Environmental Conflicts and Legal Disputes Across Media Discourse

Edited by Oriana Palusci and Jan Engberg

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Popularizing Environmental Disputes

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In the 'Mist' of an Amplification Spiral.
The Case of the 'Great Smog of London'

Abstract: The following paper aims to investigate how the Great Smog of London was slowly constructed in the British press as a deviation phenomenon by analysing a corpus of news stories published in the week from 5 to 12 December 1952. Drawing upon the appraisal systems of attitude and engagement, this investigation examines how the British press shaped a deviancy amplification spiral, which led to the passing of the 1956 Clean Air Act by the UK Parliament. The Act itself will also be analysed to see how the power of the institution is linguistically expressed in legal terms when trying to assert control over environmental matters. In order to do this, a CDA-inspired environmental law analysis will be applied to the study of the Clean Air Act, so as to see how the legal language interacts with societal elites and laypeople, revealing essential tensions in the relationship between nature and society and lay bare the discursive power struggles that underlie environmental politics.

Keywords: *media discourse, legal discourse, critical discourse analysis, interdiscursivity, environmental law, moral panic*

> and as he handed me into a fly, … I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.
> 'Oh dear no, miss,' he said. 'This is a London particular.'
> I had never heard of such a thing.
> 'A fog, miss,' said the young gentleman.
> 'O indeed!' said I.
> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*

1. Introduction

As Mertz argues, law can be seen as "the locus of a powerful act of linguistic appropriation, where the translation of everyday categories into legal language effects powerful changes".[1] In this sense, legal language plays a seminal role, on the one hand, in disciplining and controlling human behaviours, and, on the other, in solving conflicts and disputes. Indeed, as Gellers maintains, law can be regarded as "a

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[1] Elizabeth Mertz, "Legal Language: Pragmatics, Poetics, and Social Power", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23.1 (1994), 441.

means of exerting power and control".[2] Consequently, legal discourse represents the solidification and response to specific social dynamics that are impossible to foresee, and are designed to preserve social order. In this way, law can be regarded as: (1) a source of language in society, and (2) a means for the expression of power.

As a linguistic source, law translates and regulates the everyday social experiences of human kind into a stylised, professionalised and internally coherent form of discourse expressing a system of authority in society.[3] Therefore, "as the rhetoric of a particular group or class, and as a specific exercise of power and of power over meaning … legal language, like any other language usage, is a social practice and … its texts will necessarily bear the imprint of such practice or organisational background".[4] However, it is also necessary to underline the universal and contingent features of the language of law. Indeed, while law and legal discourse are always ensconced within and respond to a certain historical context that, in a given way, dictates the interpretations and subsequent speculations provided at a given moment in time, "it is constantly necessary to remember the compositional, stylistic and semantic mechanisms which allow legal discourse to deny its historical and social genesis".[5] Hence, while responding to and regulating given aspects of society in a specific time and place, law and legal discourse need to abstract from the contemporary junctures of certain events through a stylised form of communication that enforces social order through dominance.[6]

This observation brings us to the second aspect of law, deemed as a locus for the exercise of power. Indeed, according to critical legal theorists, law and its expression through legal discourse is representative of those social institutions through which "the experience and reality of human subordination and domination" are (re)produced.[7] In this sense, law can be seen as an ideological apparatus. Hunt, in discussing critical legal theory, talks about a 'legal ideology', which provides the means through which "the persistence of relations founded on inequality and subordination are explored" in legal discourse.[8] The thesis behind this interpretation of law is that law and legal discourse can be fruitfully analysed and explored as the expression of a precise ideology contributing to the reproduction of subordination. As such, law needs to be legitimated on the grounding assumption that

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[2] Joshua C. Gellers, "Greening Critical Discourse Analysis: Applications to the Study of Environmental Law", *Critical Discourse Studies*, 12.4 (2015), 482–493.

[3] Peter Goodrich, *Legal Discourse: Studies in Linguistics, Rhetoric and Legal Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

[4] Ibid., 2.

[5] Ibid., 204.

[6] See Antonio Fruttaldo, "Climate-induced Migration and International Law: Assessing the Discursive Legal Construction of Climate Refugees", in Katherine E. Russo and Ruth Wodak, eds., *The Representation of 'Exceptional Migrants' in Media Discourse: The Case of Climate-induced Migration*, *Anglistica AION*, 21.2 (2017).

[7] Alan Hunt, "The Theory of Critical Legal Studies", *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 6.1 (1986), 43; Alan Hunt, "The Critique of Law: What Is 'Critical' about Critical Legal Theory?", *Journal of Law and Society*, 14.1 (1987), 5–19.

[8] Ibid., 11.

"legal ideology is effective in constructing the perception and consciousness of the dominated in contemporary capitalist societies".[9] Domination is, thus, enforced through subordination, which is legitimated in the places where legal discourse is (re)produced (e.g. courts and law offices), becoming a dominant/dominating form of discourse in the wider society. Therefore, Klare maintains that:

> Legal discourse shapes our beliefs about the experiences and capacities of the human species, our conceptions of justice, freedom and fulfillment, and our visions of the future. It informs our beliefs about how people learn about and treat themselves and others, how we come to hold values, and how we might construct the institutions through which we govern ourselves. In these respects legal discourse resembles all other forms of systematized symbolic interaction. The peculiarity of legal discourse is that it tends to constrain the political imagination and to induce belief that our evolving social arrangements and institutions are just and rational, or at least inevitable, and therefore legitimate. The *modus operandi* of law as legitimating ideology is to make the historically contingent appear necessary.[10]

As a legitimated form of discourse, law comes to govern nearly every aspect of our social and political life. However, as both a reflection and a crystallisation of the dynamic interaction among societal elites, laypeople and specific social issues that need to be regulated, law can reveal key tensions in the relationship between discourse and society.[11] This is particularly true of issues relating to environmental law, where "discursive power struggles underlying environmental politics" can be detected, allowing one to "see environmental politics both as a process that seeks to generate an answer to a real world problem, and as a critical struggle where conflicts between discourses may be exacerbated, sidestepped or resolved".[12]

In this sense, law and legal discourse must not only be seen as a form of and a site for the power struggle that disciplines and restricts social behaviours, but also as "a product of a dominant or hegemonic political culture which directly produces the forms of mentality or social consciousness of the population".[13] Therefore, legal discourse "does not mediate between a dominant ideology and a popular consciousness; it is itself a more or less accurate replication or reflection of that external

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Karl E. Klare, "The Public/Private Distinction in Labor Law", *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 130 (1982), 1358.

[11] Jan Engberg, "Does Routine Formulation Change Meaning? the Impact of Genre on Word Semantics in the Legal Domain", in Lita Lundquist and Robert J. Jarvella, eds., *Language, Text, and Knowledge: Mental Models of Expert Communication* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2000), 31–48; Engberg, "Legal Linguistics as a Mutual Arena for Cooperation: Recent Developments in the Field of Applied Linguistics and Law", *Applications in Applied Linguistics: AILA Review*, 26.1 (2013), 24–41; Eve Darian-Smith, *Laws and Societies in Global Contexts: Contemporary Approaches* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2013).

[12] Maarten Hajer and Wytske Versteeg, "A Decade of Discourse Analysis of Environmental Politics: Achievements, Challenges, Perspectives", *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 7.3 (2005), 181.

[13] Hunt, "Critical Legal Studies", 13.

process".[14] Since environmental law can be seen as fundamentally prescribing/restricting certain human actions – impacting and actively reshaping human behaviours, for instance, in the use of physical landscapes – it can be conceived as "the most readily available means to drag law as a discipline outside its linguistic ivory tower",[15] thus reconstructing that feeble link to everyday human activities that legal language tries to dissimulate.[16]

Given this picture of the nature of law and legal discourse, the following study aims to investigate the connection between legal discourse and society by analysing how the Great Smog of London was slowly constructed in the British press as a deviation phenomenon, thus urging the British government to take action against the moral panic that ensued as a result of the media's representation of the event.[17]

2. The 'Great Smog' of London and the Clear Air Act

In early December 1952, London was engulfed in a thick fog that lasted for five days. The combination of the humid, cold weather with the black smoke emitted from homes and industries created a deadly smog that killed, according to Wilkins, almost 4,000 people during the meteorological/environmental emergency and the following weeks.[18]

In normal weather conditions, the layer of air nearest the ground is warmer and, therefore, less dense than the layers at greater heights. During periods when fog is apt to occur, the relative arrangement of the warm and cool layers is inverted. If moisture condenses from the atmosphere under these conditions, fog droplets are formed around individual airborne particles. Fog, like clouds, is made up of condensed water droplets which are the result of the air being cooled to the point (called the dewpoint) where it can no longer hold all of the water vapour it contains. As Wilkins highlights, London has often been particularly affected by fog.[19] More importantly, in his paper, Wilkins clearly identifies specific years when a correlation can be drawn between thick fog formation and increased mortality. The problem with fog is that, when it affects extremely polluted areas, much of the air-borne

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, "Actors or Spectators? Vulnerability and Critical Environmental Law", *Oñati Socio-Legal Series*, 3.5 (2013), 867.

[16] See Oriana Palusci, ed., *Green Canada* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016).

[18] E.T. Wilkins, "Air Pollution and the London Fog of December, 1952", *Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, 74.1 (1954), 1–21.

[19] Ibid.

pollution discharged at ground level is quickly carried upwards and is dissipated in the upper atmosphere, creating, when it descends, a thick curtain of toxic fog (so-called 'pea-soup' fog). These toxic fogs were so characteristic of the London area that, even in 1849, Herman Melville, in his *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent*, described this peculiarity as follows: "Upon sallying out this morning encountered the old-fashioned pea soup London fog – of a gamboge color. It was lifted, however, from the ground & floated in mid-air. When lower, it is worse".[20] The novelist Charles Dickens also popularised the term 'London ivy' in *Bleak House* (1852-1853) to refer to the specific pollution phenomena affecting London associated with the combination of fog with soot, smoke, dust, and chemical particles emitted by furnaces, factories, and incinerators:

> Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes – gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun…. Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls deified among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon and hanging in the misty clouds.[21]

Therefore, while these phenomena where widely renowned and defined as an actual "particular" of the city,[22] in the winters of 1948 and 1952, these severe toxic fogs were particularly experienced in London, the most likely cause being the exhaust fumes from an increase in motor vehicles in the years immediately after the end of the war. More notably, in his study on *Fog and Mortality*, Logan underlines the fact that the fog of 1948 caused in excess of 300 deaths attributed to pneumonia and bronchitis in older patients:

> The dense fog that enveloped London and much of the country during the closing days of November, 1948, established a record, not for density but for duration. Commencing in London on the night of Friday,

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[20] Herman Melville, *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent*, edited by Eleanor Melville Metcalf (London: Cohen and West, 1948 [1849-1850]), 45-46.

[21] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Reprinted Edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1996 [1852-1853]), 1.

[22] Ibid., 28.

Nov. 26, it persisted until Wednesday, Dec. 1. The disruption of transport that it occasioned received ample comment in the press; but less mention was made of the toll in life that it might be exacting.[23]

However, the unusually dense fog that engulfed practically the whole of the Greater London area from the morning of Friday, 5 December 1952 and continued until the early morning of Tuesday, 9 December 1952 was different and peculiar in its kind: the atmospheric pollution was much more severe, and the concentrations of sulphur dioxide were particularly high. Sulphur dioxide, when it comes into contact with water droplets, becomes sulphurous acid, which is highly irritant to the respiratory and gastrointestinal tracts. Logan, in his paper "Mortality in the London Fog Incident, 1952", highlights the exceptionality of the event in this way:

> The dense four-day fog in Greater London in December, 1952, was responsible for some 4,000 deaths during the two following weeks. The increased mortality affected persons of all ages, but particularly those aged 45 and over. Deaths assigned to bronchitis and pneumonia increased eight times and three times respectively in one week. A considerable increase in numbers of deaths occurred even on the first day of the fog. Four previous London fogs resulting in a sudden increase in deaths have been noted; but the 1952 incident caused by far the largest increase.[24]

In line with the preliminary data provided by Logan, Wilkins also estimates, as previously underlined, that there was an excess of 4,000 deaths during the 1952 fog and the following two weeks, with a further 8,000 deaths occurring over the next ten weeks.[25] These observations were confirmed by the data collected by Bell and Davis, showing the increase of mortality in the week of and the weeks after the event (see Figure 1).[26]

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[23] William P.D. Logan, "Fog and Mortality", *The* Lancet, 253.6541 (1949), 78.

[24] William P. D. Logan, "Mortality in the London Fog Incident, 1952", *The Lancet*, 261.6755 (1953), 338.

[25] Ibid.; Wilkins, "Air Pollution".

[26] Michelle L. Bell and Devra L. Davis, "Reassessment of the Lethal London Fog of 1952: Novel Indicators of Acute and Chronic Consequences of Acute Exposure to Air Pollution", *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 109.3 (2001), 389–394.
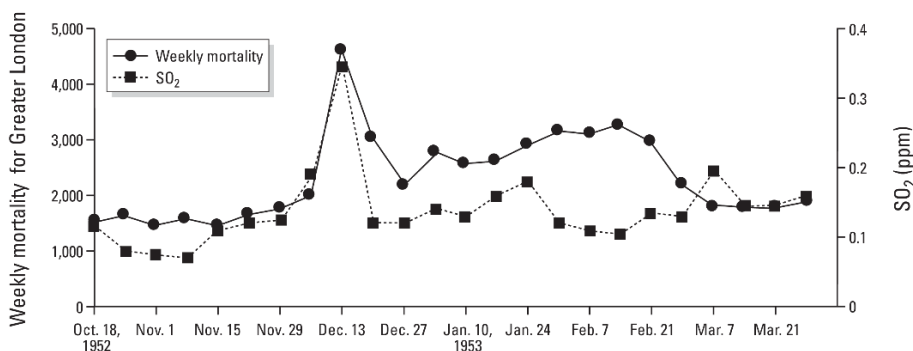
Figure 1. Weekly mortality and SO$_2$ concentrations for Greater London, 1952-1953 (from Bell and Davis, 2001, 391).

Black, who at the time was responsible for admissions to the Hospital for Sick Children (now Great Ormond Street Hospital), London, emphasises the extreme toxicity of the fog, with people experiencing a sulphurous taste in the mouth and an increase in nasal secretion during the fog of December 1952:

> A unique feature of the 1952 fog was the large number of sudden deaths at home during the actual fog, emphasising its extreme toxicity. During the fog many adults experienced a sulphurous taste in the mouth and an increase in nasal secretion, and it is probable that the epithelium of the terminal ileum of infants with intussusception could have been damaged by swallowed saliva and nasopharyngeal secretions containing irritant substances.[27]

In the aftermath of what is referred to as the 'Great Smog of London', British officials approved several regulations that would reduce the emission of black smoke and require industries to switch to cleaner-burning fuels.[28] While it was not the very first episode in contemporary history when air pollution was responsible for a spike in deaths (see, for instance, the case in the Meuse Valley in Belgium in 1930,[29] and in Donora, Pennsylvania in 1948),[30] the Great Smog represents a turning point in environmental law history. As Stoner and Melathopoulos maintain:

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[27] J. Black, "Intussusception and the Great Smog of London, December 1952", *Archives of Disease in* Childhood, 88.12 (2003), 1040.

[28] John F. Garner and R. S. Offord, *The Law on the Pollution of the Air and the Practice of its Prevention* (London: Shaw and Sons, 1957).

[29] J. Firket, "Fog along the Meuse Valley", *Transactions of the Faraday Society*, 32 (1936), 1192–1196; Kaj Roholm, "The Fog Disaster in the Meuse Valley, 1930: A Fluorine Intoxication", *The Journal of Industrial Hygiene and Toxicology*, 19.3 (1937), 126–137; Douglas W. Dockery and C. Arden Pope III, "Acute Respiratory Effects of Particulate Air Pollution", *Annual Review of Public Health*, 15.1 (1994), 107–132; Pope III, "Mortality and Air Pollution: Associations Persist with Continued Advances in Research Methodology", *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 107.8 (1999), 613-614; Pope III, "Air Pollution and Health: Good

> Yet, the incident appeared to signal a growing change within society itself.… [A] broad and growing discontent with air pollution – one that could not simply be explained as the straightforward reaction to the physical concentration of particulate matter in the atmosphere began to surface across most industrialized counties after WWII. It was these discontents that became the grounds for the political compact that came to dominate much of the twentieth century, in which the social need for regulating pollution was translated into national environmental legislation enforced and monitored by state agencies. Significantly, the devastation of the Great London Smog positioned the United Kingdom at the forefront of this trend, and in 1956 the House of Commons enacted the Clean Air Act – making the United Kingdom the first country in the world to pass a national statute for regulating air pollution.[31]

Indeed, due to the 'Clean Air Act' of 1956, a milestone in the development of a legal framework to protect the environment, awareness was raised, opening up the floor to a series of regulations that would address problems relating to pollution in urban contexts.

Before the Clean Air Act of 1956, regulations on air pollution were determined by the Public Health Act (1875), the Public Health (Scotland) Act (1897), and the Public Health (Smoke Abatement) Act (1926). These provisions, however, were extremely fragmentary and, more importantly, by the 1950s, technological developments had rendered them obsolete.[32] The Clean Air Act, therefore, established a series of requirements to fight and reduce air pollution by introducing, for instance, smoke control areas where only smokeless fuels could be burned in furnaces, thus decreasing the amount of smoke pollution and sulphur dioxide from household fires. The Act also included a number of measures to relocate power stations outside city centres, and to increase the height of chimneys so as to prevent their smoke, grit, dust or gases from becoming prejudicial to health.

The Clean Air Act, however, was a response to the media's construction of the events that had taken place in December 1952. Indeed, the media coverage of the Great Smog resulted in a deviancy

News and Bad", *New England Journal of Medicine,* 351.11 (2004), 1132-1133; Benoit Nemery, et al., "The Meuse Valley Fog of 1930: An Air Pollution Disaster", *The Lancet,* 357.9257 (2001), 704–708.

[30] Helmuth H. Schrenk, et al., *Air Pollution in Donora, Pa.: Epidemiology of the Unusual Smog Episode of October 1948. Preliminary Report* (Washington, D.C.: Federal Security Agency, Public Health Service, Bureau of State Services, Division of Industrial Hygiene, 1949); James G. Townsend, "Investigation of the Smog Incident in Donora, Pa., and Vicinity", *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health*, 40.2 (1950), 183–189; Antonio Ciocco and Donovan J. Thompson, "A Follow-Up of Donora Ten Years After: Methodology and Findings", *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health*, 51.2 (1961), 155–164; Lynne P. Snyder, "'The Death-dealing Smog over Donora, Pennsylvania': Industrial Air Pollution, Public Health Policy, and the Politics of Expertise, 1948-1949", *Environmental History Review*, 18.1 (1994), 117–139.

[31] Alexander M. Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos, *Freedom in the Anthropocene: Twentieth-Century Helplessness in the Face of Climate Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 4.

[32] John B. Sanderson, "The National Smoke Abatement Society and the Clean Air Act (1956)", *Political Studies*, 9.3 (1961), 236–253.

amplification spiral,[33] framing the event in such a way that moral panic was an inevitable consequence.[34] Developed by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in the late 1960s, moral panic theory was introduced in order to "account for episodes where the media and society at large fasten on a particular problem and generate an alarmist debate that, in turn, leads to action against the perceived problem".[35] In the words of Cohen:

> Societies appear to be prone, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions.[36]

On the basis of this definition, Cohen puts forward a cultural model to essentially account for moral panics. The model identifies four basic elements in the creation of a moral panic. First, the moral panic must find an object, namely, what the moral panic is about. Second, once a specific event, aspect or group of individuals of a given society has been identified, a moral panic requires a scapegoat (termed by Cohen a 'folk devil'), "an entity which the public can both project its fears onto and blame for a state of affairs".[37] Third, the moral panic may be generated and (re)produced by what Cohen defines as a moral entrepreneur through the media or by the media alone. Finally, the last stage of the moral panic is represented by obsessive, moralistic and alarmist debates prompted once more by moral entrepreneurs.

The way that the Great Smog of London was portrayed in the press indeed represented an example of moral panic since, as Brimblecombe argues, "the media was … prone to exaggerate some aspects of the fog and stressed the impact of the fog on housebreaking and street crime".[38] Such a construction of the event was also influenced, according to Brimblecombe, by the strong relationship between criminal activities and detective fiction, such as *Tiger in the Smoke* by Margery Allingham (1952) or the film

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[33] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics,* Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2002 [1972]). The concept of 'deviancy amplification spiral' was originally introduced by Jock Young, "The Role of the Police as Amplifiers of Deviancy, Negotiators of Reality and Translators of Fantasy: Some Consequences of Our Present System of Drug Control as Seen in Notting Hill", in Cohen, ed., *Images of Deviance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). The concept refers to the media hype phenomenon linked to a cycle of increasing numbers of reports on a set of discursively constructed antisocial behaviours or some other sorts of 'undesirable' event leading to a moral panic.

[34] Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[35] Tony McEnery, *Swearing in English: Bad Language, Purity and Power from 1586 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

[36] Cohen, *Folk Devils*, 1.

[37] McEnery, *Swearing in English*, 5.

[38] Peter Brimblecombe, "The Clean Air Act after 50 Years", *Weather* , 1.11 (2006), 311.

Lady in the Fog (1952), directed by Sam Newfield.[39] The moral panic fuelled by the press also reached other types of media. Indeed, the event and its construal had such an enormous impact on people's collective history that it also found its way in the children's book *A Dog so Small* by Philippa Pearce, where the Great Smog of London is elegantly described as follows:

> but later, another fog began. No one could say where it was coming from, but everyone could taste its tang in the air, and feel the oppression of its descent. The sky seemed to thicken, and at the same time to come lower – so low and heavy, it looked as if it would soon need propping up with poles. And then, at last, one day when all indoor lights were on by three o'clock in the afternoon, the sky fell and lay upon London in a greasy, grey-yellow pea-souper of a London fog.… All landmarks and familiarities melted into fog. Pedestrians fumbling their way home overtook even-slower-moving vehicles; as the fog thickened, they would come up abruptly against cars abandoned half on the pavement. By that time, the buses, having reached the safety of their garages, refused to venture out again. The streets filled with fog and emptied of traffic and people.[40]

In line with the previous observations, the present study sets out to investigate the particular type of conflict between the media construal of the events and the public institutions, compelling the government into a policy of intervention for environmental reasons. Therefore, by reconstructing how the British press constructed the moral panic associated with the event under investigation, the present study aims to focus on the so-called 'power to move governments'[41] that the press possesses in provoking the authority of the institutions to intervene once an out of control situation has been engendered. More specifically, the focus of this paper will be on the relationship established between the way the great Smog of London was portrayed as both an unforeseeable and uncontrollable event and the corrective action or legal response to such a lack of authorities or, more generally, a challenge to the authorities themselves, thus prompting the debate around and the final approval of the Clean Air Act by the British Parliament.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

The present study investigates how the Great Smog of London was slowly constructed in the British press as a deviation phenomenon by analysing a corpus of news stories published in the week from 5 to

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[39] Ibid.; Peter Brimblecombe, "London (1952): An Enduring Legacy", in Brimblecombe, ed., *Air Pollution Episodes* (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2017), 57–72.

[40] Philippa Pearce, *A Dog so Small*, illustrated by Antony Maitland (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1962), 73-74.

[41] Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 2015 [1963]).

12 December 1952. Drawing upon the appraisal systems of attitude and engagement,[42] this paper examines how the British press shaped a deviancy amplification spiral, which led to the passing of the 1956 Clean Air Act by the UK government. The regulation itself will also come under scrutiny to see how the power of the institution is discursively conveyed in fostering an approach of increased awareness to environmental matters.

As for the corpus of news stories, they have been qualitatively analysed by focusing on how evaluation and stance are conveyed. In line with McEnery's work on moral panic,[43] attention has been paid to how processes have been constructed, highlighting their consequences. Therefore, newsworthiness has been taken into consideration and how the news values of Impact and Negativity are discursively expressed in the corpus, given the particular interest in the way moral panic has been slowly constructed and enhanced in news stories (see the notion of 'discourse of chaos').[44]

As previously stated, the analysis of the news stories collected in the corpus has been performed by adopting a qualitative approach, in the sense that each news story has been manually annotated in order to highlight the news values enhanced in/by specific lexical items. News values have traditionally been described in terms of the factors that make a news story newsworthy, that is, as "the factors that take an event into the news".[45] In other words, they are "properties of events or stories or … criteria/principles that are applied by news workers in order to select events or stories as news or to choose the structure and order of reporting".[46] Given the focus of this study on how the press might have prompted the corrective action of the law in the case of the Great Smog of London, among the list of news values described by Bednarek and Caple,[47] particular attention has been paid to the evaluative linguistic resources that discursively construct the news values of Negativity and Impact, since they have both allowed a better understanding of the creation of a moral panic.

Negativity can be seen as a key news value since news stories thrive on it. Bednarek and Caple argue that Negativity is enhanced in news stories "through reference to emotions that are culturally

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[42] James R. Martin, "Beyond Exchange: Appraisal Systems in English", in Susan Hunston and Geoffrey Thompson, eds., *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2000), 142–175; Martin and Peter R. R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Monika Bednarek, *Evaluation in Media Discourse: Analysis of a Newspaper Corpus* (London: Continuum, 2006); Martin and David Rose, *Working with Discourse: Meaning Beyond the Clause*, Second Edition (London: Continuum, 2007); Yumin Chen, "Exploring the Attitudinal Variations in the Chinese English-Language Press on the 2013 Air Pollution Incident", *Discourse and Communication* 8.4 (2014), 331–349.

[43] McEnery, *Swearing in English*.

[44] See Katherine E. Russo, *The Evaluation of Risk in Institutional and Newspaper Discourse* (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2018).

[45] Bednarek and Helen Caple, *News Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 39.

[46] Bednarek and Caple, "Why Do News Values Matter? Towards a New Methodological Framework for Analyzing News Discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and Beyond", *Discourse and Society*, 20.10 (2014), 2.

[47] Bednarek and Caple, *News Discourse*; Bednarek and Caple, *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2017).

considered as negative".[48] The description and analysis of a repertoire of negative lexis, that is, "expressions that describe negative events or news actors, but that do not explicitly inform the audience that the writer disapproves of them",[49] can therefore enlighten us on how Negativity is being enhanced in a specific news story.

As for the news value of Impact, it can be regarded as particularly linked to the fact that "[t]he effects or consequences of an event are aspects of a story that are newsworthy, especially if they involve serious repercussions or have a more global impact".[50] In this way, Impact is generally associated with those linguistic resources that discursively assess the significance of a given happening.

Since, as Erikson argues, "a considerable portion of what we call 'news' is devoted to reports about deviant behaviour and its consequences",[51] focusing on the news values of Negativity and Impact will enable us to reconstruct and draw the shape that moral panic has assumed in the case of news stories on the Great Smog of London.

As for the data under investigation, the news stories were collected by accessing the British Newspaper Archive,[52] an online database developed in partnership by the British Library and the online website *findmypast*, containing UK newspapers from 17th century to the present day. At the time of writing, the British Newspaper Archive has digitised more than 40 million newspaper pages taken from the British Library's vast collection. The digitalised image files were then run through optical character recognition (OCR) software, creating searchable electronic texts. Therefore, thanks to this online resource, all the news stories published by UK newspapers between 5 and 12 December 1952 could be collected by using the search word 'fog'. The term was selected because it was deemed to be the least evaluative word in order to retrieve results that were not skewed by any researcher biases, thus allowing not only an impartial collection of the data but also, and more importantly, a retrieval of the different discourses the word was found in.[53]

The choice of the term 'fog' initially allowed us to retrieve 397 news stories in the period under investigation, however it highlighted a problem with the search term used. Indeed, next to articles actually on the Great Smog of London, others were also retrieved that were not, as a matter of fact,

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[48] Bednarek and Caple, *Discourse of News Values*, 86.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Bednarek and Caple, *News Discourse*, 43.

[51] Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley, 1966), 12.

[52] The British Newspaper Archive is available online at https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/, last accessed 27/12/2018.

[53] As suggested by Corton, there are multiple terms and expressions that are traditionally used to refer to the London fog. As well as the simple words 'fog' or 'smog', the following ones stand out: 'pea-souper', 'London ivy', and 'London particular'. Among them, however, 'fog' seems to be the most general term that does not entail any type of evaluation on behalf of the speaker. Indeed, searches for the use of the term 'smog', for instance, in the British Newspaper Archive might have found only those news stories that draw an actual link between the poor air quality of the city of London and fog formation. As will be seen, however, this is something that the British press does not tend to do. Therefore, the term 'fog' was selected, given its lack of any kind of stance. See Christine L. Corton, *London Fog: The Biography* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard U.P., 2015).

related to the event (e.g. advertisements for 'fog lamps', weather reports, or 'for sale' ads). Therefore, after checking each of the items collated, a final number of 68 news stories were collected from the following newspapers (see Table 1):

Newspaper	No. of news stories
Birmingham Daily Gazette	7
Clitheroe Advertiser and Times	1
The Coventry Evening Telegraph	5
Daily Herald	11
Daily Mirror	3
Dundee Courier and Advertiser	5
Evening Express	2
Grantham Journal	1
The Hampshire Telegraph	1
Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail	3
The Lancaster Guardian	1
Newcastle Evening Chronicle	1
Newcastle Journal	1
The Northern Whig	7
The Portsmouth Evening News	2
The Shields Daily News	5
West London Observer	2
The Yorkshire Evening Post	5
The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury	5

Table 1. Newspapers and number of news stories on the Great Smog of London published between 5 and 12 December 1952.

Unfortunately, the list of news stories collected by following this procedure is not comprehensive, but merely representative of the number of digitalised news stories published by the newspapers available in the British Newspaper Archive. This means that, while still being representative of how the British press reported the event, other types of discursive representations coming from news stories that were not archived on the database will not be analysed.

The news stories collected from the British Newspaper Archive, however, allow us to provide a further observation. Figure 2, indeed, shows the number of news stories published per day on the Great Smog of London:
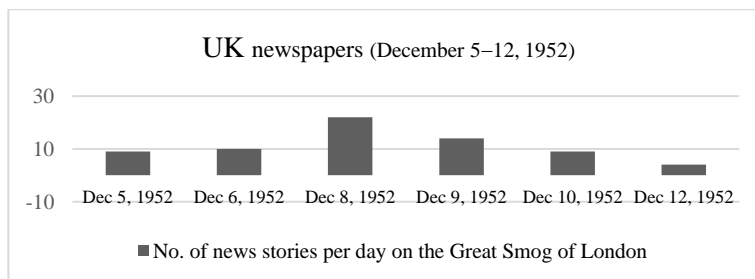

Figure 2. Distribution per day of news stories on the Great Smog of London published between 5 and 12 December 1952.

This allows us to make a preliminary observation regarding the news cycle of the event. Indeed, it appears that Monday, 8 December 1952 represents the peak of the news stories on the topic, highlighting a growing concern with the situation in London.

As a response to the media construal of the Great Smog of London, the following investigation will also focus on the analysis of the Clean Air Act of 1956. In order to do this, a CDA-inspired environmental law analysis will be applied to the study of this legal document.[54] More specifically, attention will be paid to the way power is conveyed in legal discourse. This is extremely important in the case of the Clean Air Act, since it was a direct response to a situation that was construed, as will be seen, as impossible to control by the authorities. Therefore, the Act was specifically designed not only to address problems related to air pollution but also to re-establish the power of the institutions, which might have been challenged by the media's representation of the event. In doing so, that is, by combining an analysis of how the press shaped the event as a moral panic and how the institutions responded to such a representation of the event, the idea is to capture both text and practice so as to see how legal discourse interacts with the historical and cultural specificity of particular ways of knowing the world.[55]

4. Analysis

In the following sections, an analysis will be provided of the main discourses arising from the investigation into the way newsworthiness has been enhanced in reporting the Great Smog of London. As previously argued, a discursive analysis of newsworthiness will allow us to trace the way the press slowly constructed a moral panic in the specific case of the event under investigation. More precisely, two main discursive constructions on the basis of the linguistic analysis of evaluation and newsworthiness can be highlighted. They will be discussed in Section 4.1 and 4.2 respectively. Section 4.3, on the other hand, will briefly focus on the discursive analysis of the Clean Air Act of 1956 in order to see how specific concerns voiced by the media were (possibly) addressed.

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[54] Gellers, "Greening Critical Discourse Analysis".

[55] Liz Sharp and Tim Richardson, "Reflections on Foucauldian Discourse Analysis in Planning and Environmental Policy Research", *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 3.3 (2001), 196.

4.1 The Great Smog of London and its discursive representation in the British press: discourse of routine disruption

In the very first news stories published on the event and collected in the corpus, activity (e.g. 'delay', 'cover', etc.) and behavioural processes (e.g. 'thicken', 'experience') seem to construct the fog as interrupting the normal routines of London services and affairs (transports, sports, etc.):

1) SEVERE FROST, **WIDESPREAD** FOG **DELAY** BUSES, TRAINS
   [*The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 5/12/1952]

2) Trains Late as Fog **Thickens**
   FOG covering **wide areas** of Britain suddenly **thickened** early to-day, and many trains were running late.
   [*The Portsmouth Evening News*, 5/12/1952]

In particular, the newsworthiness is enhanced in these very first news stories on the Great Smog of London by highlighting the news value of Impact (e.g. 'widespread', 'wide areas'), thus underlining how the fog had affected a widespread area of the United Kingdom and, more importantly, means of transport. Therefore, no mention is initially made to the specific case of the city of London, even though the city is mentioned as being particularly affected by this weather event in the body copy of the newspapers:

3) **London**, with a "**pea-souper**," and many parts of the country are to-day **experiencing thick** fog.
   [*The Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 5/12/1952]

4) Fog **Delayed** Carrier
   DELAYED by fog yesterday, the aircraft maintenance carrier Perseus was expected to arrive at Portsmouth to-day.
   [*The Hampshire Telegraph*, 5/12/1952]

5) FOG AND FROST **DELAY** SERVICES
   [*Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, 5/12/1952]

Another important aspect that needs to be highlighted in these very first news stories on the event (see example 5) is the typical linguistic pattern the weather condition that London is experiencing is found in, that is, it is always presented with the phrase 'fog and frost'. This phrase pattern, typically found in

the first news stories, seems to enhance the discursive 'exceptionality' of the event, which is being linguistically linked to weather conditions. This is an interesting aspect of the media construction of the event, since no mention is made of the smog and pollution afflicting the city of London.

Once the fog has been given the discursive power to alter and affect all types of human activities in an increasingly escalating manner, the agency given to the fog is further intensified through material and behavioural processes expressed with verbs such as 'grip', 'thick', and 'circle around'. The fog is additionally constructed by using evaluative expressions representing the fog as being 'severe' and 'widespread', thus further enhancing the news value of Impact and its negative consequences on human activities.

6) Fog **gripped** many parts of Britain to-day – and London had a real "**pea-souper**."
[*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 5/12/1952]

7) Fog '**black-out**' on sport
[*The Portsmouth Evening News*, 6/12/1952]

8) SPORT, TRANSPORT HOLD-UP Fog '**Black-out**' and Frost
[*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 6/12/1952]

9) **Visibility nil** in the **great** London fog
Day and night of traffic **chaos**
After another day of fog **black-out**, described by an A.A. official as being as **bad** as any ever known, all bus and trolley-bus services in the London Transport area, with the exception of three routes, were **withdrawn** at 10 o'clock last night.
[*The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 8/12/1952]

The situation is represented as being so out of control that, by the second day of the Great Smog of London, the news stories reporting the event construct the UK and, more specifically, the city of London as being in a complete state of paralysis (i.e. 'black-out'). This discursive construction, found in the majority of news stories in our corpus, seems to embody the peak of the climatic discursive sequence of a situation that has gone from merely affecting some of the activities carried out by Londoners (e.g. going to the cinema, using public transport, cancelled flights, etc.) to impacting their lives completely, thus creating a situation where no human activities are possible.

10) London again at **standstill**

London's **great** fog curtain, which temporarily lifted yesterday in many districts, **dropped** again last night and once again brought the capital to a **standstill**.
[*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9/12/1952]

11) **Black-out** holds up food today
[*Daily Herald*, 8/12/1952]

In the standstill created by the fog, however, something more menacing is slowly being created in connection with the fog, and this is strictly linked to the sense of paralysis discursively created by the press. Indeed, in the chaos brought by the fog, a black-out of the power of the institutions, conveyed through the exercise of control over citizens thanks to law enforcement personnel, is also being experienced, which brings us to the following and more vicious discursive construction of the events that took place in December 1952, the final link in the chain that gave life to a moral panic. This was also made possible because of the lack of or, at least, the relatively little prominence given to elite individuals (i.e. politicians, law enforcement workers, etc.). Indeed, the news value of Eliteness – i.e. "[t]he event is discursively constructed as of high status or fame (including but not limited to the people, countries, or institutions involved)" –[56] while not being the focus of this investigation, is scarcely enhanced in the corpus of news stories linked to the Great Smog of London. If, therefore, elite individuals are not prominently featured in the corpus, it might suggest a discursive construction where the event seems to be out of control and of the reach of the institutional power, thus leading to the following media representation.

4.2 The Great Smog of London and its discursive representation in the British press: discourse of moral deviation

Once agency has been discursively constructed and the fog is, therefore, linguistically construed as an actor capable of disrupting human activities, it slowly becomes instrumental to carrying out other activities; more specifically, the fog slowly becomes an instrument through which criminal activities are carried out, as can be seen in the following examples:

1) Thugs throw bricks at London policeman
[…] The area was searched, but the men **escaped in the fog**.
[*The Yorkshire Evening Post*, 6/12/1952]

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[56] Bednarek and Caple, *Discourse of News Values*, 55.

2)   Fog **brings a crime-wave**

Reports of burglaries, attacks and robberies **under cover of the fog** continued to be received at Scotland Yard yesterday.

[*The Yorkshire Post and Leeds Mercury*, 8/12/1952]

3)   SMASH, GRAB RAIDERS ACTIVE **IN DENSE FOG**

Smash and grab raiders **took advantage of the fog** last night.

[*The Portsmouth Evening News*, 8/12/1952]

4)   London's worst **black-out**

BANDITS STRIKE IN FOG

Reports of burglaries, attacks and robberies **under cover of the great fog** which is blanketing the South-East of England were received at Scotland Yard yesterday.

[*Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 8/12/1952]

5)   Girl (15) **stabbed in the fog**

A 15-year-old girl was **stabbed** in the back with a stiletto while walking in **thick** fog in Cheshunt (Hertfordshire), last night.

[*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 9/12/1952]

As previously discussed in Section 2, the model proposed by Cohen in the creation of moral panic identifies four basic elements.[57] First, moral panic must find an object, namely, what the moral panic is about. In the specific case of the event under investigation, initially 'fog and frost' and then only 'fog' can be identified as the objects around which the moral panic is slowly constructed. Second, once a specific event has been identified, the moral panic requires a scapegoat. In the case of the Great Smog of London, the scapegoat may be represented by the criminal activities carried out in the dense fog. The moral entrepreneur, through the media or by the media alone, reproduces the state of fear that people have been put into, publishing a series of news stories reporting the types of criminal activities carried out in the fog. The last stage of the moral panic is represented by the obsessive, moralistic and alarmist debates prompted once more by moral entrepreneurs, that is, the press. In this way, the moral panic around the Great Smog of London has been created, thus diverting readers' attention away from the actual problem affecting them, namely, the poor quality of the air in the London area. Indeed, in the corpus under investigation, no mention is made of the critical levels of smog in the city that were the

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[57] Cohen, *Folk Devils*.

probable cause of the many deaths during and after the event. There is only one news story that tangentially draws a connection between the fog's formation and the poor quality of the London air:

6) 'Fog coughs' keep London doctors busy

Doctors' surgeries in the London area filled yesterday with patients suffering from "fog cough". A general practitioner in North London told the "Daily Mirror": "It is having serious effects on elderly people with a tendency to chest troubles. Normally healthy people should not be worried. If you breathe through the nose, as you should, the nose acts as a filter to remove **the particles of soot and dirt from the air**."

[*Daily Mirror*, 8/12/1952]

By conveying a possible cause for the health troubles caused by the fog through an accessed voice, the *Daily Mirror* is thus incidentally drawing a connection between smog and the health troubles affecting, however, only a specific part of the population of London. Time would nevertheless demonstrate that the situation was far worse.

4.3 Re-establishing order in the name of the institutions: the Clean Air Act

In the aftermath of what has been traditionally labelled as the Great Smog of London, many pressure groups took the issue of the problem linked to the air pollution afflicting the London area to Parliament. As Sanderson underlines, "[s]moke abatement is within that class of subjects sometimes designated as 'non-controversial', not because no controversies are involved, but because political parties have no definite policies about it".[58] Therefore, it was up to pressure groups to raise concerns linked to the quality of the air as part of the political agenda of a government. In particular, in the years following the Great Smog of London, no other pressure group was more active in this than the National Smoke Abatement Society (NSAS), which was specifically concerned with the issues highlighted by the Great Smog of London. Indeed, it was partly because of the effect on public opinion of the great smog of 1952 and partly because of the NSAS' activities that the Clean Air Act of 1956 was passed.[59]

Being the first of its kind, the Clean Air Act of 1956 not only represents a reflection of the concerns linked to the poor air quality of that time (and what its potential causes might be) but also an introductory example of environmental legal discourse. Indeed, the Act established national policies requiring all citizens and organisations to give full consideration to the environmental effects in planning their activities and building their edifices. In order to ensure that citizens and organisations

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[58] Sanderson, "National Smoke Abatement Society", 236.

[59] Ibid., for a detailed account of pressure groups' activities surrounding the Clean Air Act of 1956.

implemented the policies introduced, the Clean Air Acts prescribed specific action-forcing mechanisms which needed to be observed. Therefore, from a linguistic point of view, while displaying some of the typical characteristics of the legal genre (i.e. an impersonal style with formulaic expressions and a typical legal vocabulary, syntactic complexity, impersonality, negatives (in particular double negatives), frequent and fixed binomial expressions, etc.), the Act is also positively brimming with expressions that served as a way to respond to the moral panic created by the press.[60] Indeed, if legal language carries with it the force of the law and each statement must thus be seen as an actual act,[61] the abundant use of deontic modality in the Act (see Table 2), while also being a typical characteristic of the genre, also serves a specific function in the social context that has been described: the power of the institutions needed to be re-established as it had been challenged by the media construal of the event.

Central modal verbs	Occurrences
SHALL	231
MAY	88
WOULD	5
WILL	5
COULD	3
CAN	3
OUGHT	2
MIGHT	2
SHOULD	1

Table 2. Number of occurrences of central modals in the Clean Air Act 1956

It is interesting to note that the central modal verb 'must' is completely missing from the Clean Air Act, while 'shall' and 'may' are unsurprisingly the most frequently used modals. This may be indicative of a specifically discursive expression of power: a form of power that not only imposes itself onto its citizens but that also wants to define a new legal glossary in order to fight smog and improve the quality of the urban environment.

> Subject to the provisions of this section, no furnace shall be installed in a building or in any boiler or industrial plant attached to a building or for the time being fixed to or installed on any land unless it is so far as practicable capable of being operated continuously without emitting smoke when burning fuel of a

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[60] See Veda R. Charrow, et al., "Characteristics and Functions in Legal Language", in Richard Kittredge and John Lehrberg, eds., *Sublanguage: Studies of Language in Restricted Semantic Domains* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), 175–190; Brenda Danet, "Language in the Legal Process", *Law and Society Review*, 14 (1980), 445–564; Danet, "Language in Legal and Bureaucratic Settings", in Allen D. Grimshaw, ed., "Language as a Social Problem", *Society*, 20.4 (1983); Danet, "Legal Discourse", in Teun A. Van Dijk, ed., *Handbook of Discourse Analysis, Vol. 1: Disciplines of Discourse* (London: Academic Press, 1985), 273–291; Anna Trosborg, "An Analysis of Legal Speech Acts in English Contract Law: 'It Is Hereby Performed'", *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, 6 (1991), 65–90; Trosborg, "Statutes and Contracts: An Analysis of Legal Speech Acts in the English Language of the Law", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 23.1 (1995), 31–53; Christopher Williams, "Legal English and Plain Language: An Update", *ESP Across Cultures*, 8 (2011), 139–151.

[61] Charrow, Crandall, and Charrow, "Characteristics and Functions", 181.

type for which the furnace was designed, and any person who installs a furnace in contravention of this subsection or on whose instructions a furnace is so installed shall be guilty of an offence (*Clean Air Act* 1956, Section 3).

The absence of the modal verb 'must', therefore, may be due to the fact that this modal verb signals an obligation to do something if the rules that lay that specific type of commitment are deontically accessible. Conversely, as the Clean Air Act is setting the scene for the abatement of environmental issues that, up until then, were not represented in legal terms, the modal verb 'shall' is preferable given its vagueness in simultaneously expressing an obligation and implying futurity, that is, the implementation of the rules established by the Act in order to fight air pollution.

Another important element that needs to be highlighted in the Act is represented by the specific type of institutional power it calls upon. As seen in Section 4.1, elite individuals are not prominently represented in the media's portrayal of the events that took place in December 1952, virtually implying a discursive construction where the event seems to be out of control and of the reach of the institutional power, and thus leading the way towards a media representation of chaos and criminality afflicting, specifically, the city of London. The Clean Air Act, therefore, seems to respond directly to this lack of control by repeatedly calling upon the power of local authorities, which are prominently featured in the Act (there are 74 occurrences of 'local authority' and 10 occurrences of 'local authorities').

[A]nd no oven in any building or on any land shall be used to subject solid fuel to any process involving the application of heat, unless the furnace or oven is provided with plant for arresting grit and dust which has been approved by the local authority or which has been installed in accordance with plans and specifications submitted to and approved by the local authority, and that plant is properly maintained and used, and if a furnace or oven is used in contravention of this subsection the occupier of the building or land shall be guilty of an offence (*Clean Air Act* 1956, Section 6).

Provided that the local authority may, by a subsequent notice in writing served on the occupier of the building or land, revoke any direction given under this subsection, without prejudice, however, to their power to give another direction thereunder (*Clean Air Act* 1956, Section 7).

Such a form of local control over environmental issues seems to be a response to the specific emergency situation following the events that took place in December 1952; a territorial control that would, in a certain way, re-establish order and enforce the power of the institution once more. The Clean Air Act, therefore, places a series of environmental imperatives upon those agencies (i.e. local authorities) which had earlier lacked the authority to consider the environmental effects of given actions and must now impose higher environmental standards. In this way, the Act's strict procedural

duties, which local authorities had to enforce, required that they commit themselves to the possible environmental consequences of their actions, thus laying the ground for a basic change in the pattern of institutional decision-making in the environmental arena.

5. Concluding Remarks

In *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), Charles Dickens describes London in the following way: "I saw all London lying in the distance like a great vapour, with here and there some lights twinkling through it".[62] London's thick, yellow, viscous and persistent fogs came to be an inescapable and constantly recurring feature in his work, a way through which the capital's everyday life in the winter months was captured. The fog might be regarded as a narrative expedient used by the author to portray the city. This atmospheric phenomenon became part of the imaginary of the city itself and, with reference to Dickens's work, many critics saw in it his increasingly pessimistic view of London.[63] As Alter states:

> The city in the industrial age spells the irrevocable end of the pastoral prospect – at least in Dickens's understanding …. The barrier of pollution that insulates the metropolis from nature is dense with the ominous idea that the modern city – in its terrific concentration of population, its runaway production of noxious waste products, its frenetic dedication to the accumulation of wealth – could prove to be, in the worst of possible projections, an irreversible catastrophe for human existence on this globe.[64]

Given this picture of the city of London as being characterised by this kind of phenomenon, this paper has analysed the way in which the Great Smog of London was actually constructed in the British press as a deviancy amplification spiral. The moral panic linked to the event has been discursively reconstructed in order to analyse how a deviancy effect was shaped, which led to the passing of the 1956 Clean Air Act by the UK Parliament. The focus on the news values of Impact and Negativity has allowed us to highlight key elements in the construction of the moral panic, which prompted the response of the institutional authorities in the form of the Clean Air Act. The regulation itself has also been analysed to see how the power of the institution linguistically re-asserted control over a situation that the media had constructed as out of control. In this way, this paper has perhaps shed further light on the tensions between society, discourse and law by identifying issues of power and dominance in the realm of environmental law and illuminating as yet uninvestigated strands of their relationship.

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[62] Dickens, *David Copperfield* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2012 [1849-1850]), 288.

[63] Corton, *London Fog*, 72.

[64] Robert Alter, *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2005), 79.

This paper does not, however, pretend to be a comprehensive analysis of the events that took place in December 1952 and the institutional response towards them. Indeed, it is but a preliminary step towards a discursive mapping of them. Future studies may be devoted to a further analysis of the discursive enhancement of the various news values in the corpus of news stories that has been collected for this investigation.

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