Style Management: Images of Global Counter-Terrorism at the United Nations

Isobel Roele

Accepted: 1 July 2022 / Published online: 31 July 2022
© The Author(s) 2022

Abstract
Models of global governance abound: expert governance, networked governance, algorithmic governance, and old-fashioned juridico-political governance vie for explanatory power. This article takes up style as a way of analysing configurations of governance that do not readily fit a particular model of governance. Style is particularly revealing when it comes to deliberately unspecified or over-specified, genre-busting, and bet-hedging ways of imagining governance. The UN’s use of the phrase ‘convening power’ is a case in point. This article looks at how the UN has styled itself as a convening power in the area of counter-terrorism governance. A visual analysis of promotional materials for the UN’s Counter-Terrorism Week suggests that the UN’s self-styling as a convening power is shaped by anxieties as well as aspirations.

Keywords Style · Counter-terrorism · Visual culture · Global governance · United Nations · International organizations

Introduction

Fleur Johns invites international lawyers to take stock of their critical storehouse. Old modes of critique, she warns, struggle to maintain a purchase on new modes of governing and can even inadvertently valorize dodgy activities and attitudes. The insight resonates with my experience of writing critically about the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), which was established in 2006 as a corrective to the War on Terror (United Nations General Assembly 2006). The strategy, I explained, was created in opposition to the critically excoriated militarized, hegemonic counter-terrorism interventions of the US and its allies. The UN takes a long view of counter-terrorism, emphasizing root causes (developmental inequalities, social unrest, bad governance) and insisting that any counter-terrorism strategy must
respect human rights and the rule of law. To tried and tested modes of critique, the result is a Teflon-coated strategy. Despite the organization’s efforts it perpetuates structural inequalities—especially the racialization integral to counter-terrorism (Roele 2022).

As Johns notices, it is hard to maintain critical purchase on an institution that adapts to take criticism on board. The incorporation of critique can entrench and exacerbate problematic objects—as with the anti-racism critiques that have fed the expansion of counter-terrorism practices and techniques by way of the even baggier concept of violent extremism (Ní Aoláin 2020, paras 12–15). More generally, the UN’s readiness to take legal criticisms on board have suggested to many commentators that the GCTS is undergoing a process of legalization. Of course, not all scholars—especially critically minded ones—intend a compliment when they make such a diagnosis.

The limitation of this kind of critique, and here I pick up a keyword in From Planning to Prototypes, is that it has no eye for the style of global governance. My study of the UN’s GCTS and its critical reception turned on the misrecognition of managerial governance as juridico-political government. Although I didn’t then think of the analysis in these terms, I was concerned with different styles of governance which, far from being categorically separated as paradigms or models, often rhyme with one another. This evanescence makes style, which in Johns’ piece is deliberately ‘difficult to grasp’ (Johns 2019, p. 840), an appealing analytic.

In this contribution, I return to the UN’s counter-terrorism strategy—this time with the intention of road-testing style as a mode of analysis. Style, it turns out, helps frame an inquiry that brings new research questions and fresh angles of investigation into view. In particular, style suggests a way of approaching a phrase that I’d earlier found intriguing but difficult to grasp analytically. Across the UN system, entities have been referring to the organization’s ‘convening power’ since at least the mid-1990s. The phrase is deployed as though it were a term of art, but it is not explicated or otherwise discussed in policy, strategy, or operational documents, and is often subject to variation, as in ‘convening authority’ and ‘convening platform’. These terms are hard to peg to a particular governance paradigm. We might equally read them as a nod to juridico-political governance in the form of multilateral interstate conventions; or as a catalyst to networked governance; or as suggesting a congregation of believers. To my eye, the term looks like an aspirational self-description, a mantra to affirm the UN’s continued relevance in the teeming, dynamic world of global governance.

Johns’ concept of style offers a way of analysing what ‘convening power’ means to the UN, without over-stating its determinacy or formal status within the institution or within scholarly discourses about global governance. Style can be particularly useful in international legal scholarship, which sometimes rushes to see proto- and quasi- legal forms in phenomena that bear scant resemblance to characteristic juridical institutions like legislation and adjudication. Discourses of legalization have a legitimating effect, of course, on the image of ‘soft’ governance initiatives like the GCTS. Over time, as I discuss in my prior study, the habit of seeing law in unlikely places starts to change the unspecific, pre-reflective juridico-political ideals that underwrite international legal discourse.
This contribution builds on Johns’ account of style, rather than deploying it as a template. In particular it emphasizes the importance of the visual in analyses of style. Drawing a distinction between self-styling and branding, I suggest that the concept foregrounds affective questions of ambivalence, aspiration, and anxiety. The figure of convening power manifests the UN’s anxieties about its unique selling point (USP) in a crowded field of better funded, technically savvier global governors; it is also an ambitious vision of the UN’s preeminence within this field—a platform for coordinating other global governors and pooling their efforts.

There are three parts. The first revisits the discussion of style in *From Planning to Prototypes*; the second introduces the idea of the ‘convening platform’ and its manifestation in the GCTS flagship event, Counter-Terrorism Week; and the third conducts a visual analysis of the posters produced for CT Week.

**By the Looks of Things**

This contribution picks up on style as one of the principal analytical contributions of *From Planning to Prototypes*. It takes the term as an invitation to investigate an aspect of the visual culture of the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy—the visual styling of a new flagship event, Counter-Terrorism Week—in order to get at how the organization sees itself. Before we come to that analysis, I first elaborate on Johns’ style analytics, establishing a connection to visual culture which is absent in *From Planning*. In doing so, I want to emphasize visual self-presentation as an integral part of stylistic analysis. The point is already implicit in Johns’ ethnographic account in *From Planning*, which paints the reader a vivid picture of two strikingly different institutions.

The word style flickers across the landscape of international legal scholarship. It is most intense in work of and about theories of international law and does different work for different writers. David Kennedy (1988), for instance, identified styles of inquiry that corresponded with different periods in international legal writing. Andrea Bianchi (2016) commented on the impersonal, restrained style of expression often found in traditional international legal scholarship. The use that resonates most with me is made by Justin Desautels-Stein, who employs style to free up the analysis of an object of study from ‘literal correspondence’ to the materials, and to conceive of the object as something deliberately and imaginatively constituted in a particular way (2014, p. 145).

Perhaps the best-known discussion of style is Martti Koskenniemi’s intervention in a disciplinary methods debate at the turn of the Millennium. Like Kennedy and Bianchi, he uses style to distinguish types of international legal scholarship, famously taking to task the editors of a symposium on legal method for treating writing styles ‘like brands of detergent’ (Koskenniemi 1999, p. 352). Instead, he explains that styles are ‘cultural conventions’ that aid communication. Writers navigate diverse international legal contexts by adopting an idiolect appropriate to the setting or audience. Here, ‘[l]egal styles are styles of argument, of linguistic expression’ (Koskenniemi 1999, p. 360). Style is distinct from branding in that it is more
than superficial ornament. At the same time, it shares the concern of branding to have immediate appeal and to compel those who encounter its fashioned objects.

Style is sometimes contrasted, as in Koskenniemi’s contribution, with method. Gerry Simpson, for different reasons, and without quite committing himself to the term, thinks about style as ‘a way of understanding international law and politics as matters of taste or aesthetics’, as opposed to a technical, dry, and disinterested method (2021, p. 133). In this usage, style connotes something that cannot be pinned down analytically without doing violence to the object of analysis. It suggests a subjective ‘I know it when I see it’ element that frustrates the impulse to generalize into types and categories. The opposition between style and method in these works provokes worries (and defiance) about scholarly rigour. The anxiety seems to shadow Johns’ deployment of style in *From Planning*, where keen-eyed, compelling observations of the differing aesthetics of her two sites of governance are preceded by a theoretically dense disquisition on style *in abstracto*, which is hard not to read as a price paid for observational flair.

Johns puts ‘style’ to different and less solipsistic work than Koskenniemi, Simpson, and the other theorists mentioned above. She deploys the term to distinguish objects of study rather than scholarly approaches, moving style from a linguistic to a socio-cultural register.

*From Planning* contrasts the ‘lean start-up’ style of Pulse Lab Jakarta with the ‘top-down governance’ of BAPPENAS, the state development planning agency of Indonesia. In a section called ‘A Tale of Two Offices’ readers are immersed in a sensory world of experience and perception, where Pulse Lab radiates ‘cool, glass-walled confidence’ in contrast to the ‘musty ceiling tiles’ and ‘marketplace atmosphere’ of BAPPENAS. Readers travel from the thick, clammy, crowded BAPPENAS offices to emerge, with relief, into the airconditioned, light, and crisply appointed space of Pulse Lab.

Johns’ discussion of style does not take place in ‘A Tale of Two Offices’. Instead, ‘On Style’, a preliminary section, plots out theoretical ground. It starts with Nietzsche’s idea that styles have to do with political stakes, albeit of ‘a very particular, non-instrumental sort’ (Johns 2019, p. 838). The understanding resonates with the other disciplinary uses of ‘style’ sketched above. Style is hard to grasp here—deliberately so. Johns wants to slip between the political project of identifying responsible agents and the structural concern for relationality and post-subjectivism (Johns 2019, pp. 838–839). I want to draw out a different aspect of this fugitive quality in the analytic of style. To do so, I take a turn towards the pictorial, while recognising that the analysis of images cannot be separated from that of language (Mitchell 1994). Style, in my argument, denotes a concern with ‘the looks of things’, suggesting both the colloquial expression for a glancing appraisal and a more formal exchange between viewer and viewed in the world of appearances.

Reconnecting style and the visual is a way of returning to James C. Scott’s concern with how states (and other governing entities) see. Rather than thinking of style as a classification externally imposed on governing entities by scholars, I want to revisit Scott’s questions of what and how these entities see. Johns’ use of style is slightly different to Scott’s. She encourages us to ask how governing entities *seem* and to notice the connections between their distinctive appearances and the world.
they perceive and construct through their practices of governing—how states see, as well as what they see (Johns 2019, p. 841). In Seeing Like a State, these different questions about how a state seems to be and how a state sees are reconciled in the proposition that we can get a handle on what a state is by looking at how it sees. This contribution draws a different connection between how governing entities seem and how they see by paying attention to how they see themselves, as expressed through the styles they project outwards.

My analysis of styles of governance, then, is a study in self-fashioning. As a practice, styling is more aspirational and impressionistic than programmatic or essentialist. It may be the kind of practice that organizations engage in when prêt-à-porter models of governance touted by experts (academics, we well as consultants) do not fit the bill. Networked governance, for instance, does not quite fit the UN’s bill, as we shall see. I turn to style to ask questions about what the UN aspires to be in terms of how it aspires to seem.

International lawyers have not rushed to make a pictorial or visual turn. But there is a well-established literature in other fields of legal study. Not all legal scholars embrace the visual. Mulcahy suggests that the visual has been squeezed out of the scholarly frame because ‘over time law’s authority has become inextricably bound up with the text to the exclusion of the image’ (2017, p. 117). International legal scholars, as Hohmann and Joyce (2018) argue, also tend to privilege text over other kinds of scholarly objects. As Mulcahy suggests, images are sometimes written off because they are taken as obvious; a picture is meant to say a thousand words (Mulcahy 2017, p. 118). We also write images off because they are treacherous; they are not what they seem. The twin qualities of immediacy and deception mean images are readily legible both in Benjaminian terms as an aestheticization of politics and as mere branding. The appropriate critical response in either case is a hermeneutic of suspicion (Roele 2018).

Styling has a lot in common with branding (Schwobel-Patel 2021). Indeed, the visual artefacts analysed in the third part of this contribution, ‘Styling Counter-Terrorism Week’, are advertising materials for a flagship UN event. The concept of convening power, which this contribution approaches by way of visual analysis, is a kind of sales-pitch or business case for the UN organization. If the UN can successfully present itself as a convening platform; if it can show that convening platforms are indispensable to effective global problem-solving; and if it can appear to

---

1 Notable exceptions include Miles, Kate. Forthcoming. Visual International Law: Image, Symbol, Art and Architecture. CUP; Vadi, Valentina. 2018. Power, Law and Images: International Law and Material Culture. Syracuse Journal of International Law 44 (1): 215–248; Stolk, Sofia and Renske Vos. 2020. International legal sightseeing LJIL 33 (1): 1–11; Rajkovic, Nikolas. 2018. The Visual Conquest of International Law: Brute Boundaries, the Map, and the Legacy of Cartogenesis. LJIL 31 (2): 267–288.

2 There is a huge and diverse literature that spans the arts, including film and architecture, culture and society, and philosophy and theory. See e.g. Sherwin, Richard. 2021. Visualizing Law in the Age of the Digital Baroque. Routledge; Sherwin, Richard. Visual Jurisprudence. 2012. New York Law School Law Review 57: 11–39; Manderson, Desmond. ed. 2018. Law and the Visual. University of Toronto Press; Mulcahy, Linda. 2017. Eyes of the Law: A Visual Turn in Socio-Legal Studies? Journal of Law and Society. 44 (1): 111–128.
be better than alternative solutions, then it can demonstrate its relevance, which is to say its added value, which is to say its fundability.

Styling goes beyond branding because it is an exercise in self-fashioning as well as self-presentation. In management and organization circles, styling is also a matter of developing an imaginary, which reflects and directs ‘a way of thinking and a way of seeing’, as Gareth Morgan put it in his bestselling executive self-help manual, *Images of Organization* (1997a, p. 4, emphasis in the original). The book is meant to school executives in ‘the art of metaphor’ so they can ‘find fresh ways of seeing, understanding, and shaping the situations that [they] want to organize and manage’ (Morgan 1997a, p. 6, emphasis added).

Morgan extended this approach in a second work, *Imaginization: New Mindsets for Seeing, Organizing and Managing*, to include the visual, making a case for ‘picture power’ in generating a ‘strategy for change’ (1997b, p. 233). Managerial discourse is action-oriented and the kind of action favoured by managers is improvement—whether in incremental forms of professional development and performance enhancement, or in root-and-branch transformation projects. Organizational improvement is a matter of reforming the elements (people, offices, units, programmes, projects) that make up an organization and this work of re-forming is as much about affect as brute fact.

Morgan showed how images, especially metaphors, pervade organizational thinking: organizations are machines, brains, organisms, and prisons, for instance. Each metaphor opens out a rich image-world that managers can use to make sense of and reshape their organizations. For instance, when organizations are imagined to be machines, those who work in them become engineers, mechanics, and operatives. Such organizations run smoothly or break down, especially when someone throws a spanner in the works.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe this as the ‘systematicity’ of metaphors. Metaphors come with ‘entailments’ and ‘reverberations’, which are generally pre-reflective. When we say ‘time is money’, for example, we imply that time is a limited resource and therefore valuable (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 457). Visual imagery encourages even less reflection because of the speed with which we tend to absorb images. Richard Sherwin explains that the ‘associative logic’ of visual communication means that ‘what we see on the screen, we unconsciously associate to memories, thoughts, and feelings’ (2012, p. 15).

Metaphor is a way of picturing something. For Morgan getting a hold on metaphors is a way for leaders to exercise control over their organization by conditioning how they and others see it. Here, self-reflection is an instrument ‘for mobilizing organizational change’ (Morgan 1997b, p. 234). Picturing, in other words, is a technique of governance. This is not mere management guff. Lakoff and Johnson explain that sensitivity to metaphor is not only a path to self-understanding; it also structures action. They write, ‘we define our reality in terms of metaphor, and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphor’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, p. 485). Where such action is oriented to self-improvement, as in Morgan’s ‘imaginization’, visual and linguistic images are means of self-fashioning.

Morgan does not suggest that images are simply *prêt-à-porter* executive solutions, styles of governance that can be taken off and put on again as required.
Instead, ‘imaginization’ is a creative process, which I understand here as a process of styling. Each metaphor ‘generates important insights while having major limitations’ (Morgan 1997a, p. 8). Since ‘in creating ways of seeing [particular metaphors] tend to create ways of not seeing’ (Morgan 1997a, p. 348), Morgan advises executives to draw on a wide range of them to ‘extend [their] horizons of insight’ (1997a, p. 351). Styling is a way of imagining oneself, of organizational self-understanding as much as external branding.

Styling brings together ways of seeing and ways of knowing, like the techniques of simplification Scott described in Seeing Like a State. As Johns emphasizes, these influence not just what is seen, but also how it is seen (Johns 2019, p. 841). The how of seeing is affective as well as technical. As Sherwin points out, images—especially those which show up on digital screens, as do the CT Week posters analysed below—‘motivate belief and judgment on the basis of visual delight and unconscious fantasies and desires as well as actualities’ (2012, p. 13). This aspect of imagining is unaccounted for in Morgan’s work. It undermines the idea that ‘imaginization’ can help executives and managers to take control. A viewer’s perception is not under control. Images appeal to us—or not—even in the absence of rational grounds for preferring them, and they mean different things to different viewers.

Vismann (2008) explains that the polysemy of images means that styling is not a reliable way of controlling perception—and this includes self-perception. The idea follows from Lakoff and Johnson’s ideas of entailments and reverberations, many of which may not be foreseen at the time styles are adopted or developed. Imagery is apt to get out of hand and to fall into the wrong hands. Thus, Scott describes how the ‘duplication and regimentation of building forms’, in which Le Corbusier saw clean-lined order and efficiency, looked to Jane Jacobs like so much ‘urban taxidermy’ (1998, p. 133; 139). Image worlds have unseemly undersides and uncanny doubles, which haunt the mind’s eye of the stylist, as well as those towards whom she projects an image.3

Now is not the time to lose myself in the entangled Lacanian gaze, but I want to stress that looks provoke looks. At its most basic, a projected image—an executive vision, say—provokes rather than directs the viewer’s look. A vision of open doors of opportunity, say, summons counter-images of doors slammed shut and of entrants locked in. Such counter-images not only exist in the subversive responses of others; they shadow the executive vision, too. The unwilled aspects of styling—the way images take on a life of their own—engages the organizational unconscious, even (especially) as they emerge from a sense of acute self-consciousness.

As we shall see in the next part, the UN has for several decades been under pressure to refashion itself for a globalized world in which its core constituency of nation states are no longer, if they ever were, alone on the global stage. While embracing civil society and courting ‘global partnerships’ with the private sector have helped

---

3 I use Freud’s essay on the uncanny in the final chapter, ‘Uncanny Law’, of my study of the UN’s counter-terrorism strategy. Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection, which I also draw on, intensifies to the nth degree such moments of misrecognition and misapprehension because it is ourselves we misrecognize. Self-perception is unbiddable, these psychoanalytic perspectives suggest.
the UN respond to the changes wrought by global governance, it remains vulnerable to competitors—especially agile, issue-specific, informal groups of states and other global actors, whose standing costs are considerably less. Attending to the UN’s practices of self-styling in response to these challenges is valuable insofar it tells us about how the UN sees the terrain of global governance and how it imagines it is seen, and could be seen, by its member states and stakeholders. Self-styling practices may be (self)delusive, merely wishful, but they yield revealing insights into the aspirations and anxieties of the UN organization.

**What is Convening Power?**

Executive management operates in terms of problems and solutions. The UN Secretariat, which manages the UN organization, is no exception. It uses strategies and action plans to solve the world’s problems, be they problems of under-development, poor governance, or insecurity. Since it was established after World War Two, the organization has also had to manage constitutional problems stemming from member states’ prioritization of their own interests to the exclusion of the collective interest and the mutual mistrust which plays havoc with cooperative solutions.

In a globalized world, the UN also faces existential problems, which threaten its continued relevance in the twenty-first century. New structures, configurations, and techniques of global governance threaten to edge the UN into the margins of global problem-solving. Worse still, the global financial crisis led an already tight-fisted membership to wonder whether the organization represents value for taxpayer money. The figure of the ‘convening platform’ is a solution to these existential problems. It is a solution, however, without determinate form or programmatic application. This section introduces the concept and its relationship to the UN’s Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS), which aspires to operate as a convening platform for the (dis)array of counter-terrorism initiatives and activities launched by governments, private sector actors, and civil society.

The UN’s ‘convening power’ has been invoked by successive Secretaries-General (SG). In his final report on the work of the organization in 2006, Kofi Annan wrote that the UN must use.

its unique convening power to reach out to diverse constituencies, especially where such actors command great expertise or resources relevant to a particular issue. Facilitating the participation of different stakeholders in relevant debates of global significance can only enhance the quality and depth of policy analysis and implementable outcomes, including in the form of partnerships. (Annan 2006b, para. 207).

A decade later, Ban Ki-moon repeated the phrase in his final report on the work of the organization. During his term in office, he said, he had focused on ‘harnessing the power of partnerships and using the convening power of the United Nations to bring a wide range of actors together in pursuit of responses to pressing global challenges’ (Ki-moon 2016a, para. 16).
His successor has also used the phrase. Launching his landmark report ‘Our Common Agenda’ in 2021, António Guterres emphasized that

While the United Nations alone cannot address the numerous challenges confronting us, especially in a complex and networked world, it is one of the key institutions available for solving the problems that matter most. The United Nations has a universal convening power that gives all 193 Member States an equal voice, increasingly joined by representatives from the private sector, civil society and academia. (Guterres 2021, para. 109)

Nor is the term restricted to the Secretariat. A declaration by UN member states to mark the 75th anniversary of the organization begins by asserting that ‘[t]here is no other global organization with the legitimacy, convening power and normative impact of the United Nations’ (United Nations General Assembly 2020, para. 1).

This small sample of uses makes several themes apparent. Firstly, that convening is about bringing together stakeholders on particular issues. As a problem-solving organization, the UN’s work is issue-specific; no troubling claims to govern the world per se are implied. This brings us to the second point, which is that the kind of governance the UN undertakes is auxiliary. It is meant to augment and facilitate the governance exercised by nation-states who, the organization is careful to acknowledge, enjoy primary responsibility as sovereign actors. A third aspect of convening power, particularly strongly expressed by Annan and Ki-moon, is that it is not limited to bringing nation-states together, but also includes stakeholders from business, civil society, and academia.

Convening power is also imagined in spatial terms. The UN doesn’t just connect actors, it gives them spaces—platforms—to gather. Elaborating on its ‘unique convening power’ in the realm of development, for instance, the UN claims to be ‘uniquely placed to offer the platforms needed for all actors to come together, build trust and mobilize their respective assets to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals’ (Guterres 2017a, para. 130). There is something defensive about these uses of the phrase, which want to assert the organization’s continued relevance in the face of a crowded field of global governance competitors. ‘No other global organization’ can match the UN, its member states admit. In one of his first reports as SG, Annan asserted that the UN’s ‘convening power’ makes it a ‘unique and indispensable forum’ (Annan 1997, para. 9). To give another example, a UN report on security said in 2004 that its convening power was ‘unparalleled’ (United Nations High Level Panel on Threats 2004, para. 57).

Counter-terrorism is one of the issue-areas in which the UN’s convening power is heralded. The UN’s ‘unparalleled convening authority … can be harnessed to build political momentum for stronger international cooperation in specific areas of counter-terrorism’, Ban Ki-moon asserted in 2016 (2016b, para. 39). His successor, Guterres, also ‘made it a priority for the United Nations to leverage this unique convening power’ by ‘bringing Member States, regional organizations and civil society together to facilitate dialogue, cooperation and partnerships on all levels for a united front against terrorism’ (Guterres 2020, para. 63). Multi-stakeholder cooperation and inclusive networks depend on the provision of platforms to broker partnerships, enable dialogue, and share expertise.
The UN has launched several counter-terrorism (CT) platforms in recent years, often taking advantage of digital technologies. The highest profile of these is the digital Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform, launched in March 2021. Its purpose is to in-line states’ implementation assessments with the capacity-building activities of UN entities, and to connect member state ‘focal points’ for counter-terrorism with one another. The UN’s Office for Counter-Terrorism, which owns the GCTS, has also launched a Connect and Learn online platform, which enables states to connect with experts and undertake e-leaning training modules. There are also thematically specific CT platforms, such as the cooperative platform launched by the UN Countering Terrorist Travel Programme, or the victims of terrorism support portal which, unusually, is not password protected.\(^4\)

The UN’s convening platforms are not all digital. The organization sees its main organs—the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Security Council—as convening platforms, too. Conference-convening has been a core activity of UN organization since it was created. Outcome documents are often the focal point and telos of conferences: the gold standard being a legally binding multilateral convention or resolution (Riles 2017). While the UN’s use of ‘convening power’ calls to mind these traditional activities of negotiating legally binding conventions and treaties, in the field of counter-terrorism such conventions are a vexed issue—especially when it comes to the negotiation of a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention, which has been on the General Assembly’s books for years, but which is stalled because member states cannot agree on a definition of terrorism (Saul 2008). So, while convening power sometimes connotes the negotiation of resolutions in the General Assembly or Security Council, these juridico-political activities do not exhaust ‘convening power’.

Instead, ‘convening power’ seems to straddle juridico-political and managerial registers of governance.\(^5\) The Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is not a juridico-political document. It consists of a Strategy and annexed Plan of Action and, although adopted by a political organ, the General Assembly, the GCTS calls into existence a programme of managerial governance by way of strategic planning and performance review, rather than the deliberation and adjudication characteristic of governance in a juridico-political register. These differences mean that the exercise of ‘convening power’ in a managerial register is distinct from its exercise in a juridico-political one. The flagship event in the CT calendar is the UN’s Counter-Terrorism Week, a manifestation of convening power and expression of the UN’s managerial imagination.

One feature of convening power in this mode is that it facilitates knowledge exchange rather than the negotiation of treaties or agreements. We see this in the programme of work set out by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, which features

---

\(^4\) These platforms can be found at the following URLs (last accessed, 16 June 2022): The Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform is at https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/CounterTerrorismCoordinationPlatform; the Connect and Learn platform is at https://unocct-connectandlearn.org; the terrorist travel platform is at https://www.un.org/cittravel/ and the victims platform can be found at https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/en.

\(^5\) For a discussion of the two modes of governance, see Roele (2022, Ch. 5).
conferences as the first prong of its institutional strategy and uses them recursively to design agendas and direct follow-up actions. Thus, the Office plans to ‘convene high-level regional conferences to follow up on the outcomes of the High-level conferences of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States’, and in turn ‘the conclusions from those regional conferences will inform the second United Nations High-level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States’ (United Nations General Assembly, Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee) 2020, para. 3.221). Unlike the high-level ministerial meetings associated with landmark legal conventions, the convening power exercised in these arenas is addressed to counter-terrorism specialists within national governments.

If convening power is a knowledge-exchange medium, the inclusion of non-state actors becomes particularly important. When in 2018 the first High Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States was held, the two-day conference was shadowed by a programme of side-events co-organized by UN entities, member states and, in a couple of cases, NGOs. The event was retrospectively designated the first Counter-Terrorism Week. Covid notwithstanding, the organization pictured the event as a two-yearly CT jamboree, timed to coincide with the biennial reviews of the GCTS by the General Assembly. In the event, a virtual CT Week was held in 2020, on the theme ‘Building institutional and social resilience to terrorism’ and the second official CT Week postponed until late June 2021, on the theme ‘Countering and Preventing Terrorism in the Age of Transformative Technologies: Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade’.

Counter-Terrorism Week 2021 drew together three components: the General Assembly plenary meeting which adopted the seventh biennial review of the GCTS on the final day of CT week (United Nations General Assembly 2021); a three-day High-Level Conference of Heads of Counter-Terrorism Agencies of Member States; and a week-long roster of (mostly online) side-events ‘jointly organized by Member States, international and regional organizations, UN entities, civil society organizations and the private sector’.

In practice, there is a good deal of overlap between the Conference and the side-events. Although some sessions were billed as ‘member states only’, conference speakers were not limited to the usual round of state representatives and UN officials. In one parallel session, for instance, the Human Rights Chief at Facebook shared a platform with the director of the UK office of Human Rights Watch, a government minister from Spain, and representatives from UN Women and UNESCO. Official side-events were generally organized collaboratively between member-states, UN CT agencies, and organizations from civil society and industry. For instance, the CTED collaborated with industry bodies Tech Against Terrorism and Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism in a lunchtime event on ‘Handling Terrorist Content Online: Towards Transparency’. Some side-events were led by NGOs,

---

6 Readers can find the event’s webpages here: https://www.un.org/en/counterterrorism/hlc/index.shtml (last accessed 16 June 2022).
7 The website for CT Week 2021 can be found here: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/2021-counter-terrorism-week (last accessed 16 June 2022).
such as the event organized by the Soufan Centre in partnership with the Airey Neave Trust on White Supremacists, Conspiracy Theories and Violent Extremism. Other side-events were UN-agency led, such as the CTED briefing session on its new electronic assessment and analytics tools.

Side-events and conference sessions shared a panel format. In the Conference sessions, panellists were given usually 5–10 min to speak. In the parallel breakout sessions, audience members were also invited to respond and ask questions (albeit limited to a strict 3-min per intervention). Side-events were of a similar duration of about one and a half hours, but earmarked little time (15 min or so), after the introductory comments and closing remarks, for general discussion. In short, the focus of both events was to convey information, promote collaborative initiatives, and raise awareness, rather than to deliberate, debate, or disagree.

Counter-Terrorism Week is a particular manifestation of what it means to exercise convening power, which cashes in on the UN’s capacity to act as a platform for a diverse group of CT actors across multiple sectors and scales. This sort of convening platform is difficult to grasp with existing analytical categories. As I have intimated already, the GCTS is a work of managerial governance rather than juridico-political order and Counter-Terrorism Week does not fit the mould of multilateral convention-making. At the same time, it is not a purely technocratic exercise in expert rule. Government representatives and voices from civil society are heard alongside academic and industry speakers.

Networked governance is one possible paradigm for making sense of CT Week. Although the UN was initially slow to pick up the language of networking, it now convenes several networks as part of its counter terrorism work, as we have seen. Launching his ‘Common Agenda’ to revitalize the organization, SG Guterres presented a vision of ‘networked, inclusive, and effective multilateralism’ (Guterres 2021, p. 51). This way of seeing the organization lowers expectations of what the UN can achieve, giving responsibility back to other global actors (‘the United Nations alone cannot address the numerous challenges confronting us, especially in a complex and networked world…’).

At the same time, the UN becomes a way of guarding against ‘exclusivity’. Networks can be cliquey and often are seen as instruments of control wielded by powerful actors (Slaughter 2009, 2015). The UN cannot accept these aspects of networked governance. Preempting the centre-periphery dynamics of networked governance (Kennedy 2013), Guterres reasserts some of the founding ideas of the UN—including sovereign equality—in his formulation: ‘the United Nations has a universal convening power that gives all 193 Member States an equal voice, increasingly joined by representatives from the private sector, civil society and academia’. The UN wants to ‘safeguard a space for all voices’ (Guterres 2021, para. 109).

We need to exercise caution, then, in projecting readymade models of governance onto the UN’s self-understanding. This is especially the case when it comes to networked governance because, as Annelise Riles has explained, the network can seem to imply a neater, more well-defined paradigm than the facts can bear. Observing the ordinary workings of a particular site of global governance networking (a derivatives trading floor in Japan during the late 1990s), what she saw was ‘a flurry of activity’ that is ‘not building anything in particular’ (Riles 2008, p. 629).
The exercise of convening power is not simply a catalyst for networking. Nor, as we saw above, is it simply a mechanism for negotiating legal and quasi-legal agreements. Falling between two (and more) stools in this way, the UN’s exercise of convening power in the aid of its counter-terrorism strategy is difficult to grasp. How does the organization imagine the exercise of convening power in this context? The next section uses style to analyse CT Week in an attempt to respond to this question.

Styling Counter-Terrorism Week

This section puts the concept of style to work in an analysis of the UN’s biennial Counter-Terrorism Week, so as to gain a richer understanding of the UN’s sense of itself as a convening power, platform, and authority. I have suggested that this power is neither wholly juridico-political nor wholly managerial. It retains elements of old-school UN practices—by retaining the General Assembly plenary as a central site, for instance. At the same time, it incorporates networking, technical expertise, and modularization: characteristic managerial modes of governance.

I am interested in CT Week as a managerial practice of self-styling. While the question of what style of governance it manifests is germane to my purpose, it is not my sole focus. Instead of following Johns and making ethnographic observations of the events, I home in on an easily over-looked object: graphics produced for Counter-Terrorism Week. Taking them as instances of the executive self-help technique of ‘imaginization’, I make a visual analysis of the graphics as an exercise not only in branding, but in self-styling.

Style suggests a kind of cosmetic self-fashioning that puts structural questions (ones like ‘How do we classify this system of governance?’, ‘What concepts underpin it?’, ‘How is it assembled?’) on the backburner. As the first section suggested, it introduces instead a range of questions about desire and affect—ones that resist pat responses because, as Johns and other international lawyers use the term, style is hard to pin down. A style analysis might, then, shed light on the organization’s anxieties and aspirations in a world brimming with new-fangled forms of global governance. I’m not only asking what it means to be a convening platform, but specifically what it means to the UN.

The banners made for the CT Weeks in 2020 and 2021 depict convening platforms. They seemed to offer richer data than the underdeveloped and unprogrammatic appearances of the term in UN documents and speeches, discussed in the previous section. In part this is due to the retention and elaboration of the same basic design used in the banner for the 2020 iteration (Fig. 1) for the second CT week, and because elements of the design reappear across Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy webpages and in documents produced by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT).

The visual analysis which follows is structured around the three main zones of the banner: the side panels, the centrepiece, and the background and lettering. In its 2021 iteration (Fig. 2), the tripartite organization recalls, though does not quite correlate with, three parts of CT Week: the GA plenary meeting; the high-level conference; and the side-events. The central graphic is a composite, arranging distinct
elements into an ensemble which includes allusions to a traditional state-centric, deliberative mode of governing through resolutions of the UN plenary organ; a high-tech, problem-based governance of functional expertise; and a multi-stakeholder networked governance of states, industry, and civil society. The arrangement of these elements produces an ordered ensemble which, if it falls short of the systemic coherence preferred by doctrinal international lawyers, and if it looks too centrifugal to be a fully decentralized, open-ended network, nevertheless seems to be an exercise in convening power—a gathering together. How does the UN imagin(iz)e idiosyncratic modes of governance as an ensemble? What convening power is produced by, and used in the production of, such an ensemble?

The composite graphic is not the only element pertinent to our visual analysis. In arranging a multitude of disparate elements into a single (if unwieldy) composite, we can see how the UN convenes. The background tells us a lot about the UN’s place in relation to this convened grouping. It is innocuous: business-like navy and
modestly imprinted with the name of the UN entity responsible for CT week, the UNOCT. The organization’s emblem is equally unflashy. Its colour and shape rhyme with other elements in the central graphic.

This visual reticence can be read as representing the UN’s self-identity as a convening platform; so indispensable is it as a convening platform that, like the air we breathe, it is taken for-granted. The unobtrusiveness of the UN is in inverse proportion, in this institutional imaginary, to the organization’s importance. Self-aggrandizement that is nicely captured by the familiar throwaway phrase that meetings are convened and conventions negotiated ‘under the UN’s aegis’, as though sovereign states are shielded by the institution, like heroes of the Iliad under the goddess Athena’s protection.

The eight icons displayed to the left and right of the central circle in the banners for the 2020 and 2021 CT weeks (Figs. 1 and 2) resemble the official humanitarian icons used by the OCHA. The icons for virus, the rule of law, and epidemic are clearly identifiable, if slightly more stylized in the Counter-Terrorism Week posters. The other five icons, depicting a gunsight or radar screen, an aeroplane with what may be a biometric chip, two (para)military figures taking aim, a globe cradled in a hand, and an explosion. The globe-and-hand icon is similar to a UNODC icon for ‘victims of terrorism’ (Fig. 3), except the UNODC replaces the globe with a heart. The UNODC icons also suggest that the aeroplane icon denotes transport-related terrorism, an issue owned by the UNODC since the negotiation of successive counter-hijacking conventions in the 1970s and 80s. The CT week banners add what looks like a machine-readable passport to the aeroplane graphic, suggesting the thematic area of countering terrorist travel, an issue associated with the Security Council’s ‘foreign terrorist fighter’ agenda.

8 The OCHA’s icons can be found on its website: https://brand.unocha.org/d/xEPytAUjC3sH/icons (last accessed 17 June 2022).
In any case the eight icons on the CT Week posters are an exemplary rather than complete roster of the many thematic areas that make up the GCTS. As I show elsewhere, CT governance is characterized by a proliferation of new thematic areas and the endless sub-division of existing ones (Roele 2022). Intra-organizational tensions are a complicating factor when it comes to these discrete thematic areas (Cockayne 2014, 670–671). Although the GCTS is meant to be an ‘all-of-UN’ effort (Roele 2022), fundamental questions remain about whether terrorism is primarily a security issue (making it the ‘property’ of the UN Security Council) or whether it is equally a matter of development and human rights (giving UN entities engaged in economic and social work, like the UNODC, equal ownership of CT). Visual repetitions and half-rhymes in GCTS iconography smooth the surface of this bumpy terrain to produce an impression of visual unity on the issues.

All but two of the CT Week banner’s icons (the scale representing the rule of law and the cradled globe), make counter-terrorism legible as a security issue. We might therefore read the graphics as saying something that the UNOCT could not express linguistically for fear of trespassing on the Security Council’s fiefdom. The poster might be read as an assertion of the UNOCT’s ownership of terrorism as a security issue, rather than its contribution of development and human rights elements to an overall strategy in which the Security Council, by way of its powerful Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, takes charge of the security aspects. This is a daring reimagining of organizational competences: a departure, perhaps, from the orthodox primacy of the Security Council in security matters.

Paying attention to how the thematic icons appear and their relationship to another modularized element of the CT Week banners– the ranks of parallelograms on which the icons sit—is also instructive. The icons, picked out in pale blue like the OCHA icons, are semi-transparent and superimposed on a matrix of semi-transparent parallelograms. The combination of free-floating icons and regular matrix lends an impression of steadied dynamism. A similar balance (or compromise) is struck between the one-point perspective generated by foreshortening in the parallelogram matrix, which suggests centralized and determinate order, and the translucency of the matrix and the icons, which suggests movement and reflexivity (Figs. 1 and 2).

The substantive effect is one of technological advancement. Low colour saturation gives a blur and transparency to the parallelograms, which makes them look like rectangular screens in a rush, as though swiped up and down on a touchscreen device. The technique is used in TV shows to denote the sophisticated mental processing of complex data—as in Steven Moffatt and Mark Gatiss’ Sherlock, which aired during the 2010s, or tech-wizard Tony Stark’s design interface in Marvel’s Ironman and Avengers franchises. The impression of tech-savviness is amplified by the allusion to an older space-age register of technological advancement.

The parallelogram matrix is legible as an array of screens. Surveillance aside, the impression recalls an older Hollywood trope associated with war films as well as movies about space travel: the mission control room. From CTU in the early 2000s TV Show 24, to NASA Mission Control in Apollo 13 (1995, Dir. Ron Howard), banks of monitors and walls of screens signal technical sophistication and attention to every aspect of an operation. It makes us think of the strategy and planning aspects of security, rather than the boots-on-the-ground ones. As I suggested
in my original study, strategic planning is one of the main managerial technologies deployed in the GCTS (Roele 2022). The juxtaposition between this mode of governance and the notoriously under-thought interventions of the early War on Terror is captured in the image of mission control—another register for convening power.

The focal point of both 2020 and 2021 CT Week banners is the central circular badge, which is also the site of the biggest development from 2020 to 2021. In the first iteration, the central circle appears as a three-dimensional sphere (Fig. 1). The sphere is made of a network of nodes and spokes. Compared to two-dimensional networks, the image manifests the UN’s ambivalence about networked governance. On the one hand, it valorizes the hub-and-spoke connectivity of the network; on the other hand it rejects—as we saw in Guterres’ remarks in the previous section—the centre-periphery dynamics of flat networks (as can be seen in the Cable and Wireless map in Fig. 4).

The flat network still dominates network thinking—indeed, the idea of an infinitely extensible, infinitely inclusive network depends upon it. In an essay on the widespread, unreflective use of networking as a metaphor, Martin Coward explains that the classical hub-and-spoke was ‘first seen in concepts of the communicative interconnectedness forged by the telegraph’ (2018, p. 450). He emphasizes the linearity of the network metaphor form and its deterritorialization.

The UN’s spherical network is different. Its globular network suggests a reterritorialization insofar as it recalls the division of the earth into sovereign states. Still, the globe is also a way of redressing any suggestion of exclusiveness, of being a closed-shop: globes ‘lay claim to comprehensiveness’ and can be distinguished from the idea of bridging as in inter- or trans-nationalism (Johns 2005, p. 69). At the same time, the sphere does away with the unequal centre-periphery dynamics of the flat network (Fig. 4). While there is no hierarchy in a sphere, it is worth noticing that the 2020 banner (Fig. 1) implies that the UN enjoys a meta-position in relation to the
network. The organization stands outside the network—and even above it, if we take seriously the position of the UN logo.

We might read the UN’s globular network in another way, too. The UN’s networked globe highlights unity of effort and cooperation, which are central to the organization’s counter-terrorism strategy. The purport of the GCTS is that the world must ‘unite against terrorism’ (Annan 2006a). Globes encompass. They are a way of visualising the ‘all of’ mantra of UN Counter-Terrorism: ‘All of government’, ‘all of society’, ‘all of UN’ (Guterres 2017b, para. 40). In this sense, the convening power manifested by the CT week banner aims to bring together functional and institutional elements into a united effort—not only the nation-state members of the organization.

The 2021 version (Fig. 2) downplays network images. It complicates the centrepiece with additional elements, including a ring of thematic quadrilaterals that renders the central badge more circular than globular. The parallelogram ring echoes the side-panels matrices discussed above. Its integration into the reterritorialized globular network suggests a coming together of the high-level inter-state diplomacy of the General Assembly and the multi-stakeholder side-events by which CT weeks are structured. The graphic’s convening effect, in this respect, lends a sense of unity to the 2021 banner, which is lacking in the more awkwardly composite 2020 graphic (Fig. 1). We should not, however, overstate the diminution of the networking image when it comes to the GCTS as a whole. The 2020 version of the poster has been repurposed and updated for the UNOCT’s Connect and Learn e-learning platform, launched at the 76th General Assembly in September 2021 (Fig. 5). We might read this as an instance of the organization nuancing its understanding of the place of networks, making them a tool the UN uses in some parts of its CT governance work but not others, rather than a central feature of the overall GCTS. It is worth noticing that the globular network in the Connect and Learn graphic rests on the palm of a woman’s hand, suggesting that the UN’s convening power is intended to be enabling rather than controlling. The position of the network on top of the palm repeats the idea, mentioned above,
that the UN occupies a position outside the networks. These connotations come together in the Homeric aegis, invoked at the start of this section.

The UN’s idea of itself as a convening platform is not only about equalising connections. It is also about forging connections across diverse actors and interests in the form of consensus. The handshake, an icon of agreement and statesmanship, is central to the 2021 CT Week banner (Fig. 2). The handshake is emblematic of convening and ‘uniting against terrorism’. The figure appears elsewhere in the UNOCT’s visuals (Fig. 6). The handshake is closely associated with statesmen and diplomacy, and its addition to the 2021 poster might suggest a shift away from network style towards a more juridico-political style of governance, where ‘convening power’ connotes multilateral conventions and diplomacy. It is worth remembering, however, that the handshake is also emblematic of business deals. UN funding arrangements make fund-raising a preoccupation of the GCTS. More generally, the handshake connotes the multistakeholder ‘partnerships’ through which GCTS capacity-building projects are delivered (Roel 2022).

The handshake also speaks of consensus and emphasizes a completed agreement rather than the cut-and-thrust of negotiation. This is characteristic of GCTS discourse. States cannot agree on international terrorism and keeping politics out of the Strategy is a condition of success. As Guterres said, it ‘needs to be depoliticized if [it] is to have the desired impact on the ground’ (Guterres 2018, para. 22). The kind of agreement suggested by the handshake is close to the contemporary understanding of convention as frictionless consensus-building. As David Kennedy astutely observes, the aspiration for consensus is an aspiration for ‘a mature organizational voice finally released from its members’ (Kennedy 1987, p. 972). We might, in this case, think of the UN’s claim to convening power as being a claim to maturity—an ability to rise above self-interested politics.

We turn now to the background of the posters. Although restrained in the use of graphics and visual effects, the background says a lot about the UN’s understanding of itself as a convening power. The background reiterates the UN’s commitment to consensus and the unity of effort required to eliminate international terrorism. Above all, it presents the organization as self-effacing—a safe pair of hands that need not monopolise our attention.

Notice that the background is navy rather than the cyan of UN blue (Pantone 2925). UN Blue is a highlight colour, used to pick out networked nodes, quadrilaterals in the side panels and centrepiece, and for lettering. In this, the posters adopt a colour-scheme evident across the UNOCT webpages (see also Figs. 6 and 7). The deep French navy of Pantone 540 C is also used by other UN system entities but is
not part of the overall UN brand identity. This underscores the message of unity in diversity—this time across the UN system. The branding is recognisably part of the UN, but distinctive in adopting navy as its base colour and picking out highlights in orange, white, and UN Blue.

Along with emblems and icons, colour is one of the ways UN system entities distinguish themselves visually. These visual distinctions have been part of the internal politics of the organization since its earliest years (Biddescombe 2020). For instance, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, mentioned above, adopts a colour palette based on UN Blue, but uses salmon pink and pale grey as accent colours, and allows sparing use of a range of tertiary pastels, too (UNOCHA 2018). For its part, UNICEF has its own cyan blue and boasts a rainbow of jewel-toned colours as a secondary palette (UNICEF 2016). The UNOCT’s graphics style-guide is not readily accessible, but its colour palette is evident from its branded work-products and website. The CT Week posters, it emerges, are typical: cyan blue and French navy dominate, while tangerine and white are used sparingly as accents.

While this distinctive colour palette helps to establish a brand identity for the UNOCT, it also drives a visual wedge between the Office and its rival, the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, which uses a different

---

10 The UN web style guide can be found here: https://www.un.org/styleguide/ (last accessed 17 June 2022).
colour palette (Fig. 7). Compared to the pastels of the OCHA or the rainbow colours of UNICEF, the UNOCT’s colour palette is limited and sombre. The dominant navy suggests boardroom suits and, perhaps, military uniforms, referents that speak to different aspects of CT work. The mood evoked is altogether more solemn than the engaging graphics of the OCHA and UNICEF, but in taking navy blue as the base colour, the UNOCT suggests steadiness rather than the perennial urgency UN Security Council action.

Corporate UN branding is also evident in the use of the san-serif typeface, Roboto, for the text on both 2020 and 2021 banners. Roboto is the UN’s primary typeface according to the brand identity guidance issued by the Department of Global Communication. Text takes a backseat in the CT Week posters. Notice, for instance, that the themes for each CT week (‘Building institutional and social resilience to terrorism’ (2020) and ‘Countering and Preventing Terrorism in the Age of Transformative Technologies: Addressing the Challenges of the New Decade’ (2021)) are not spelled out on the posters.

Abstention from wordiness helps the central theme of counter-terrorism, done in eye-catching white and orange, to sing out. I have already alluded to the central political impasse of the GCTS—the absence of agreement among states on what international terrorism means. The intensity of agreement on the proposition that counter-terrorism is an unalloyed good is, in this light, remarkable. States, stakeholders, and UN staff can unite around the proposition that something must be done, even if they cannot agree on the problem.

The deep navy background is not uniform in tone. Instead, colour graduates radially from a paler central tint to a darker shade at the edges of the poster. The effect generates a sense of both breadth and focus. It reinforces the one-point perspective discussed above, as the eye is drawn to the centrepiece, where the background is lightest. At the same time, shading around the edges generates a peripheral sense of vastness, a way of reiterating the size of the problem facing states and non-state actors.

The two CT Week banners make sparing use white and orange highlights in their lettering and imagery. These bright tones vary the otherwise monochromatic palette of navy and cyan blue. The restrained use of orange does not intrude, especially in the 2020 version of banner, into the overall harmony of blues; it is not a competing colour scheme. We might read this complementary colour scheme as a simultaneous disavowal of homogeneity and affirmation of unity: another visualisation of unity in (eye-catching but limited) diversity and reiteration of consensus at the core of the convening platform.

It is tempting, though it stretches the point, to claim a symbolic meaning for the orange colour. Although orange is not part of the organization’s official branding, it features in UNWomen’s ‘Orange the World’ campaign against Gender-Based Violence, which has run annually since 2015. UNWomen seek to mainstream gender in the work of the organization. In the sphere of counter-terrorism, gender-mainstreaming has had particular traction in the thematic area of preventing and countering violent extremism (Security Council 2015). Institutionally, UNWomen are a GCTS Coordination Compact entity, and the UNOCT is in the process of adopting a Gender Policy and Action Plan and establishing a Gender Unit. It is more
than fortuitous, then, if viewers see gender-mainstreaming in the orange highlights. Style’s resistance to pigeon-holing means that such happy accidents—allusive, non-committal, and capable of being all things to all viewers—is neatly illustrated here.

This part of the article has undertaken a visual analysis of counter-terrorism week graphics in the hope of understanding what the UN means by ‘convening power’. The analysis has unearthed several distinct anxieties and aspirations. The first is that convening power is all about extracting unity from diversity: the UN aspires to generate consensus about counter-terrorism between governments that cannot agree about international terrorism; to coordinate an ‘all-of-UN’ effort among mutually mistrustful and jealous UN system entities; and to bring together national governments with partners and stakeholders in civil society, academia, and industry. Unity is the UN’s USP and a shared project like countering terrorism represents an opportunity for the organization to prove its worth.

A second striking feature brought out by the foregoing visual analysis is that the UN seems to toggle between defensiveness (especially towards networked governance) and hubris (in reserving for itself the role of aegis, which Homer gives to the gods of Olympus). Networked governance poses a threat to formal, inter-governmental organizations like the UN. Networks are cheaper, less rigid, and riper for the kinds of centre-periphery and patronage relations favoured by powerful actors. If the UN is to make the case for its continued value, it must both demonstrate the deficiencies of networks (that they do not respect sovereign equality, for instance) and present itself as a condition of successful networking (because only the UN can bridge the worlds of states, experts, and stakeholders). Here, convening power suggests connectivity rather than unity. This aspect of the UN’s convening power is presented most clearly with the cupped hand of its Connect and Learn graphic (Fig. 5). The organization offers to enable CT activity rather than to direct it. In the same moment as the UN defers to other global governors, it asserts its superiority over them. Convening power is equally modest and universal, qualities associated with the organization since 1945.

**Concluding Thoughts**

*From Planning to Prototypes* urges critical international lawyers to take stock of our go-to techniques, concepts, and motivations because different styles of governance call for different styles of critique. The insight resonated with me. Researching the UN’s counter-terrorism strategy, I had encountered phrases and phenomena that kept slipping my analytical grasp. ‘Convening power’ was one such phrase. I was writing about a strategy to articulate component parts into a collective effort, so the word ‘convening’ vibrated with etymological significance. Maddeningly, the phrase, though repeated often, was never defined, doubted, deconstructed, or otherwise discussed. I felt frustrated for analytical material.

The concept of style, especially in Johns’ hands, seemed to invite a visual analysis. *From Planning* paid illuminating attention to how the two offices in Jakarta look and made me wonder how convening power would appear if I could see it. Here I have taken the flagship event of the counter-terrorism season, the biennial
counter-terrorism week organized by the UN, to be a manifestation of the organization’s convening power.

One way of studying the style of CT week would be ethnographic. Like Johns in Jakarta, I could have travelled (pandemic permitting) to New York or zoomed in to the virtual conference, interviewed delegates, and observed panels, side events, and corridor conflabs. My project was different. I set out to analyze of visual material created for the CT Weeks. My method, and therefore my research questions and the stakes of my analysis, are different from those posed in From Planning. One of the biggest changes, indeed, is to the concept of style.

In Johns’ article, as in many of the other international lawyers’ work discussed in the first part of the article, style is a better alternative to terms like method, mode, and model. Like these terms, style is a way of distinguishing between different ways of doing or being. Unlike the other terms, however, style brings a je ne sais quoi to the work of identification: styles are hard to pin down, shifting, and merging. This quality appeals to me. Forcing one’s object of study into a paradigmatic mould seems apt to do violence to either the material or the paradigm. In any case my sense is that the UN’s institutional landscape is a jangle of paradigms, which drift in and out of favour in this and that part of the organization. It is a hunch about the way the organization thinks (and doesn’t think) about paradigms that has led me to thinking about practices of styling rather than arrays of styles: style as verb not noun.

Getting to grips with the way the UN styles itself as a convening power (and what this might tell us about what drives managerial self-styling) is related to, but distinct from, the question of what style ‘convening power’ represents in the context of CT Week. Like other organizations, international organizations are always in a state of becoming. Much of the organizing work they undertake—and this is especially true in the case of the counter-terrorism strategy—is self-organization. Every newly appointed Secretary-General, CEO, Vice Chancellor comes bearing an agenda for organizational transformation.

Taking these improvement projects as exercises in self-styling pays critical-analytical dividends: style refuses the projects’ paradigm-shift premises; understands that they are apt to go awry—the intentions of the stylist may not carry; and speaks volumes not only about aspirational ideals, but also about anxieties (the executive equivalent of does-my-beergut-look-big-in-this?). The general invitation in From Planning to think again and the specific invitation to think with style are both productively destabilizing and intellectually generative.

Acknowledgements Many thanks to Geoff Gordon, Fleur Johns, and Dimitri van den Meerssche for encouraging and patient comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Springer
References

Annan, Kofi. 1997. Report of the secretary general: Renewing the UN: A programme for reform, UN Doc. A/51/950.

Annan, Kofi. 2006a. Report of the secretary general: Uniting against terrorism UN Doc. A/60/825.

Annan, Kofi. 2006b. Report of the secretary-general on the work of the organization, UN Doc. A/61/1.

Bianchi, Andrea. 2016. *International Law Theories: An Inquiry about Different Ways of Thinking*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Biddescombe, Perry. 2020. Branding the United Nations: The adoption of the UN Insignia and Flag, 1941–1950. *International History Review* 42 (1): 19–41.

Cockayne, James. 2014. Challenges in United Nations counter-terrorism coordination. In *Research handbook on international law and terrorism*, ed. Ben Saul, 666–682. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Coward, Martin. 2018. Against network thinking: A critique of pathological sovereignty. *European Journal of International Relations*. 24 (2): 440–463.

Guterres, António. 2017a. Report of the secretary general: Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet, UN Doc. A/72/684.

Guterres, António. 2017b. Report of the secretary general: Capability of the United Nations system to assist Member States in implementing the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, UN Doc. A/71/858.

Guterres, António. 2018. Report of the secretary-general on the activities of the United Nations system in implementing the global counter-terrorism strategy, UN Doc. A/72/840.

Guterres, António. 2020. Report of the secretary general: Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, UN Doc. A/74/677.

Guterres, António. 2021. Report of the secretary general: Our common agenda, UN Doc. A/75/982.

Hohmann, Jessie, and Dan Joyce, eds. 2018. *International law’s objects*. Oxford: OUP.

Johns, Fleur. 2005. The globe and the ghetto. In *Criticizing global governance*, Markus Lederer and Philipp S. Müller. eds., 69–102. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan.

Johns, Fleur. 2019. From planning to prototypes: New ways of seeing like a state. *Modern Law Review* 82 (5): 833–863.

Kennedy, David. 1987. The move to institutions. *Cardozo Law Review* 8 (5): 841–988.

Kennedy, David. 1988. A newstream of international law scholarship. *Wisconsin International Law Journal* 7 (1): 1–49.

Kennedy, David. 2013. Law and the political economy of the world. *Leiden Journal of International Law* 26 (1): 7–48.

Ki-moon, Ban. 2016a. Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, UN Doc. A/71/1.

Ki-moon, Ban. 2016b. Report of the Secretary General: Activities of the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, UN Doc. A/70/826.

Koskenniemi, Martti. 1999. Letter to the editors of the symposium. *American Journal of International Law* 93 (2): 351–361.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. Conceptual metaphor in everyday language. *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (8): 456–458.

Morgan, Gareth. 1997a. *Images of organization*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Morgan, Gareth. 1997b. *Imaginization: New mindsets for seeing, organizing, and managing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Mulcahy, Linda. 2017. Eyes of the law: A visual turn in socio-legal studies? *Journal of Law and Society* 44 (1): 111–128.

Ní Aoláin, Fionnuala. 2020. Human rights impact of policies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, UN Doc. A/HRC/43/46.

Riles, Annelise. 2008. The anti-network: Private global governance, legal knowledge, and the legitimacy of the state. *American Journal of Comparative Law* 56 (3): 605–630.

Riles, Annelise. 2017. Outputs: The promises and perils of ethnographic engagement after the loss of faith in transnational dialogue. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23 (1): 182–197.

Roele, Isobel. 2018. Policing critique. *Modern Law Review* 81 (4): 701–721.
Roele, Isobel. 2022. *Articulating security: The UN and its infra-law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saul, Ben. 2008. *Defining terrorism in international law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schwobel-Patel, Christine. 2021. *Marketing global justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sherwin, Richard. 2012. *Visual Jurisprudence*. *New York Law School Law Review* 57 (1): 11–39.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Slaughter, Anne-Marie. 2009. *A new world order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Slaughter, Anne-Marie. 2015. *The chessboard and the web: Strategies of connection in a networked world*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI. http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/

United Nations General Assembly. 2006. *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, UN Doc. A/Res/60/288.

United Nations General Assembly. 2020. *Declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the United Nation*, UN Doc. A/Res/75/1.

United Nations General Assembly. 2021. *The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: seventh review*, UN Doc. A/Res/75/291.

United Nations High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. 2004. *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*, UN Doc. A/59/565.

UNICEF. 2016. *Brand Graphics Manuel* (ed. 1.2, 2016). https://www.unicef.org/argentina/sites/unicef.org.argentina/files/2018-04/2.2%20UNICEF%20GRAPhICS%20MANUAL%20LITE%201.2.pdf.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2018. *Graphics Stylebook* (September 2018). https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/01_OCHA_graphics_stylebook_Visual_Idenity.pdf.

United Nations Security Council. 2015. *Resolution 2242 of the Security Council*, UN Doc. S/Res/2242.

UN General Assembly, Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee). 2020. *Proposed programme budget for 2021, Section 3: Political Affairs*, UN Doc. A/75/6.

Vismann, Cornelia. 2008. *Law and image—A troubled relationship*. *Parallax* 14 (4): 1–9.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.