example, its first National Security Strategy, issued on October 18th 2010, identified al-Qaeda's core leadership as the nation's most potent threat. But, significantly, the document downplayed the ability for figures such as bin Laden and his key commanders to directly launch attacks in the West, pointing towards al-Qaeda's affiliates in Yemen, Somalia and Iraq, and in particular lone-terrorists inspired by such groups, as much a greater menace.¹¹ The Prime Minister's February 5th 2011 speech to the Munich Security Conference was also noteworthy in the way it called into play the same Orientalist-inspired discourses and binary logic espoused by Blair a few years earlier when seeking to explain the July 7th 2005 bombings.¹² As Cameron pointed out, '[w]e have to get to the root of the problem, and we need to be absolutely clear on where the origins of these terrorist attacks lie; that is the existence of an ideology, Islamist extremism'.¹³ Thus, despite apparent changes in its overall approach, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition echoed the previous government's strategy of denying the political origins of such terrorism, and instead viewing the 'root' causes and problems as being inherent *within* Islam.¹⁴

It is in this context, therefore, that U.S. officials announced the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden in a secret operation by American special-forces. Located in the quiet garrison town of Abbottabad, northern Pakistan, bin Laden's final place of residence was less than two miles from the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) and other regimental headquarters of the country's armed forces. Although the Pakistani authorities had played a key role in locating and arresting some of the major figures in the al-Qaeda movement, given the location of the bin Laden house, a five minute walk from the country's elite military academy, one of the first questions asked was the extent to which the security establishment knew about his presence. The fact that senior al-Qaeda figures such as Khaled Sheikh Mohammed, Ramzi bin al-Shibh, Abu Faraj al-Libbi and Umar Patek had all been captured in major Pakistani cities, not to mention the close relations between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency and groups such as Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, further stood to fuel claims of complicity.

In terms of the events leading up to the raid, different accounts offer conflicting narratives about how bin Laden evaded capture for so long and how he was eventually apprehended. According to the 'official' version, the initial prompt came when an individual linked to the periphery

of al-Qaeda, a Kuwaiti-born Pakistani named Mohammed Arshad Khan, had been identified by several high-profile Guantanamo detainees. Khan was believed to be bin Laden's most trusted courier, transporting letters, USB drives and spoken messages to senior figures in the al-Qaeda movement, particularly those in Waziristan, who then understood to then issue instructions to affiliates around the world.¹⁵ Using sophisticated surveillance software, in late in 2010 the CIA located Khan's phone number after trawling through vast amounts of mobile-phone data, eventually tracing him to a large house in Abbottabad.¹⁶ The size, estimated cost and levels of security around the house drew immediate suspicion from CIA officials: 'it was eight times larger than any other home in the area and sat in middle of a large plot of private land'.¹⁷ Over the following months, U.S. agents rented houses around the property and mounted a massive surveillance and intelligence-gathering programme, that included, among other things, a fake polio vaccination programme designed to secure bin Laden's DNA.

Rather than be tracked down by the CIA, however, the 'alternative' version of events, developed by investigative journalists such as Carlotta Gall and Seymour Hersh, suggests that bin Laden had actually been a prisoner of the Pakistani government since 2006.¹⁸ In fact, according to Hersh, the United States also had prior knowledge of his whereabouts due to the revelations brought about by a former Pakistani intelligence officer who betrayed the secret in return for the \$25 million-dollar reward on bin Laden's head. According to this version of events, due to his incarceration bin Laden had little contact with the outside world and had, in fact, been side-lined by other figures within the al-Qaeda movement in the first few years after September 11th 2001.

Regardless of the truth of the matter, the decision to raid the compound was made on April 29th 2011 and in the early hours of May 2nd 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs carried out Operation Neptune Spear to capture and kill bin Laden.¹⁹ Flying into Pakistan from a base in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, the SEALs quickly stormed the compound and located bin Laden. He was shot twice in the head and once in the shoulder. The SEALs quickly gathered any intelligence material they could, before flying bin Laden's body to Bagram airbase in Afghanistan and then onto the supercarrier *USS Carl Vinson*, where his body was buried at sea. As the world braced itself for massive reprisals, perhaps reflecting bin Laden's declining status within the movement,²⁰ the event passed with few retaliations in the West. Indeed, as if to reflect the prevailing politics

and geographies of the ‘war on terror’, the most significant reprisals were carried out not by al-Qaeda, but by the Tehrik-i-Taliban, when soldiers were targeted during a graduation party in Shabqadar, Pakistan.²¹ Al-Qaeda, itself, issued a terse statement confirming the death of bin Laden on May 6th 2011, drawing little world-wide attention.

OVERVIEW OF THE BBC’S ‘NEWS AT TEN’ COVERAGE

For this final case study, two weeks of ‘News at Ten’ bulletins (May 2nd–15th 2011) were sourced through archives housed at the British Universities Film and Video Council (BUVFC). Due to the significance of this event, the BBC devoted considerable space to detailing the operational measures surrounding bin Laden’s capture and killing, the response in the United States, Britain and Pakistan, the implications for domestic security and for the longevity of the al-Qaeda movement. In total, 20 reports were dedicated to reporting this incident, producing 1 hour 21 minutes of airtime, with the bin Laden story placed first in the running order during the first 4 days. Report times averaged around the 3–4 minute mark, the longest of which appeared on May 2nd and May 5th, and dealt, respectively, with the actual details of the raid on bin Laden’s compound (6 minutes) and President Obama’s visit to Ground Zero, New York (6 minutes and 31 seconds). Given the extended broadcast times for many of these items, it is curious to note that not a single BBC report sought to discuss the political factors underpinning bin Laden’s terrorism, nor al-Qaeda’s for that matter, something that might be expected when covering an event of such importance. Interestingly, even Jane Corbin’s hour-long May 9th *Panorama* special on the death of bin Laden offered no analysis of his political aims or beliefs, which suggests a significant omission within the BBC’s coverage.

In terms of the broadcaster’s overall narrative to this event, as one might expect, the BBC’s immediate focus is on marking the historical record, with George Alagiah’s bold declaration, ‘Osama bin Laden, the world’s most wanted man, killed in a top secret U.S. operation’, during the opening sequence of the May 2nd broadcast, something that lends the bulletin an epoch-making tone. The ‘official’ account of the raid is covered, along with a range of perspectives from U.S., British and Pakistani officials, and a substantial chunk of the first broadcast is also given to discussing bin Laden’s legacy and the current threat posed by al-Qaeda. By the May 3rd and 4th bulletins, however, the emphasis shifts

onto debates surrounding the complicity of Pakistan's security services, the inconsistencies in the official U.S. account of the raid, and the issue of whether the United States will issue images of the dead bin Laden. Indeed, the focus shifts again during the May 5th broadcast, with the BBC considerable space to Obama's visit to Ground Zero in New York and the views of those who lost loved ones during the September 11th 2001 attacks. Interestingly, while there is a brief acknowledgement of questions surrounding the legality of bin Laden's killing²² and the emergent testimony of bin Laden's wife Amal,²³ there is little consideration by the BBC of those whose lives have been changed by the 'war on terror' outside of America. By the May 6th broadcast, the story had been relegated to fourth place in the running order, appearing after a report on the Coroner's official verdict on the July 7th 2005 bombings and focusing on the release of a statement by al-Qaeda acknowledging the death of bin Laden. The story reemerges during the May 7th, 8th and 9th bulletins, where the focus is on the release by White House officials of previously unavailable propaganda and home-video footage of bin Laden. Here, questions about the extent to which the Saudi 'ran an active command and control centre' from his Abbottabad compound are raised,²⁴ and subject to scrutiny by the BBC's journalists,²⁵ alongside broader discussion of Pakistan's role in protecting bin Laden. BBC Correspondent Aleem Maqbool sheds light on the competing narratives put forward by the Pakistani government around this time. As he explains,

[t]he official Pakistani narrative steered things more towards this event being a violation of sovereignty by America. The Pakistani government and military were not answering the question 'what was he doing there in the first place?' They had successfully shifted the debate to being about how America could do this, and that infiltrated the communities around Abbottabad, and within a couple of days there was some hostility for journalists.²⁶

By the May 10th bulletin, however, the story had completely disappeared from the BBC's news schedule. Notably, the relatively swift appearance and disappearance of the bin Laden story in the BBC's news cycle can be seen to reflect the diminishing importance given to 'al-Qaeda'-related news during this period, with the Alternative Vote referendum and the escalating violence in Libya and Syria dominating the remaining BBC coverage.

THE 'PERSONALISED' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

Given the nature of the events being reported on it is to be expected that much of the BBC's attention will be on Osama bin Laden, and, in particular, the implications of his death for the broader al-Qaeda movement. As such, one of the most immediate and noteworthy aspects of the coverage is the return to, and rearticulation of, the 'Personalised' mode of representation. Here, 'al-Qaeda' is portrayed in highly centralised terms, as an entity that is directly controlled and financed by a small group of influential and highly-visible individuals. In light of bin Laden's death, however, what is most significant here is the way the BBC's representations simultaneously call into play such an individualised understanding of al-Qaeda and yet question its very stability as a framework for knowing this entity.

In this regard, over the course of the first week of reporting we see the appearance of a series of statements denoting al-Qaeda's hierarchical and highly centralised identity. Hence, al-Qaeda is described as being '*Osama bin Laden's* al-Qaeda',²⁷ and there are references to the 'organisation',²⁸ its 'core leadership', 'training camps',²⁹ 'support system'³⁰ and 'support network' in Pakistan.³¹ Indeed, there are frequent characterisations of bin Laden as the 'al-Qaeda leader'³² or its overall 'commander',³³ alongside more general descriptions of him as 'the 9/11 mastermind',³⁴ 'the man behind the attack',³⁵ the man 'who had the basic idea', and the person who 'planned',³⁶ 'masterminded'³⁷ or 'ordered' the strikes.³⁸ On a similar level, Ayman al-Zawahiri is also labelled as 'al-Qaeda's most visible leader' and 'the man most likely to succeed bin Laden'.³⁹ Statements from unnamed 'senior officials' within the Obama administration further support this highly centralised conception of al-Qaeda, with bin Laden described as someone who was 'actively in command' of the group,⁴⁰ and thus much 'more than just a figurehead',⁴¹ and that he 'ran an active command-and-control centre' from his compound in Abbottabad,⁴² 'driving tactical decisions'⁴³ and directly 'calling for... attacks'⁴⁴ against the West. This notion is further supported in claims that the strike uncovered 'a wealth of intelligence on al-Qaeda',⁴⁵ and a 'treasure trove of information', which included '10 cell phones, 10 computers' and more than '100 memory sticks'.⁴⁶ Further descriptions point towards the fact that the raid revealed 'the biggest haul of terrorist material ever seized from an individual' or the 'largest collection of senior terrorist material ever seized'.⁴⁷ Such

statements not only call into play a series of assumptions about the structure, organisation and behaviour of clandestine political groupings, but also, perhaps more importantly, serve to foreground the belief that bin Laden had operational control over al-Qaeda itself.

At the same time, however, despite portraying al-Qaeda in highly embodied and centralised terms, the BBC's representations also work to challenge this mode of representation, with repeated questions raised about bin Laden's operational role within the movement. For example, during the first day of reporting Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen suggests bin Laden's influence was 'waning'⁴⁸ within al-Qaeda, and World Affairs Correspondent Paul Wood points out that 'nobody really believes that the death of Osama bin Laden is going to change... very much'.⁴⁹ Similarly, statements made by a former associate of bin Laden, Noman Benotman, also suggest that he 'wasn't in charge of the operation of al-Qaeda' because he 'lacked the skills to be an operational leader',⁵⁰ and that 'he handed everything over to Ayman al-Zawahiri' many years ago.⁵¹ Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir offers perhaps the most trenchant criticism, however, simply stating that the 'issue of Osama bin Laden is *history*' (my emphasis).⁵² While most likely a result of the celebratory mood surrounding bin Laden's death, the sceptical, and deeply iconoclastic, nature of such statements do much to undermine the belief that bin Laden was directly in control of al-Qaeda.

The BBC's selection of images also serves to cast further doubt over bin Laden's operational role within al-Qaeda. Mainly concentrated to the May 2nd, 3rd, 7th and 8th broadcasts, the Saudi's image appears a total of 65 times over the course of the two weeks of coverage, where the most frequent images are that of a dishevelled and haggard bin Laden sat, covered in a thick brown blanket in his Abbottabad compound (×11) and an unflattering outtake from an unreleased propaganda video (×10). Other images appearing within the coverage include more familiar scenes of bin Laden wearing military fatigues (×9), with his index finger raised (×7), and a publicity photograph taken by Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir, in which the 54-year old is seen dressed all in white (×7). More specifically, however, while bin Laden is frequently represented as an active leader of al-Qaeda (for example, where he is pictured firing guns,⁵³ being interviewed by foreign journalists,⁵⁴ issuing orders on a personal radio, walking amongst supporters⁵⁵ or speaking within propaganda videos⁵⁶), it is important to note that within such imagery bin Laden is predominantly portrayed on his own in close-up and medium

shots. This is in contrast the images and visual representations of the Saudi seen in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks, where he is frequently pictured at the centre of, or surrounded by, unknown numbers of masked, keffiyeh-wearing fighters.

Of further significance, in this regard, is the way the BBC makes use of variety of visual effects to supplement and enhance bin Laden's image within its reporting. During the first 3 days of coverage, for instance, zoom effects are used no less than 16 times on different images of the Saudi. In this regard, Maria E. Grabe and Erik P. Bucy have suggested that the convention of 'zooming-in' on televised subjects can have a considerable influence upon audience perceptions, due to the fact that it subtly encourages viewers to focus attention directly onto a subject's face.⁵⁷ Here, while extreme close-up shots are often regarded as '*too* close for comfort', thus having the 'potential to repel viewers or provoke emotional discomfort', Grabe and Bucy point out that the act of zooming-in can also function in a humanising fashion, creating 'intimacy between the portrayed object/person' and those viewing.⁵⁸ Additional studies, moreover, have also found that zoom effects are much more likely to increase audience involvement in television news coverage,⁵⁹ with close-up portraits often regarded as 'the type of images most likely to evoke compassion in viewers'.⁶⁰ While it is not possible here to establish precisely how audiences engaged with these images, the BBC's use of such effects can be understood to invite the viewer to 'look within' bin Laden for deeper insight into his unspoken motivations and beliefs. More to the point, however, the frequent use of this technique further serves to personalise and psychologise al-Qaeda's terrorism, thus reinforcing the belief that it is an entity driven by a small number of individuals. Indeed, the iconoclastic nature of such coverage is powerfully emphasised towards the end of one report, where Security Correspondent Frank Gardner points out that of all the available portrayals of bin Laden 'it's this image that is likely to endure: a tired man in a shabby room in a Pakistani safehouse'.⁶¹

In addition to criticism of bin Laden's operational role, moreover, there are also references to al-Qaeda's weakened, fragmented state within the BBC's reporting, and the fact that it no longer seems relevant in the context of the North Africa and Middle East uprisings. For instance, Frank Gardner describes how recent events ensure that al-Qaeda will be pondering an 'uncertain future' in coming days,⁶² and retired British

military officer Richard Kemp describes al-Qaeda as ‘a relatively weak organisation, that has not only ‘suffered huge setbacks as a result of drone strikes in Pakistan’, but is also viewed as being antiquated and ‘behind the agenda in the Middle East revolutions’.⁶³ Similarly, citing information released by Pakistani officials in Abbottabad, Orla Guerin further highlights al-Qaeda’s uncertain status, describing it as ‘split in two’ and ‘having money problems’.⁶⁴ Indeed, there are also a series of references to the al-Qaeda’s internally fragmented nature. Here, for example there are descriptions of al-Qaeda as acting much more like a ‘syndicate’,⁶⁵ one that, moreover, is made up of a series of ‘affiliates’⁶⁶ or smaller ‘organisations’ that are ‘inspired by but run independently’ from bin Laden’s core unit.⁶⁷ References are also made to al-Qaeda affiliates in Pakistan, Yemen, North Africa and the United Kingdom.⁶⁸ Importantly, however, although such descriptions emphasise al-Qaeda’s diffuse nature, these affiliates and associated groups each continue to be viewed in highly centralised and personalised ways. Thus, when discussing each separate entity, the BBC’s visual focus centres much of the attention upon individuals such as AQAP’s Anwar al-Awlaki and Said al-Shihri, something that stands to further reinforce the personal and individualised nature of this entity.

THE ‘ISLAMIC’ MODE OF REPRESENTATION

As we have seen in previous chapters, working in tandem with this ‘Personalised’ mode of representation is the ‘Islamic’ mode, whereby al-Qaeda is portrayed as a fanatical, anti-Western entity, driven by religious, as opposed to political, grievances. Specifically, we see the emergence of a series of Orientalist-inspired discourses and narratives which stand to emphasise al-Qaeda’s temporal and spatial ‘Otherness’. Thus, we see a series of references to ‘Islamists bent on revenge’,⁶⁹ ‘Islamist fanatics’,⁷⁰ ‘Jihadists’,⁷¹ ‘Jihadist sympathisers’,⁷² and ‘followers’,⁷³ appear alongside a number of more neutral-sounding labels such as ‘radicalised individual[s]’,⁷⁴ ‘extremists’⁷⁵ and ‘militants’.⁷⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, here, such labels are further supplemented through brief references to the core ‘ideology’⁷⁷ or the broader ‘ideological movement’⁷⁸ of which al-Qaeda forms a part. Interestingly, however, there is no elaboration of precisely what this ideology or worldview is, beyond veiled references to terms such as ‘radicalism’⁷⁹ or ‘Jihadist thought’,⁸⁰ and there is no discussion throughout the coverage of the various

social, political or historical factors driving its terrorism. Notably, Frank Gardner's description of AQAP not only as an entity that is located in 'the *distant deserts* of Yemen', but one that is, moreover, located 'a long way from Europe' (my emphasis), further serves to construct al-Qaeda as an external and largely foreign threat.⁸¹

The language used within this category of representation is further supplemented through the repeated use of images of al-Qaeda's senior leadership and key ideologues. Here, we see an interesting convergence between the 'Personalised' and 'Islamic' modes of representation, whereby al-Qaeda's terrorism is visually portrayed through reference to both psychological *and* extremist religious factors. Thus, in addition to the frequent use of images of bin Laden, we also see footage of other senior al-Qaeda figures such as al-Zawahiri (×2), al-Awlaki (×3) and Said al-Shiri (×2), alongside scenes from the AQAP propaganda video *We Start from Here and We Will Meet in Al-Aqsa* (2009), in which scores of masked fighters are seen training in the dusty Yemeni hinterland. Though we should be clear that these images are al-Qaeda's own, self-representations, as should be clear by now such forms of imagery have come to be imbued with a considerable level of symbolic appeal over the course of the 'war on terror', functioning to contain this entity within a seemingly familiar, and Orientalist-inspired, category of representation. Indeed, as we shall see below, in the absence of other representations, such embodied and sartorial signifiers can be understood to symbolise an irrational, antiquated world-view, something that further functions to spatially and temporally 'Other' al-Qaeda, and thus decontextualise its various aims and grievances. In particular, the visually arresting, and highly-symbolic, image of the 'Islamic' terrorist gesturing with a raised index finger (seen in ×9 of the images featured in the coverage) is an especially important feature of this mode of representation, as it functions to underscore the violent threats issued in these propaganda statements and work to further support the belief that 'Islamic' terrorists are driven, not by rational political ideals, but by an archaic, violent and intolerant system of beliefs.⁸²

When asked about to the appearance of such sequences within the BBC's coverage, journalists and editors were quick to highlight the pragmatic, as opposed to the discursive or ideological, function of these visuals. For example, Home Affairs Editor Mark Easton was fairly clear about why these particular images were selected above others. As he points out,

[n]ormally we will use the material in the context that we feel it deserves. We do not selectively pick out sequences from al-Qaeda propaganda videos... We look for the material that provides the clearest understanding of the story and its context... In this instance, my immediate view would be that if you are trying to make a report that looks at the potential threat that comes from extremists who've been trained in al-Qaeda camps in the desert it would make sense to show them being trained in the desert, rather than some statement from an al-Qaeda leader. But ultimately it would always depend on the story and the focus.⁸³

This point was further emphasised by another BBC correspondent, who suggested that, while the broadcaster is always conscious of the propaganda value of al-Qaeda video releases, such images are often employed to remind or situate audiences in relation to a particular story. In their words,

when we reuse scenes such as this, we are effectively taking them for illustrative purposes, just to remind people what al-Qaeda is: so it's effectively a kind of visual reference point. And that's standard practice in television news, you know, in the case of the BBC you go to the Motion Gallery and say I need some images of this group, such as the iconic or famous pictures which are obviously recognisable and you pull them out and use them as an illustration... It's an easy reference point for people.⁸⁴

While these visual imperatives are often an unavoidable consequence of the commercial environment in which the BBC operates, one important factor not acknowledged by its journalists and editors is the way such video productions often undergo a highly selective process of editing and translation even before they appear within its news bulletins. As research by Hoskins O'Loughlin makes clear, propaganda videos from al-Qaeda and its associated groups often pass through government-funded terrorism-monitoring organisations, where large portions, specifically related to the political grievances and religious authority of a speaker, are systematically edited out.⁸⁵ In the case of the training sequences used here, moreover, it is clear that these scenes have been sourced by the BBC from terrorism-monitoring websites SITE Intelligence and Flashpoint Partners, whose logos are clearly present in the footage used. These two organisations have received significant levels of criticism for being highly selective in the way they translate al-Qaeda propaganda statements, often focusing on graphic and violent content at the expense of more conciliatory passages.

Curiously, this mode of representation is not presented in isolation from the broader, more progressive portrayals of Muslim peoples seen elsewhere within the BBC's coverage. As we saw during the previous chapter, here we see clear efforts by the BBC's journalists and commentators to distance al-Qaeda's actions from the beliefs and practices of Muslims within the Middle East more broadly. In particular, in the context of the uprisings across the MENA region, there is a discursive contest between the 'good' Muslims calling for democracy and an end to corruption and inequality, and the 'bad' terrorists who comprise al-Qaeda. In one report, for example, Gardner describes how 'the so-called "Arab Spring" has left al-Qaeda side-lined', explaining how 'it has played no part in the mass protest movements, where young, mostly secular Arabs overthrew the regimes al-Qaeda tried, and failed, to topple'.⁸⁶ Comments by Jeremy Bowen lend additional support to this view, but provide much more nuance to this arbitrary division. When asked about the appeal of bin Laden's worldview, Bowen cautiously and judiciously replies:

[w]ell frankly in the Middle East, the area where I work, it was waning anyway, and what really matters right now is not what Osama bin Laden was saying about the way things should go or the activities of Jihadist sympathisers and movements there, it's the big changes brought about by the so-called 'Arab Spring'. The fact is people are marching for change, not always getting it, but trying to get it, and they're talking about freedom, and sometimes about democracy, maybe about political Islam in some cases, but certainly not about this violent kind of Jihadist thought bin Laden stood for.⁸⁷

He continues:

[y]ou know, the thing about al-Qaeda and bin Laden is that they've made themselves unpopular among Arabs because of the fact that they've been killing, because of the fact that they cause fear, but let's not forget that more Arabs and more Muslims in the world have been killed as a result of al-Qaeda's activities than Westerners have. So they still have this hardcore appeal to some people, but they're not widely popular.⁸⁸

In this regard, while it is clear that the presence of such representations provides a level of balance, and indeed nuance, to the BBC's coverage, the broader process of 'Othering' al-Qaeda witnessed here serves to

further remove its terrorism from the complex social and political contexts that give rise to this phenomenon. Much more than this, however, by spatially and temporally locating al-Qaeda's terrorism in 'the distant deserts of Yemen', or within the minds of 'extremists in the Middle East',⁸⁹ this mode of representation allows the threat to be distanced from the United Kingdom, thus restoring the social order that was disturbed during the coverage of the July 7th 2005 attacks. As Hellmich explains, with the rise of AQAP in Yemen, al-Qaeda is no longer

seen as a primarily ideological threat capable of lying 'within ourselves' – that is, Western societies – but can safely be 'othered', treated as an issue particular to a certain geographical context, and hence understood as resting within societies that are alien, or even hostile, to western values.⁹⁰

THE 'ELUSIVE' MODE OF REPRESENTATION

Curiously, however, despite the presence of the 'Personalised' and 'Islamic' modes, appearing alongside, and often in tension with, these categories of representation is a more disparate, fragmented and somewhat 'Elusive' understanding of al-Qaeda. As discussed in previous chapters, this category not only foregrounds concerns about the size, shape and internal organisation of al-Qaeda, but also, more importantly, draws upon a series of fears and discourses surrounding the identity of those who comprise its ranks. What is most significant here, though, is the way this mode appears almost invisible in contrast to the other modes of visual and verbal representation seen within the coverage. As such, in the absence of bin Laden's unifying image, it would seem that the BBC is somewhat reluctant to acknowledge the present 'reality' of the terror threat, due to the impact it might have on audience perceptions of al-Qaeda.

In particular, the 'Elusive' mode is first evident in the way the BBC portrays al-Qaeda in increasingly disparate and fragmented terms. Thus, we see references to 'al-Qaeda and its affiliates',⁹¹ 'its 'Saudi affiliate', its 'dangerous affiliate in the Arabian Peninsula', its 'North Africa group',⁹² its 'syndicate of terror',⁹³ as well as a number of more general observations pertaining to the 'various groups associated with al-Qaeda'⁹⁴ and the many 'organisations inspired by but run independently from' al-Qaeda's core leadership.⁹⁵ More broadly, however, this 'Elusive' understanding is further exacerbated through the characterisations of

bin Laden as ‘an icon of evil’,⁹⁶ ‘an elusive villain’,⁹⁷ a man who ‘cast a dark shadow’ over the United States,⁹⁸ ‘a spectre that has haunted America’,⁹⁹ ‘America’s most wanted’,¹⁰⁰ ‘America’s best-known fugitive’,¹⁰¹ ‘America’s arch enemy’,¹⁰² ‘the world’s most wanted man’,¹⁰³ and ‘the world’s most wanted terrorist’.¹⁰⁴ These descriptions are intensified through the appearance of several metaphors associated with hunting and stalking, such as those describing bin Laden’s ‘hiding place’,¹⁰⁵ and the fact that he was found in ‘deep hiding’¹⁰⁶ or ‘hiding in plain sight’.¹⁰⁷ Although mainly centred on Osama bin Laden, such descriptions feed into the broader portrayal of al-Qaeda, seen elsewhere in this book, as a disparate, intangible and almost ghost-like threat. Notably, the categorisation of al-Qaeda’s foot soldiers as ‘unseen enemies’,¹⁰⁸ as people who pass as ‘normal people’,¹⁰⁹ as individuals and groups located in ‘distant deserts’¹¹⁰ or a movement with that has cultivated a powerful ‘mystique’¹¹¹ further stands to support such a claim.

As noted, at the visual level, beyond the images of bin Laden and other senior ideologues discussed above, what is most significant about the ‘Elusive’ category is the fact that we see remarkably few images or visual representations of actual al-Qaeda suspects and operatives. This is not to say that no images are present, but rather that, as with the lack of any visual portrayals of bin Laden’s actual capture and killing, for the most part within such a category of representation al-Qaeda remains almost *unseen*, or in the words of Avery Gordon ‘*un-visible*’ for British television audiences.¹¹² In this regard, BBC audiences are offered brief, fleeting glimpses of individuals who have each carried out acts of violence on behalf of al-Qaeda, for example, Mohamed Atta,¹¹³ Roshonara Choudhry,¹¹⁴ Mohammad Sidique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer.¹¹⁵ With the exception of Atta’s California driving licence photograph, which itself draws upon the semiotic conventions of the mug-shot image, each of these images in various ways mark the subject as criminal. So, for example, the images of Khan and Tanweer are screen-grabs taken from police surveillance footage and, as analysed in more detail below, the images of Choudhry are also a police-sourced mug-shot and CCTV footage. This is not to say that the four individuals identified in the analysis are in any way innocent of the crimes committed, but that, in view of their iconicity, such images appear as fragmentary visual markers of the ‘reality’ of al-Qaeda’s terrorism. Indeed, because of their fleeting, evanescent nature, such visual representations are overwhelmed by the sheer

presence of the ‘Personalised’ and ‘Islamic’ modes of representation in the BBC’s coverage.

In one report, for example, the BBC’s audiences are briefly presented with a mugshot image and CCTV footage of Roshonara Choudhry, the 27 year-old British student who attempted to murder M. P Stephen Timms on May 14th 2010.¹¹⁶ Pictured wearing a black abaya and hijab, Choudhry appears as a shadowy presence within in the report’s grainy and indistinct footage, somewhere at the intersection between visibility and invisibility, with the poor-quality of the police mugshot further affirming her furtive, on-screen status. As Jermyn points out, while closed circuit TV footage enjoys a powerful epistemological relationship with the real, ‘it simultaneously holds a distancing quality’, whereby ‘[t]he blurry images common to so much CCTV material evoke its figures as *screen ghosts*’ (emphasis added).¹¹⁷ According to this reading, far from objectively depicting ‘reality’, such footage, as she continues, ‘is both “real” in content and un- or surreal in its rendering’.¹¹⁸ Notably, the fact that the narrator does not even utter name her within the report can be seen to hasten this sense of phantasmic elusiveness, with Choudhry entering into the growing list of perpetrators of seemingly-inexplicable ‘Islamist’ violence.

Similarly, the inclusion of images of Choudhry is further significant for the analysis, given the fact that no women feature elsewhere in the BBC’s representations of al-Qaeda. While previous chapters have highlighted the way prosaic visual representations of terrorist suspects can serve to destabilise the delicate status quo, the inclusion of a woman into al-Qaeda’s rank and file further extends the discursive boundaries surrounding this entity and opens up broader questions about the identity of al-Qaeda suspects. As Lizzie Seal points out, acts of extreme violence by women ‘violates norms of femininity, such as nurturance, gentleness and social conformity. It disturbs culturally held notions not only of how women should behave, but also of what a woman is’.¹¹⁹ Similarly, we might extend this analysis by suggesting that including an image of a woman within its representations of al-Qaeda the BBC not only disrupts deeply held societal norms about femininity, but also the broader question of *who* can be a terrorist. Indeed, often marginalised within public discussions of political violence, women have historically played a central role in ‘Islamic’ terrorist groups and movements like al-Qaeda, functioning as not only as fighters, but also as educators, ideologues,

ascetic examples and facilitators of other militants.¹²⁰ That said, however, one of the central themes within media portrayals of female operatives is the way in which their agency and political motivations are subordinated to those of the males in their lives.¹²¹ While we should be clear that the Choudhry's appearance in the BBC report is merely illustrative, her portrayal does reflect this dominant theme, with Gardner describing how 'the woman who stabbed him [MP Stephen Timms] was *inspired* by al-Awlaki's message' (my emphasis).¹²² No mention is made of her own personal motivations, such as her vocal criticism of Britain's role in the 2003 Iraq war or the impact of its counterterrorism programmes on her life. Here, discourses of radicalisation, as identified in the previous chapter, are quietly evident within such statements, helping to reinforce a simplified narrative whereby individuals such as Choudhry, and the 'Nigerian underpants bomber' also briefly referenced in the report, are viewed as being at risk of exposure to the violent extremist narratives promoted in a top-down fashion by external, foreign figures such as bin Laden, al-Zawahiri and Awlaki.

CONCLUSION

The representations that emerge in the aftermath of the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden provide significant insight into the way al-Qaeda is viewed by the BBC nearly ten years into the 'war on terror'. As such, the chapter provides a fitting historical endpoint to the analysis of BBC portrayals of this entity. Though the BBC acknowledge the fact that the death of bin Laden is, to paraphrase one correspondent, not going to change very much, the focus on this looming figure, and indeed broader al-Qaeda leadership, can be seen to reflect a preoccupation with, and even nostalgia for, conventionalised understandings of terrorism, whereby there is a clearly identifiable 'leader' and chain-of-command. The celebratory accounts seen in much of the early coverage would seem to further reflect this notion. Moreover, the broader, and more problematic, 'Islamisation' or 'Orientalisation' of al-Qaeda, appears to follow a similar logic, in that the threat is spatially, temporally and politically 'Othered' within the BBC's coverage and, thus, distanced from the United Kingdom.

And, yet, the effect of the focus on the individuals and radical 'Others' within the al-Qaeda phenomenon is to counter the deeper, ontological fear that al-Qaeda's many fighters and operatives form a key presence

within everyday society. As Gillian Rose points out, '[a]bsences can be as productive as explicit naming; *invisibility* can have just as powerful effects as visibility'.¹²³ In this regard, the furtive presence of the 'Elusive' mode of representation, and the revealing of images of individuals such as Mohamed Atta, Roshonara Choudhry, Mohammad Siddique Khan and Shehzad Tanweer, can be seen to further the belief that al-Qaeda suspects are almost impossible to identify and even more difficult to apprehend. As noted above, the inclusion of the police CCTV footage and mugshot of Choudhry is most significant to this line of argument, as it forces audiences to expand the discursive and ideational boundaries surrounding the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and thus question precisely who is a terrorist. In effect, its presence within the coverage lends support to much of the sociological and biographical research into al-Qaeda's operatives, where it is suggested that such individuals are much more likely to have come from largely secular, middle-class, well-educated backgrounds, as opposed to some dusty, Oriental, former-colonial backwater.¹²⁴ And it is in this regard, therefore, that we see such a powerful discursive pressure within the BBC's coverage to want to isolate al-Qaeda and render it, and its worldview, as 'Other'. Because in doing so al-Qaeda is no longer deemed to be a threat to Western countries, and the very notion of the 'Self', but is, instead, a distant, atavistic danger that can be banished to the far corners of the Orient.

NOTES

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2. See Simon Cottle, 'The Media and the Arab Uprisings', *Journalism*, Vol. 12, No. 5 (2011), pp. 647–659.
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4. See Nicholas Bowman et al., 'The Morality of May 2nd 2011: A Content Analysis of U.S. Headlines Regarding the Death of Osama Bin Laden', *Mass Communication and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2015), pp. 639–664; Uche Onyebadi, 'Framing from the Inside: An Examination of Pakistani Newspapers' House Editorials on Osama bin Laden's Targeted Assassination', *The Journal of International Communication*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2016), pp. 108–125, for examples.

5. See Priya Dixit, 'Decolonizing Visuality in Security Studies: Reflections on the Death of Osama bin Laden', *Critical Studies on Security*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2014), pp. 337–351. See also Susan Moeller et al., 'Images of Our Dead Enemies: Visual Representations of Bin Laden, Hussein and el-Qaddafi', in Susan Jeffords & Fahed al-Sumait (eds.), *Covering Bin Laden*, pp. 112–139.
6. Rick Nelson et al., 'A Threat Transformed: Al-Qaeda and Associated Movements in 2011', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies Report* (February 2011). Available at: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/110203_Nelson_AThreatTransformed_web.pdf (Accessed August 13th 2017), p. 15.
7. Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile*, p. 244.
8. Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 130.
9. See John Benyon, 'The Con-Lib Agenda for Home Affairs', in Simon Lee & Matt Beech (eds.), *The Cameron-Clegg Government: Coalition Politics in an Age of Austerity* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 145.
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12. See David Cameron, 'PM's Speech at the Munich Security Conference' (February 5th 2011). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference> (Accessed August 18th 2017).
13. Ibid.
14. See Victoria Basham & Nick Vaughn-Williams, 'Gender, Race and Border Security Practices: A Profane Reading of "Muscular Liberalism"', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2012), pp. 516–519, for analysis of Cameron's Munich speech.

15. Peter Bergen, *Manhunt: From 9/11 to Abbottabad—The Ten-Year Search for Osama Bin Laden* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), pp. 137–138.
16. Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, p. 488.
17. Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile*, p. 360.
18. See Carlotta Gall, ‘What Pakistan Knew About Bin Laden’, *The New York Times* (March 19th 2014). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/23/magazine/what-pakistan-knew-about-bin-laden.html> (Accessed August 18th 2017); Seymour Hersh, ‘The Killing of Osama Bin Laden’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 37, No. 10 (May 21st 2015). Available at: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n10/seymour-m-hersh/the-killing-of-osama-bin-laden> (Accessed August 18th 2017); and Cathy Scott-Clark & Adrian Levy, *The Exile*, for alternative accounts.
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20. See Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Laden Sidelined?* (Westpoint: Combating Terrorism Centre, 2012). Available at: <file:///C:/Users/Jared1/Downloads/ADA560875.pdf> (Accessed August 18th 2017).
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22. See Mark Mardell, ‘News at Ten’ (May 5th 2011).
23. See Orla Guerin, ‘News at Ten’ (May 5th 2011).
24. See Gordon Corera, ‘News at Ten’ (May 8th 2011).
25. See Noman Benotman, ‘News at Ten’ (May 7th 2011).
26. Skype interview with Aleem Maqbool (July 24th 2017).
27. Frank Gardner, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011).
28. George Alagiah, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011).
29. Frank Gardner, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011).
30. Orla Guerin, ‘News at Ten’ (May 3rd 2011).
31. Jane Hill, ‘News at Ten’ (May 8th 2011) and Barak Obama, ‘News at Ten’ (May 8th 2011).
32. See George Alagiah, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011); Aleem Maqbool, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011); John Simpson, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011); Frank Gardner, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011); Jeremy Bowen, ‘News at Ten’ (May 2nd 2011); Huw Edwards, ‘News at Ten’ (May 4th 2011); Clive Myrie, ‘News at

- Ten' (May 7th 2011); Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 7th 2011); Orla Guerin, 'News at Ten' (May 8th 2011); George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (May 9th 2011), for examples.
33. Mark Mardell, 'News at Ten' (May 4th 2011).
 34. See George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011) and Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 5th 2011), for example.
 35. Mark Mardell, 'News at Ten' (May 5th 2011).
 36. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 37. George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 38. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 39. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 40. See Clive Myrie, 'News at Ten' (May 7th 2011) and Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (May 8th 2011).
 41. See Clive Myrie, 'News at Ten' (May 7th 2011) and Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (May 8th 2011).
 42. Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (May 8th 2011).
 43. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 7th 2011).
 44. John Brennan, 'News at Ten' (May 4th 2011).
 45. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 4th 2011).
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 48. Jeremy Bowen, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 49. Paul Wood, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
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 55. See John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
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60. See Roland Bleiker, et al., 'The Visual Dehumanisation of Refugees', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2013), p. 399.
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 64. Orla Guerin, 'News at Ten' (May 5th 2011).
 65. Hilary Clinton, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 66. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 67. George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 68. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 69. Aleem Maqbool, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 70. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 6th 2011).
 71. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
 72. Jeremy Bowen, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 73. See John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011) and Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 74. David Cameron, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
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 76. See Aleem Maqbool, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011) and Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 6th 2011).
 77. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 4th 2011).
 78. General Jack Keane, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 79. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 80. Jeremy Bowen, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 81. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
 82. Jared Ahmad, 'Nightmarish Visions?', p. 63.
 83. Telephone interview with Mark Easton (July 25th 2016).
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 85. See Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, '*Remediating Jihad for Western News Audiences*', p. 201.
 86. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
 87. Jeremy Bowen, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
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 89. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
 90. Christina Hellmich, *Al-Qaeda*, p. 151.

91. David Cameron, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
92. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
93. Hilary Clinton, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
94. Tobias Feakin, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
95. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
96. Mark Mardell, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
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103. Aleem Maqbool, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011) and Orla Guerin, 'News at Ten' (May 4th 2011).
104. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 13th 2011).
105. Mishal Hussain, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
106. John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
107. Orla Guerin, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
108. Matt Frei, 'News at Ten' (May 5th 2011).
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115. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 6th 2011).
116. See Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
117. Deborah Jermyn, 'This Is About Real People! Video Technologies, Actuality and Affect in the Television Crime Appeal', in Su Holmes & Deborah Jermyn (eds.), *Understanding Reality Television* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 82.
118. Ibid.
119. Lizzie Seal, *Women, Murder and Femininity: Gender Representations of Women Who Kill* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 1.

120. See Nadya Ali, 'Terrorizing Women: Re-thinking the Female Jihad', in Christina Hellmich & Andreas Behnke (eds.), *Knowing Al-Qaeda*, pp. 145–166. See also Laura Sjoberg & Caron E. Gentry (eds.), *Women, Gender and Terrorism* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2011), for example.
121. See Katherine E. Brown, 'Muriel's Wedding: News Media Representations of Europe's First Female Suicide Terrorist', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 6 (2011), pp. 705–726.
122. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
123. Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, pp. 157–158.
124. See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*.



Conclusion: A Shifting Enemy

Over 16 years have now passed since the attacks of September 11th 2001. In the period since that inaugural event, the threat posed by al-Qaeda and its various affiliates has gone on to dominate debates within media and policy-making circles. From Afghanistan (2001–2017), Bali (2002), Casablanca (2003), Istanbul (2003) and Iraq (2003–2017), to Madrid (2004), London (2005), Islamabad (2008), Paris (2015), the list of attacks attributed to ‘al-Qaeda’ has grown at an exponential rate, and, despite the apparent rise of the so-called Islamic State, the dangers posed by this entity continue to be regarded as one of the dominant threats to nations around the world. And yet, regardless of its overwhelming presence within state-led narratives of threat and insecurity, there continues to be a lack of understanding as to precisely what ‘al-Qaeda’ is. It is this widespread uncertainty and doubt that the current book has sought to investigate. In particular, it has sought to question precisely how al-Qaeda has been represented within the BBC’s coverage, how these representations changed over the course of the ‘war on terror’ period, whose interests are served by adopting particular modes of visual and verbal representation, and, finally, with what consequences?

The chapter begins by returning to, and summarising, some of the key findings identified over the course of the four case studies. These are linked back to the core research questions, and are also discussed in relation to the dominant themes highlighted in the literature on media representations of al-Qaeda, and the media-state-terrorism relationship,

more broadly. Building on this material, the following section reflects upon the BBC's overall performance when representing al-Qaeda across the first stage of the 'war on terror'. To further supplement this discussion, material taken from interviews with current and former journalists, editors and documentary film-makers from the BBC is included, who each shed light on the way these representations have taken shape, whilst also reflecting on the pressures faced when covering acts of terrorism. The final section addresses some of the methodological limitations highlighted by the analysis, and ends by reflecting on how the main findings might inform future research on this issue.

KEY FINDINGS—THE REPRESENTATIONAL DIMENSION

As noted, the first aim of the book has been to show how 'al-Qaeda' has been visually and verbally represented within the BBC's 'News at Ten' coverage and how they have shifted over the course of the 'war on terror' period. The main argument, here, has been that 'al-Qaeda' should be understood not as a phenomenon that *pre-exists* the BBC's reporting, but one that, perhaps most importantly, emerges from *within* its coverage of particular events. Here, in the absence of any stable ontological and epistemological frameworks of understanding, the BBC's representations have functioned as repository for an ever-shifting range of fears, identities, discourses and forms of knowledge and power surrounding the terror threat. In this regard, one of the most significant characteristics of the representations analysed for this book has been the way they simultaneously draw upon and challenge the dominant discourses that circulate in the aftermath of each 'al-Qaeda'-related event.

Appearing in three of the case studies, and drawing on a long tradition of deeply hostile portrayals of the East and Islam,¹ the 'Islamic' mode is usually the first category of representation seen within the BBC's coverage. As we have seen, within this category al-Qaeda is verbally characterised in ways that reinforce age-old, Orientalist-inspired stereotypes (as 'Arab fundamentalists',² 'Islamic terrorists',³ 'fanatics',⁴ 'fundamentalists',⁵ 'Islamist fanatics'⁶ or 'Jihadists',⁷ for instance) and visually portrayed via images of bearded, bescarved ideologues such as Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, or as rows of endless, masked fighters as seen in al-Qaeda's own, self-made propaganda videos. Here, the threat is contained within a stereotypical and foreign mode of representation, and is, moreover, viewed as a largely *external* danger

located outside of the nation state, in distant, foreign landscapes such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Yemen.

For those writing on media representations of al-Qaeda, or on the media-state-terror relationship more broadly, the presence of such a reductive category of representation should come as no surprise. In particular, its appearance within the coverage should add weight to existing studies by Macdonald,⁸ Nashef,⁹ and Winch,¹⁰ for example, where it is argued that representations of al-Qaeda, and figures such as Osama bin Laden more generally, reflect a set of simplified, Orientalist stereotypes about the East, Islam and the broader phenomenon of 'Islamic' terrorism. Likewise, the BBC's focus on al-Qaeda's bearded, finger-wagging ideologues or the more violent or aggressive visual sequences from its propaganda videos also lends support to the claim that mainstream, Western media tend to present 'audiences with decontextualized footage of angry pointing men, absent the political claims, religious and historical narratives, and songs, poetry and scripture through which such communications attempt to persuade'.¹¹ This suggests that, at least on one level, the discourse of Orientalism still has significant explanatory appeal, particularly in the immediate aftermath of an al-Qaeda-related attack or, in part, when seeking to explain the motivations behind its violence.

At the same time, however, despite its presence across the 'war on terror' period, we should be clear that this category is often short-lived within the 'News at Ten's' reporting. Thus, in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001, July 7th 2005 attacks and the May 2nd 2011 capture and killing of bin Laden, the 'Islamic' mode is often quickly downplayed and of-set by seemingly 'positive' representations of Muslim citizens in America, Britain and beyond. Partially driven by its core objectives of impartiality, fairness and balance, not to mention its broad, pluralistic Public Purpose commitments, the BBC has a statutory requirement to avoid reductive and simplistic stereotypes, ensuring that British citizens are made aware of the different cultures and viewpoints of people living both within and outside the UK.¹² Such a view is especially evident in the aftermath of the July 7th 2005 bombing, where there is a clear effort by the broadcaster to distance the actions of al-Qaeda from the beliefs and practices of Britain's broad, yet singularly defined, 'Muslim community'.¹³ Furthermore, while we should be clear that there is little in the way of detailed analysis of al-Qaeda's aims and grievances, nor of bin Laden's widely-available propaganda statements or pronouncements, the discursive logic of the 'Islamic' mode is further

challenged by the BBC's attempts to highlight some of the underlying historical and political issues motivating its terrorism. Though, at times, fleeting within the coverage, the allusions to U.S. and U.K. foreign policy in Israel/Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan serve to create the emergent conditions in which a broader understanding of al-Qaeda's terrorism can be developed, and thus shed light on the BBC's ability to challenge dominant discourses such as Orientalism.

In this respect, the findings also add to recent debates concerning the shifting representations surrounding the religion of Islam in the years after the September 11th 2001 attacks,¹⁴ where it has been suggested that when situated within a national setting, a broader range of discourses can be seen to manifest themselves within portrayals of the 'Islamic Other'. Here, notions of inclusivity, national identity and belonging can be said to often take precedence over the kinds of representations that simply emphasise difference.¹⁵ As such, while Orientalist discourses are often applied to al-Qaeda when it is viewed as an external, 'foreign' threat, they are less apparent when the perpetrators are understood to be British, as we saw during the coverage of the July 7th 2005 bombings.

Appearing alongside, and often in tandem, with the 'Islamic' mode, the 'Personalised' mode of representation further simplifies the al-Qaeda phenomenon by portraying it as a hierarchical, centrally administered entity that is directly controlled, trained and financed by a single, all-powerful mastermind. Within this mode, al-Qaeda is typically characterised as '*Osama bin Laden's* al-Qaeda network',¹⁶ '*Osama bin Laden's* terror network',¹⁷ or more simply as '*Osama bin Laden's* al-Qaeda',¹⁸ and there a series of references to its highly centralised command structure, via the use of terms such as 'lieutenants',¹⁹ its 'leadership',²⁰ or 'core leadership', for example.²¹ Visually, this category is further communicated through repeated images of bin Laden and, to a lesser extent, other senior figures within the movement such as Ayman al-Zawahiri or Anwar al-Awlaki. Such images dominated coverage of the September 11th 2001 attacks and, perhaps not surprisingly, the capture and killing of bin Laden on May 2nd 2011, where they provided audiences with a potent visual anchor for the empty signifier 'al-Qaeda'. Indeed, the heavy presence of this mode of representation in the aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks does lend a tacit level of support to existing studies claiming that Western news media tend to 'personalize', 'psychologize', and thus 'simplify', terrorist violence for audiences,²² reducing complex,

historical events and processes to the aims and individual failings of a seemingly all-powerful, 'evil genius'-type figure.²³ While he does not appear with the same level of frequency as 'official' political figures such as Bush and Blair, as found by scholars such as Nacos in U.S. media coverage,²⁴ the sheer dominance of bin Laden's image helps to centre the viewers' attention and provide audiences with a clear 'enemy' figure upon which to locate the source of the attacks. The subtle revival of the 'Personalised' mode, when discussing activities of al-Qaeda affiliates such as AQAP, also implies that the category still carries some explanatory weight.

At the same time, however, the fact that this category is so frequently criticised and challenged by BBC journalists and interviewees reveals its limitations as a lasting framework for making sense of 'al-Qaeda'. Perhaps most significantly for the analysis, doubts over bin Laden's operational role and influence within al-Qaeda were evident within the first week after the September 11th 2001 attacks,²⁵ and can be seen to be at their most trenchant during the coverage of the capture and killing of the Saudi on May 2nd 2011,²⁶ something that does much to undermine the claim that news media organisations sought to perpetuate an exclusively centralised conception of the al-Qaeda phenomenon during the early stages of the 'war on terror'.²⁷

Nevertheless, of all the categories identified in this book, it is the 'Elusive' mode that dominates much of the BBC's reporting. Witnessed in all four of the case studies, this mode of representation not only provides an outlet for fears regarding the identity of al-Qaeda's operatives, but also broader concerns about the size and shape of the terror threat and the operational role of figures such as bin Laden. Calling into play an incredibly diverse set of discourses surrounding normality and deviance, migration and asylum, Britishness and belonging, visibility and invisibility, within this category al-Qaeda is described as an 'elusive',²⁸ 'shadowy',²⁹ 'faceless',³⁰ 'network',³¹ of intangible ' sleeper cells',³² or as an unknown number of 'home-grown',³³ 'British-born' individuals,³⁴ who, in the words of one eyewitness, appear to be 'just like the rest of them round here... just *normal*' (emphasis added).³⁵ The 'Elusive' mode is further characterised by the interplay between the lack of images of al-Qaeda suspects and the gradual emergence of a series of prosaic visual representations, such as driving licence photographs, family portraits, police mug-shots images and CCTV footage. Scattered across the coverage, the presence of such images powerfully underscores the sheer sense

of anxiety surrounding ‘al-Qaeda’ and the evanescent and phantom-like threat it poses, thus giving rise to broader questions about its social, cultural, ethnic, and gender make-up. Indeed, within this category al-Qaeda is, for the most part, viewed as an *internal* threat that is located within the nation state. This explains the unspoken reluctance within much of the BBC’s coverage to want to fully explore the implications of such a mode of representation for fears of permanently damaging Britain’s delicate status quo.

While several studies have highlighted the ontological and epistemological uncertainty that surround academic and political debates on al-Qaeda,³⁶ for the literature focusing on news media representations of this entity, not to mention the media-state-terror relationship more widely, these findings are especially significant. In particular, the dominance of the ‘Elusive’ mode adds to research into shifting nature of newspaper portrayals of al-Qaeda,³⁷ and the figure of the ‘Islamic’ terrorist more broadly,³⁸ by providing deeper insight into the multimodality of such representations and, in particular, the way word and image work together to secure meaning. Here, far from simply reproducing the reductive binaries and forms of knowledge that produce discourses such as Orientalism, this analysis shows that mediated representations of al-Qaeda would seem to reflect the diversity and complexity that exists within our own, globalised, hybridised and multicultural societies. That is, representations of contemporary terrorist threats appear to be less that of the external, distant and foreign-born ‘Other’ and increasingly representations of *ourselves*. With the advent of Web 2.0 and the increased presence of information taken from visually-orientated social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram within news media reporting, it is the ‘Elusive’ mode of representation that will come to dominate future coverage of the terror threat. The growing willingness of both al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State to use Western fighters in their most recent propaganda releases, moreover, suggests that the challenge of representing the phenomenon of ‘Islamic’ terrorism is not going to be resolved any time soon.

KEY FINDINGS—THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

In addition to exploring the shifting nature of the BBC’s portrayals, the second major aim of this book has been to consider their overall political functions; that is, the way they work in the ‘interests’ of certain groups

and the extent to which they reproduce or challenge the ‘war on terror’s’ underlying discourses. Given the disparate, fragmented nature of many of the groups engaged in this conflict, however, not to mention the complexities of the BBC’s own internal power relations, the main argument in this regard has been that these representations do not neatly correspond with the ‘interests’ of a single group or set of actors. Rather they function according to a broader, albeit unstable, strategic logic, whereby the BBC’s portrayals constitute the endpoint of a ‘system of relations’ between a number of competing groups; the most significant of which are the various individuals, groups and organisations that comprise the al-Qaeda movement and the small number of politicians that form the head of the British executive. While this system of relations is continually shifting between states of harmony and tension,³⁹ what is most significant about the BBC’s representations here is the way different ‘al-Qaeda’-related events either open up or close down opportunities for these groups to influence, or benefit from, the BBC’s representations.

For example, when reporting on the immediate aftermath of an al-Qaeda attack, we see significant variation within the BBC’s representations, with greater levels of attention devoted to the political context behind an event and a deeper exploration of the identities of those responsible for such an attack. As we saw in Chapter 3, for instance, in the days after the attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, BBC journalists and correspondents did attempt to provide insight into the possible factors influencing the attacks, via specific references to U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and the rallying call of the Arab/Israeli conflict.⁴⁰ Similarly, when reporting on the London bombings the BBC’s Security Correspondent Frank Gardner can be seen to provide a clear platform for the various groups associated with al-Qaeda, due to the fact that he quotes directly from an ‘al-Qaeda’ statement describing the attacks as ‘revenge against the British government for, what it calls, its massacres in Iraq and Afghanistan’.⁴¹ Notably, the presence of such statements suggests that the ‘war on terror’s’ underlying discourses and power relations have been less stable within the news media than existing scholarship proposes, particularly within the U.K.⁴²

Following the ‘event-driven’ news model, therefore, the results imply that unexpected terrorist attacks create disruption within the political environment and thus produce opportunities for a broader range of perspectives and representations to be aired in the ensuing coverage.⁴³ While we should be clear that such reporting is by no means

comprehensive in scope or character, the fact that such perspectives are on offer do much to undermine claims that the BBC functions exclusively as a platform for elite voices,⁴⁴ or that the mainstream media more generally report on terrorism in a way that ‘retards public understanding’ of al-Qaeda.⁴⁵ As noted in Chapter 2, part of the reason we see such variation is because, first, political elites are never in full control of the political environment, and, second, because dramatic and exceptional events provide ‘gateways’ for challenger groups to enter, and thus influence their representations.⁴⁶ In doing so, this not only opens up a space for BBC journalists to explore some of the root causes of al-Qaeda’s terrorism, but also, and perhaps more interestingly, provides terrorist groups more broadly with momentary access to the news media.

We should be clear, however, that each of the events analysed for this book took place in very different spatial, temporal and political contexts. Thus, the September 11th 2001 attacks occurred in the United States and the July 7th 2005 bombings took place during a period of intense criticism of U.K. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan. With this in mind, the findings also seem to support Schlesinger et al.’s claim that ‘proximity’ and ‘distance’ are two of the most significant variables when it comes to the scope and depth of television representations of terrorism.⁴⁷ Here, the BBC’s *geographical* distance from the U.S. during the first case study provides it with enough detachment to discuss some of the underlying motivations behind the attacks. Likewise, its *historical* and *political* distance, during Chapter 5, from Britain’s wars in the Middle East and South Asia ensure that the broadcaster can call attention to the possible grievances of the London bombers. More broadly, the analysis shows how the BBC’s role when covering terrorism-related news events is not simply fixed or static in nature, but rather is in a continual state of flux, adapting to, and changing, in relation to the ever-shifting spatial, temporal and political contexts in which it is situated. As Wolfsfeld points out,

the role of the news media in conflicts varies along with such factors as the political context of the conflict, the resources, skills, and political power of the players involved, the relationship between the press and the each antagonist, the state of public opinion, the ability of journalists to gain access to the conflict events, and last but certainly not least what is happening in the field.⁴⁸

When it comes to reporting on other types of ‘al-Qaeda’-related events, however, such as ‘*terror incidents*’ or ‘*counter-terrorism initiatives*’,⁴⁹ we see a much more limited range of representations on offer. Here, the findings sit more comfortably with the existing literature on media representations of al-Qaeda, and indeed the media-state-terror relationship more broadly, where it is suggested that the news media typically neglect to report upon the aims, motivations and grievances underpinning terrorist attacks; thereby delegitimising terrorist groups and representing their actions simply as the outcome of mindless violence.⁵⁰ The Wood Green ricin plot is especially significant in this regard, hence the extended focus in Chapter 4. During this event, the pressing nature of the BBC’s reporting, the lack of information about the perpetrators, and the tendency for journalists and correspondents to speculate over the size and scale of the alleged plot, enabled its representations to be mobilised in the interests of elements within the British state *and* the al-Qaeda phenomenon. As such, if there is one place within the BBC’s coverage where the language and discourse of the ‘war on terror’ can be witnessed in its most ‘embedded’ form it is here, as journalists and correspondents evoke its discursive and narrative logic to make sense of events unfolding in Wood Green, Manchester and beyond.

While this is not to exonerate the BBC or justify its lack of attention to the wider context, part of the reason for such limited patterns of representation, again, relates to the specific nature of these events. In both instances, the Wood Green plot and capture and killing of bin Laden were, to varying degrees, instigated and controlled by state actors. So, in the case of the poisons plot, for example, news coverage only surfaced *after* police and counterterrorism officials raided addresses in Wood Green. Similarly, although the BBC sourced initial information through social media platforms such as Twitter,⁵¹ journalists only began to make sense of the death of bin Laden once political elites in the United States began to publicly acknowledge this event. Both events gave political elites in Britain and America a significant amount of control over the flow of information to BBC journalists and thus their ensuing representations of the terror threat. As will be discussed below, though no doubt a difficult task, it is during events such as these that the Corporation needs to prevent itself from being ‘hijacked’ by terrorist and state actors,⁵² because it is over the course of such incidents that the broadcaster most serves their interests.

KEY FINDINGS—THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSION

Alongside the political and strategic interests at play within the BBC's representations, the final overarching aim of the analysis has been to consider the broader social and cultural consequences that can be said to arise from these depictions. As emphasised in Chapter 5, the goal here is not to claim that there has been a direct, causal relationship between the broadcaster's representations of al-Qaeda and particular interpretations and counterterrorism policies, however, but rather to reflect on the way mediated representations, and the wider truth regimes in which they are legitimised, help to construct the boundaries of political possibility, thus creating a knowledgeable basis for social, cultural and political actions. In this regard, one of the most powerful, and indeed lasting, consequences to arise from the BBC's reporting has been the discursive construction of the al-Qaeda phenomenon itself. Here, in line with Foucault's conception of discourse as a practice that systematically forms the object of which it speaks,⁵³ the mere act of *representing* 'al-Qaeda' can be seen to reify and bring into being a particular conception of who and what 'it' is. This is not to say that the terror threat is not real, but, more crucially, to show how when the BBC's correspondents and commentators refer to 'al-Qaeda' they are alluding not to a real thing but to an *ideal*, one that, moreover, has been formed within a highly specific discursive context. Thus, to paraphrase Said, the BBC's representations and statements about al-Qaeda refer to that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas about al-Qaeda, as opposed to its mere being.⁵⁴

More significantly, however, the process, of *discursively* producing al-Qaeda, can be understood to give rise to a dangerous, and continual, self-fulfilling prophesy, whereby the BBC seeks to inform its audiences by reporting on events that they believe involve 'al-Qaeda'. Yet, in doing so, this then serves to construct a particular notion of what al-Qaeda actually is, something that leads those who either form part of this movement or want to emulate its actions to then claim responsibility for certain acts of terrorism because it provides them with a tacit, and much desired, level of legitimacy. This is a notion that Omar Saghi alludes to when he suggests that, '[a]l-Qaeda is the first political machine devoid of any depth beyond its tautological legitimacy of representation'.⁵⁵ Notably, this process then enables political elites to use these tenuous claims of responsibility as further evidence of the pervasive threat posed by al-Qaeda, thus allowing them to legitimise policies that would not be accepted under

other circumstances. Although clearly unintentional on the side of the BBC, this recursive process has the power to undermine the positive role that public service media serve during times of crisis, and enable the tone and content of its coverage to be dictated by both terrorist groups and those fighting them.

Aside from the broader construction and constitution of the al-Qaeda threat, however, the fact that the BBC's representations have been so changeable during this period also ensures that their 'effects' have been equally uncertain and unstable. As noted below, one of the major limitations of the book is the fact that it can only speculate on the extent of such effects and outcomes. Thus, the presence of simplistic categories of representation such as the 'Islamic' and 'Personalised' modes of representation create the conditions for a particularly limited understanding of al-Qaeda and the threat it poses. In particular, the 'Islamic' mode, seen in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th 2001 attacks, the July 5th 2005 bombings, and the May 2nd 2011 capture and killing of bin Laden, albeit temporarily, foregrounds the religious nature of al-Qaeda and its terrorism. Though it is impossible to measure the level of influence that the Corporation had over its audiences, the distinct hardening of public attitudes towards Islam and Muslims in Britain after these events would have, at least in part, been shaped by such forms of representation. Likewise, the myopic focus by counterterrorism practitioners on the links between mosques, religious schools and Muslim communities following incidents such as the London attacks, even when all evidence points in other directions, would have certainly been strengthened via the frequent visual and verbal associations made between Islam and terrorism within the BBC's coverage of this event. It is, of course, not the BBC's fault that many of these events took place, or, moreover, that they happened to involve Muslims, but the often careless evoking of Orientalist-inspired stereotypes (for example, the frequent use of training sequences from al-Qaeda propaganda videos or the stereotypical image of the bearded, finger-wagging terrorist) does much to undermine its, often honest, attempts to maintain the distinction between al-Qaeda's actions and the beliefs and practices of Muslim citizens in America, Britain and beyond.

In regard to the 'Elusive' mode of representation. While this category can be said to result in greater levels of fear and uncertainty in the aftermath of a terror attack, given the way such portrayals appear to transcend the fragile boundaries separating 'Self' from 'Other', 'familiar'

from ‘foreign’, this mode of representation at least has the potential to enable a broader, more representative understanding of al-Qaeda to take shape. Indeed, the range of social and cultural discourses employed to stabilise meaning and make-sense of ‘al-Qaeda’ in these cases does provide greater insight into the kinds of people who seek to act in its name and the various political causes that inspire its terror, thus better informing citizens about the threats they face. In fact, the presence of such representations serve to support much of the existing scholarship into the biographical and sociological factors driving al-Qaeda-related terrorism.⁵⁶

While it is difficult to assess the extent to which audiences might accept, negotiate or challenge these more nuanced portrayals, their presence within the BBC’s reporting can be understood to render possible, or indeed legitimise, a set of counterterrorism policies that focus more on the social, economic and historical imperatives underpinning al-Qaeda’s terror. And yet, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, it is clear that there is an implicit reluctance to want to show the ‘reality’ of the terror threat to audiences, due to assumptions about the impact such portrayals might have on Britain’s fragile social fabric. In some respects, this is a state of affairs Hoskins and O’Loughlin recognise when they point out that ‘[t]elevision, and television news in particular, is thus condemned by the thresholds... that curtail the extent to which it can fully expose the worlds it connects and represents’.⁵⁷ The fact that most of the perpetrators of al-Qaeda’s terrorism do not conform to the stereotype of the bearded, ‘Islamic’ fanatic described by Said et al. is a dangerous and unsettling notion to comprehend at a societal and cultural level, let alone in the confines of a short item for a ‘News at Ten’ broadcast. This is not to say that that it cannot be done within the BBC’s news output, but rather, as a number of its journalists point out below, the nuance and complexities required often counteract with other forces that exist both within and beyond the Corporation.

REFLECTING ON THE BBC’S PERFORMANCE DURING THE ‘WAR ON TERROR’

With these overarching themes and findings in mind then, what do the book’s overall conclusions say about the BBC’s performance during the ‘war on terror’? As noted in the Introduction, as the nation’s leading public service provider, the BBC faces a number of complex, overlapping

challenges when it comes to reporting on terrorism-related phenomena. In the first instance, its representations formulate a key starting-out point for public debates surrounding terrorism and counterterrorism policy, providing citizens with important information about the nature of terror threats, the people who comprise such threats, the context and causes in which they act, and the various ways in which the government are expected to respond. The fact that it has to do this, however, not only by steering an informed middle-ground between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ representations and definitions, but also in ways that do not alienate substantial portions of its core audience ensures that the BBC faces a near-impossible task when it comes to representing the al-Qaeda phenomenon. Add to this is the fact that, throughout the period under analysis, academics, policy-makers, terrorism experts, and even terrorism suspects themselves have not been able to agree as to what ‘al-Qaeda’ actually is means that the challenges facing the broadcaster are even more demanding. As Security Correspondent Gordon Corera recalls,

I don’t think anyone would confidently say for sure they knew what ‘al-Qaeda’ was because it was so fluid... and your knowledge was always based on limited evidence. And it wasn’t as if there was one settled view on what ‘it’ was, because different academic experts were arguing about what it was and what it looked like, and how organised it was, how coherent it was, and add to that the fact that it was changing over time and in different incidents’.⁵⁸

Adding to the ontological and epistemological uncertainty surrounding the terror threat, however, is the broader challenge of being able to convey accurate and reliable information to audiences when reporting on random, unexpected and fast-moving events. As Mark Easton explains,

whenever you are covering a major breaking story you want get the information out there as quickly as you can, but there is an equal responsibility to do that as *accurately* as you can. Often stories are moving and changing so much in those crazy first few hours after an event that you have to be really, really careful that you get it right... And I think that we are really quite careful to make sure that any claims that are made are accredited to whoever is making them, rather than us assuming that they are necessarily correct. Trying to ascertain the motivations of someone who carried out a terrorist attack is very, very dangerous territory, and you have to be really careful not to assume those underlying motivations.⁵⁹

Thus, one of the major challenges for the BBC is to resist the temptation of projecting into the vacuum speculative claims about the identity of the perpetrators and the possible aims, grievances and causal factors underpinning a terrorist event. As we have seen, the BBC is not always successful in this regard, but the need to ‘get it right’, as Easton puts it, is especially important for a broadcaster whose very identity is forged around the core editorial values of ‘truth, accuracy, accountability, public interest and independence’.⁶⁰

And, yet, as Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen points out, despite the levels of uncertainty, it is essential that the institutions such as the BBC provide *some* context to terrorist events, so that audiences have a clear understanding of why groups like al-Qaeda seek to carry out such acts of violence. In his words,

[i]n all things in reporting, and in particular this area, you need to explain and you’ve got to talk about the context for why various kinds of belief emerge. So, in regard to al-Qaeda, I think it’s important to try and explain to the audience how maybe once it was like an organisation but then it developed into an ideology, and I also think you need to explain, as well, why the ideology is so attractive to some people, and you then need to explain what makes them tick. It’s not about saying these are evil men who want to kill us all. You *have* to give the context (emphasis in original).⁶¹

Admittedly, as Easton’s above comments make clear, when events occur very quickly journalists and editors might not have very much time to gather the relevant information before they have to report, and that severely impacts on the amount of space the BBC has to convey the complexities of an issue. Bowen continues,

[i]t is quite difficult to do that in the time allocated, because you’re not writing an academic treatise... The thing about being in the mainstream media is that a lot of people watch what we do, listen to what we do and read what we do, that’s the upside. The downside is that you don’t always get the space that you need. I have found over the years that it is possible, not really in 2 minutes, but if you have 4 minutes, and these days the pieces I do for “the Ten” tend to be around 4 minutes, you can get a lot in. But you have to work really hard as a journalist to get the material to make your explanations. And the longer you have to do that the better.⁶²

On a related level, several journalists also highlighted the danger of overwhelming audiences, or ‘burdening the casual or general viewer’, with

too much information about the various factors surrounding a terrorist event.⁶³ Veteran Middle East correspondent Jim Muir, for example, suggested that as the ‘war on terror’ developed he did not feel it was always necessary to squeeze detailed contextual or historical information into a dispatch every time an ‘al-Qaeda’-related incident took place. In fact, as the conflict against al-Qaeda and its affiliates developed, Muir suggested that most audiences could be understood to have a general grasp of who and what al-Qaeda is to justify spending more time on other, often more important, aspects of an event. As he explains, ‘these days, brand recognition of groups like al-Qaeda is now so high that you don’t really need to explain it to audiences because they already know who and what it is and what it wants’.⁶⁴

For others, however, one of the main factors impacting upon the BBC’s coverage of al-Qaeda and the ‘war on terror’ more broadly concerns the very medium of television, and in particular the spatial constraints in which the genre of television news operates. As Peter Taylor points out,

[t]he problem is the nature of news and news journalism: *It is essentially reactive*. It is doing a piece primarily because something has happened, and because of the limited nature of the news bulletin, there’s not a lot of room for analysis for why it happened in the context of a half hour news bulletin (emphasis added).⁶⁵

Indeed, Taylor’s comments also shed light on the professional values underpinning the construction of television news, where the focus is often on ‘the facts’ and, perhaps most significantly, telling the audience a ‘good story’. He continued,

I did an interview with a jihadi imprisoned in Germany who was highly articulate and was adept at explaining why he did what he did. And he went out of his way to say he was not ‘al-Qaeda’. But the first question you’re asked when you are talking to the news people or colleagues is whether he is ‘al-Qaeda’.⁶⁶

Ultimately then, according to the BBC’s journalists and producers, institutional discourses about news ‘value’ or ‘worth’, as well as broader assumptions about audience interest and engagement, will always be prioritised when it comes to news coverage of phenomena such as al-Qaeda. This comes at a price for citizens’ understandings of terrorism, but it is

an issue that is not restricted to the BBC. The fact that it is the most popular and trusted source simply means that it receives the most scrutiny.

Nevertheless, while the specific detail might not always be evident in a short news item, given the range of programmes produced by the BBC, many of those interviewed pointed to the fact that, in addition to items for the ‘News at Ten’, they had produced content for BBC radio, its website, its satellite channel BBC World, as well as longer pieces for the Corporation’s flagship documentary series *Panorama*. For example, Corera noted that while ‘you can’t always fit all the detail into a short TV piece for the “News at Ten”, you would make sure that the detail is there for people who want more, so for example for those using the website or for viewers watching documentaries’.⁶⁷ As current Director of Editorial Policy David Jordan put it,

I doubt that over the BBC’s output as a whole you wouldn’t find explanation for what groups like al-Qaeda want. And I think the same would be true of Islamic State and other groups of that nature. There is certainly BBC output in which their views are explored and why they’re doing what they’re doing is explained in detail, as well as the effects of what they’re doing is being reported.⁶⁸

In this regard, looking beyond its main news bulletins, the sheer size and scale of the BBC’s broadcasting output provides it with the time, resources and space to cover a diverse range of perspectives and angles related to al-Qaeda’s violence. As Muir explains,

I’ve never felt any push or shove in any direction, really. In fact, on the whole issue of this stuff [al-Qaeda, war on terror, etc] I’ve never felt any pressure from the BBC to put things one way or the other; they’ve never corrected or tried to influence me in any direction. For example, after 9/11 I wrote a very strong piece for BBC online called ‘Explaining Arab Anger’, and the Beeb ran it completely unchanged... and I’ve recently done an 11,000-word piece on Islamic State for the website, where there was very little editorial guidance beyond making them as explicable as possible for our audience.⁶⁹

And yet, while it may be the case that information about the aims, grievances, and root causes behind an al-Qaeda-related event is available *somewhere* across the BBC’s programming content, there is a danger

in relegating such perspectives to the peripheries of its vast news and current affairs output. Indeed, given its status as Britain's most trusted and viewed news bulletin, one that, moreover, has the time and space to cover a wide range of stories, including in-depth coverage of international affairs and events in the UK's nations and regions,⁷⁰ it is not wrong to expect that space for such perspectives can be included within its coverage. This a point the BBC itself acknowledges in its own institutional literature, suggesting that

[a]n open-minded search for completeness does not entail equal space for every shade of argument of attitude. But it should involve *some* space, provided that the points of view are rationally and honestly held, and all of them are subject to equal scrutiny. Sometimes they may be disagreeable or distasteful to the programme-maker, but that should not be evident in the output.⁷¹

The fact that many of the broadcasts analysed for this book were explicitly extended to facilitate a more detailed, critical and engaging reporting-style, moreover, should further stand to support the claim that it is possible to cover the complexities of a particular event within a single bulletin.

In this respect, the coverage of the July 7th 2005 bombings is particularly noteworthy, as it shows us that there are occasions when the BBC does manage to navigate the various challenges it faces relatively successfully. While we should again emphasise that there is no systematic effort to analyse al-Qaeda's various written or spoken pronouncements during this particular event, the fact that a number of BBC journalists do at least attempt to discuss some of the root causes behind these attacks is significant, especially in light of the countless studies criticising the BBC for being biased towards 'official' perspectives. In particular, Gardner's direct quoting of an al-Qaeda statement in the immediate aftermath of this attack⁷² and Easton's reporting of the impact British and American foreign policy on sections of the U.K.'s Muslim population are clearly noteworthy aspects of the coverage.⁷³ That the broadcaster positions these more critical elements of the narrative next to the government's 'official' account is a reflection of the broader discourse and professional ideology of 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' that underpins the BBC's identity. Further to this, the fact that some of the reports during this event are not afraid to humanise the perpetrators, and thus remind audiences

that the attacks were carried out by individuals with their own complex stories and grievances, as opposed to abstract or stereotypical terrorist ‘Others’, provides further support to such claims. It is during these moments when the BBC most fulfils its role as Britain’s leading public service broadcaster; providing audiences with ‘independent, impartial and honest’ news.⁷⁴

As Easton pointed out in Chapter 5,

I think that undoubtedly 7/7 was an important moment for Britain understanding the ‘home-grown’ nature of the threat. And it made us, that is journalists, academics and politicians and others, think much harder about how we could create a society where people were prepared to act in that way. People who were born in the UK, were educated here, and had previously been, you know, normal and non-violent... And I also think that it is absolutely right after such an appalling series of attacks that we reflect really hard on what this tells us about our society and the things that helped create that situation, and indeed what we could and should do to try and prevent this happening again... The motivation from our point of view was to try and understand a confused and contradictory and difficult situation, not to over simplify, but equally not to dismiss as too complicated to go into. We absolutely had to understand the environment in which those attacks happened.⁷⁵

To acknowledge the BBC’s success when covering this particular event, however, is not to overlook the areas where it needs to improve. But in reflecting on the BBC’s overall performance, one of the main tasks for scholars, activists, citizens and active audience members is to highlight those moments when the Corporation has ‘got it right’. In fact, if the BBC seeks to remain *primus inter pares* in the British news media environment it is necessary for this institution to maintain the quality of its reporting and critically reflect on those aspects of its coverage that distinguish it from other, more commercial, broadcasters. This task is even more important at a time when the BBC is facing unprecedented threats to its status as Britain’s leading public service broadcaster. Despite consistently being singled out as the most important information source for voters during major political events and crises, the broadcaster faces frequent attacks from both left and right-wing politicians, a partisan and increasingly bitter press, and a host of new digital media blogs and websites, such as Media Lens, The Canary, Newswatch and Biased BBC.¹ While in some respects criticism of the Corporation is nothing new, in

an era when notions of ‘truth’ and ‘factuality’ are increasingly called into question by both political elites and citizens themselves it remains vital that we seek to protect a set of institutions that at least attempt to safeguard such very ideals. Indeed, while it is clear that the BBC does not always adhere to the lofty standards laid down in its own institutional literature, it is an organisation that has a strong capacity to learn and reflect on its journalistic practices, and one thing that does distinguish this broadcaster from others is the fact that ‘*we* can ask it to try harder’ (emphasis added).¹

In this regard, the comments by Bowen are particularly fitting in regard to the importance of maintaining journalistic and editorial vigilance at the BBC, and thus provide us with an optimistic end to the discussion of the broadcaster’s overall performance during the ‘war on terror’ period. As he asserts,

I think there is an ongoing attempt at the BBC to want to educate people in terms of what’s going on around the world, and I think that what it takes is a lot of editorial vigilance, that editors and senior editors need to be able to say that ‘look, the tone isn’t quite right’ or ‘the nuance is wrong’. And as well as that, not to fall into easy stereotypes. Sometimes as well, to be aware of the frames that governments use and you have to be critical of that. And when governments and militaries use these umbrella terms, like ‘the war on terrorism’, you’ve got to be quite careful to try to look at the bigger context and deconstruct it if necessary. This of course takes time and effort, but I know it is possible and can be done.⁷⁶

LIMITATIONS OF THE BOOK AND FUTURE RESEARCH

With these overarching themes and findings in mind, it is important to end the book by highlighting some of the methodological limitations presented by this study so as to highlight future areas for research into news media portrayals of terrorism, and the media-state-terrorism relationship more widely.

In the first instance, despite its depth of analysis, the most obvious limitation of this study is the focus on a single news bulletin. Although Britain’s most watched and trusted news programme, we should be clear that the ‘News at Ten’ has not been the only source of information for British citizens during the ‘war on terror’ period. Indeed, given the observations of Corera and Jordan above, it is clear that the broadcaster has sought to offer a range of perspectives across its output. Thus,

across the period analysed here, the BBC has produced documentaries such as Adam Curtis' *The Power of Nightmares* (2004), Jason Burke's *Channel Terror* (2005) and Peter Taylor's *The New Al-Qaeda: Jihad.com* (2005) and *Generation Jihad* (2010), alongside a host of current affairs programmes, dramas, soap-operas and films dealing with al-Qaeda, the 'war on terror', and the broader consequences of the terror threat for British citizens, both Muslim and non-Muslim. To what extent are the various modes and patterns of representation explored here applicable to other areas of the BBC's output? Schlesinger et al. suggest that there are systematic variations within media representation of terrorism, with fluctuating degrees of openness and closeness,⁷⁷ but with the exception of their *Televising 'Terrorism'*, few studies have sought to consider the BBC's output as a whole beyond the broadcaster's own internal audits of programme content. This is, undoubtedly, a large undertaking, but is one that is needed if we are to better understand the way the al-Qaeda phenomenon, and the terror threat more broadly, has been portrayed by this institution as a whole.

Second, despite the BBC's powerful position within Britain's media landscape, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that there has, in recent years, been a steady proliferation of news information sources, some of which are slowly infringing upon the broadcast media's long-held position of authority. Though mainstream media such as the BBC still remain the dominant information sources during major political events such as terrorist events, particularly for older demographics, amongst younger people social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook appear to be rapidly becoming the main sources through which to find, read and consume news.⁷⁸ These changes in the information landscape pose significant challenges to those conducting research in this area. As Ben O'Loughlin points out, rather than focus on a single medium, scholars must trace 'relations across different media, mainstream and marginal, and across a range of actors taking part in the production and consumption of information about terrorism' in order to paint a more convincing picture of the dynamics of the contemporary media-state-terrorism relationship.⁷⁹

With this in mind, key areas for future research must focus on the representations that take place across a broad range of news information sources, tracing the quilting points and complex interactions that take place between political elites, terrorists and journalists in today's multi-layered global media environment. For instance, how are terrorist

entities such as al-Qaeda portrayed within 24-hour rolling news media coverage by global media outlets such as BBC News, CNNi, RT or Al-Jazeera, where there is space not only for a more sustained level of analysis, but also, at least in normative terms, a more global and international editorial line? Similarly, how do the representations engendered by movements such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State in their own websites, social media platforms and online propaganda outlets manifest themselves within mainstream news bulletins? Notably, while a growing level of research has already been carried out into the role new media platforms serve in facilitating and disseminating al-Qaeda propaganda,⁸⁰ few studies have sought to analyse the representational practices engendered through such online contents and the way in which they reproduce or challenge existing discourses surrounding 'Islamic' terrorism.⁸¹ Each of these areas offer their own theoretical and methodological challenges, but are important projects in their own right.

Third, in making the claims about the 'effects', 'consequences', 'power', 'impact' or 'influence' of the BBC's representations, the analysis makes a number of loose assumptions about audiences and the ideal or normative positions they might be expected to adopt when viewing representations of al-Qaeda. In conducting the research for this book, there was not enough time to conduct a full audience ethnography. Here, existing research into audience perceptions of such issues tells us that rather than engage in a single preferred reading, audiences are indeed *active* subjects, who each 'orient themselves differently depending on their experiences and varying community, class, ethnicity and gender identities'.⁸² With this in mind, a crucial area for further analysis, therefore, would be a detailed ethnographic analysis of audience interpretations of these representations. Nevertheless, while debates continue within media, cultural and political and communications scholarship with regard to where textual meaning lies (is it situated within a specific news broadcast, with an individual audience member, in an interaction between the two, or does it lie within wider cultural frameworks of understanding, for example),⁸³ one thing clear is that BBC 'audiences' are not simply a monolithic grouping of passive viewers, but rather are a complex weave of individuals from different religious, ethnic, class and socio-cultural backgrounds.⁸⁴ As Norman Fairclough has noted, news audiences are not simply discourse subjects, but rather 'social subjects with particular accumulated social experiences and with resources variously oriented to the multiple dimensions of social life'.⁸⁵

Finally, one of the most significant limitations of this book is the historically contingent nature of the cases analysed. At the time of writing, the events of September 11th 2001, the Wood Green ricin plot, the July 7th 2005 bombings and the death of bin Laden occurred, respectively, 16, 14, 12 and 6 years ago. While this is not undermine the analysis developed, here, particularly since so little research has been carried out with regard to the way the al-Qaeda phenomenon has been represented during these events, it is, nonetheless, important to acknowledge some of the incidents that have taken place in the years following these particular case studies. Since the May 2nd 2011 capture and killing of Osama bin Laden, and in particular the events following the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ in the MENA region, there has been a near-constant engagement with the threat posed by ‘Islamic’ terrorism. Though not on a scale seen in places such as Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or Pakistan, terror attacks in Boston (2013), Paris (2015), or the more recent outbreaks of terrorist violence claimed by the Islamic State movement in Brussels (2016), Istanbul (2016), Nice (2016), Moscow (2016), Berlin (2016), London (2017) or Manchester (2017) have ensured that the spectre of ‘Islamic’ terrorism has retained its central place within Western media and political narratives of threat and insecurity for the near future. In what way are the patterns of representation identified here reproduced within media coverage, ‘old’ or ‘new’, of these events? To what extent do representations of Islamic State draw upon, challenge or renew those of al-Qaeda?

These are important areas of research, and in looking back at the way al-Qaeda has been represented across the ‘war on terror’ period it is hoped that this book will provide an opportunity to better understand the mediation and discursive construction of the current terror threat. Indeed, despite falling out of fashion in security and policymaking circles, it is important to keep in mind that the ‘war on terror’ is still an ongoing project. And as we move into the next phase of this long war, it remains crucial that we question the extent to which its underlying discourses, power relations and representational practices continue to shape the way journalists report on events around the world.

NOTES

1. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* and *Covering Islam*, for example.
2. Paul Beaver, ‘News at Ten’ (September 11th 2001).
3. Peter Sissons, ‘News at Ten’ (September 12th 2001).

4. John Pienar, 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005).
5. Unnamed Witness, 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005).
6. Huw Edwards, 'News at Ten' (May 6th 2011).
7. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 3rd 2011).
8. Myra Macdonald, 'Osama the Elusive One'.
9. Hania Nashef, 'Blurring the Boundaries'.
10. See Samuel P. Winch, 'Constructing an "Evil Genius"', pp. 288–289.
11. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, 'Remediating Jihad for Western News Audiences', p. 212.
12. Department of Culture, Media and Sport, *Broadcasting: An Agreement between Her Majesty's Secretary for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation*. Available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/agreement.pdf (Accessed October 12th 2017).
13. See in particular John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005).
14. See Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News*; Dina Ibrahim, 'Framing Islam on Network News Following the September 11th Attacks', *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (2010), pp. 111–125; Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam*; and Elizabeth Poole & John E. Richardson (eds.), *Muslims and the News Media*, for several key studies.
15. Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam*, p. 247.
16. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001); Gavin Hewitt, 'News at Ten' (September 24th 2001), emphasis added.
17. Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003), emphasis added.
18. George Alagiah, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011), emphasis added.
19. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 18th 2001).
20. Gordon Corera, 'News at Ten' (July 15th 2005).
21. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
22. Michael Stohl, 'Old Myths, New Realities and the Enduring Realities of Terrorism', p. 7.
23. See Samuel P. Winch, 'Constructing an "Evil Genius"'. See also Ron T. Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy*, p. 3; and Stuart Croft & Cerwyn Moore, 'The Evolution of Threat Narratives in the Age of Terror', p. 825.
24. Brigitte L. Nacos, *Mass-Mediated Terrorism*, p. 162.
25. See Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 17th 2001), for example.
26. See Paul Wood, 'News at Ten' (May 2nd 2011).
27. See Rainer Hülse & Alexander Spencer, 'The Metaphor of Terror', p. 581–582.
28. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 15th 2001).

29. Stephen Sackur, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
30. George W. Bush, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001).
31. See Ben Brown, 'News at Ten' (January 7th 2003).
32. Michael Buerk, 'News at Ten' (January 8th 2003).
33. See Margaret Gilmore, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005); Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 8th 2005); and Daniel Boettcher, 'News at Ten' (July 10th 2005), for example.
34. Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005).
35. Unnamed Witness 2, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005), emphasis added.
36. See Christina Hellmich & Andreas Behnke, *Knowing Al-Qaeda*; Richard Jackson, 'Bin Laden's Ghost and the Epistemological Crises of Counterterrorism', for example.
37. See Rainer Hülse & Alexander Spencer, 'The Metaphor of Terror'. See also Alexander Spencer, *The Tabloid Terrorist* and 'Metaphorizing Terrorism'.
38. See Mark Featherstone et al., 'Discourses of the War on Terror'.
39. See Mark Andrejevic, 'Theory Review: Power, Knowledge and Governance', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2008), p. 611.
40. See Abdel Bari Atwan, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001); Andrew Marr, 'News at Ten' (September 12th 2001); John Simpson, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001); and Matt Frei, 'News at Ten' (September 14th 2001), for example.
41. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
42. See Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terror*, for example. See also Pippa Norris et al., *Framing Terrorism*; Zizi Papacharissi & Maria de Fatima Oliveria, 'News Frames Terrorism'; and Stephen D. Reece & Seth C. Lewis, 'Framing the War on Terror', for examples of how the discourse of the 'war on terror' has become internalised within U.K. and U.S. news coverage.
43. See Regina Lawrence, *The Politics of Force*; Steven Livingston & W. Lance Bennett, 'Gatekeeping, Indexing and Live-Event News'; and Piers Robinson et al., *Pockets of Resistance*, for example.
44. See Tom Mills, *The BBC*, for example.
45. Akil N. Awan et al., *Radicalisation and Media*, p. 88.
46. Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict*, p. 30.
47. Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism'*, p. 56.
48. Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict*, p. 4.
49. Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News*, p. 167.
50. See David L. Paletz et al., *Media and Terrorism*, p. 19; Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism'*, p. 38; and Simon Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict*, pp. 144–152, for example.
51. See Valerie Belair-Gagnon, *Social Media at BBC News*, pp. 68–72.

52. See Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, p. 98.
53. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 49.
54. See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 5.
55. Omar Saghii, 'Osama bin Laden, the Iconic Orator', in Gilles Kepel & Jean-Pierre Milelli (eds.), *Al-Qaeda in Its Own Words*, p. 36.
56. See Mark Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, for an excellent overview.
57. Andrew Hoskins & Ben O'Loughlin, *Television and Terror*, p. 189.
58. Telephone interview with Gordon Corera (August 30th 2016).
59. Telephone interview with Mark Easton (November 30th 2017).
60. BBC Trust, 'The BBC's Editorial Values'. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/bbc-editorial-values/editorial-values> (Accessed June 5th 2017).
61. Telephone interview with Jeremy Bowen (August 16th 2016).
62. Ibid.
63. Telephone interview with Jim Muir (July 5th 2016).
64. Telephone interview with Jim Muir (July 5th 2016).
65. Skype interview with Peter Taylor (August 23rd 2016).
66. Ibid.
67. Telephone interview with Gordon Corera (August 30th 2016).
68. Telephone interview with David Jordan (August 12th 2016).
69. Telephone interview with Jim Muir (July 5th 2016).
70. BBC Trust, 'Public Purposes: Sustaining Citizenship and Civil Society'. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/corporate2/insidethebbc/whoware/publicpurposes/citizenship.html> (Accessed June 5th 2017).
71. BBC Trust, 'From Seesaw to Wagon Wheel', p. 38.
72. Frank Gardner, 'News at Ten' (July 7th 2005).
73. See Mark Easton, 'News at Ten' (July 12th 2005); 'News at Ten' (July 13th 2005); and 'News at Ten' (July 14th 2005), for examples.
74. BBC Online, 'Mission and Values'.
75. Telephone interview with Mark Easton (November 30th 2017).
76. Telephone interview with Jeremy Bowen (August 16th 2016).
77. Philip Schlesinger et al., *Televising 'Terrorism'*, p. 35.
78. Nic Newman et al., *Reuters Digital News Report 2016* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of News, 2016), p. 8. Available at: <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/research/files/Digital%2520News%2520Report%25202016.pdf> (Accessed December 7th 2017).
79. Ben O'Loughlin, 'Media Coverage of Terrorism', in Richard Jackson (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 278.
80. See Jarrett Brachmann, 'Hi-Tech Terror: Al-Qaeda's Use of New Technology', *World Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2006), pp. 149–164; Akil

- Awan et al., *Radicalisation and Media*; Philip Seib & Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media: The Post-Al Qaeda Generation* (London: Routledge, 2011); Gabriel Weimann, *New Terrorism and New Media* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Centre, 2014). Available at: <http://tsas.ca/wp-content/uploads/224069893-New-Terrorism-and-New-Media.pdf> (Accessed December 7th 2017); and Jytte Klausen, 'Tweeting the *Jihad*: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2015), pp. 1–22, for notable examples.
81. See Peter Wignell et al., 'Under the Shade of AK47s: A Multimodal Approach to Violent Extremist Recruitment Strategies for Foreign Fighters', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2017), pp. 429–452, for a recent example.
 82. Ammar al-Ghabban, 'Global Viewing in East London', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2007), p. 312.
 83. See Christopher Flood et al., *Islam, Security and Television News*, p. 265. See also Virginia Nightingale, *Studying Audiences: The Shock of the Real* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 35.
 84. See Ammar al-Ghabban, 'Global Viewing in East London', pp. 311–326, for an example of how black, Asian and mixed-ethnicity youth engage in different readings of the same news text.
 85. Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 136.

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