

CHAPTER

6

TERRORISM: DATA AND ETHICS

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

The study of online violent extremism and terrorism is a growing area in academia. Terrorism is studied from various perspectives, including linguistic perspective. Not to mention, every research project poses its unique risks, including those related to terrorism. Specifically in the field of terrorism, the researcher must mitigate security risks and adhere to a set of strict ethical considerations to ensure the safety of both respondents and themselves. At times, the researchers' well-being is compromised due to the nature of the data that they need to analyse. However, discussions about the researcher's well-being remain limited. Researchers who are willing to conduct studies on terrorism should be aware of the risk this field poses and be equipped with the knowledge on how to take care of their well-being while conducting such research. It is also worth mentioning that while researchers can take personal steps to help mitigate the risks of researching online extremism, research institutions have a responsibility to support their staff and students by providing training and access to resources, professional supervision, and specialised mental health support.

This chapter discusses linguistics-based research conducted on media and social media posts related to and by the terrorist group known

as the Islamic State (ISIS). Specifically, this study discusses how ISIS, which is known for its propaganda-disseminating strategies, uses linguistic tools to disseminate ideologies to establish and maintain its presence on online platforms and to recruit female sympathisers to join them. ISIS is known mainly for how it has managed to recruit many followers from all over the world using its propagandistic materials. This dual-pronged study examines how female sympathisers of ISIS are represented through and by media discourses, and significantly also, how female sympathisers of ISIS represent themselves on Twitter, about ISIS. Employing critical discourse analysis (CDA), specifically the discourse historical approach (DHA) (Resigl & Wodak, 2016) analyse the diverse and often contested ways in which the Self versus Other (Wodak, 2009) is constructed in representations of ISIS female sympathisers.

This chapter limits itself to studying the representation of ISIS female sympathisers as soldiers and keyboard soldiers from three different media, which include online news, ISIS-affiliated media and Twitter postings from the female sympathisers themselves. This chapter will illustrate how the various media very often portray women involved with terrorist groups' acts in ways that are not only different from their male counterparts but also in ways that are specific about their gender as well as their perceived gendered roles (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). In this case, complementing and contesting discourses of female sympathisers of ISIS as soldiers and keyboard soldiers are discussed. Additionally, this chapter will reflect on the processes, challenges, risks, and ethical considerations encountered by the researchers during the study. Hopefully, this chapter will provide new researchers in the field with some guiding questions to reflect on their research strategies and maintain their well-being throughout the process. Nonetheless, this chapter is hopeful that it can shed light on possible avenues and ways in which research institutions could offer support to researchers involved in such studies.

6.2 ISLAMIC STATE FEMALE SYMPATHISERS

Islamic State (ISIS) is regarded as a Salafi jihadist Islamist group which aims to build a state based on historic Islamic caliphates (Wagemakers, 2015). It is believed that ISIS has managed to bring instability to Syria (Neumann, 2015). Furthermore, ISIS uses social media platforms to persuade, influence and recruit people to join them. This is reflected by the number of foreigners leaving their countries to join ISIS. According to Neumann (2015), though the exact number of Westerners (both men and women) leaving their country and migrating to ISIS remains unknown, the number is still considered significant as compared to other terrorist groups.

Specifically, ISIS was also known for its ability to recruit a high number of female sympathisers to support and join their terrorist group. Upon agreeing to their ideologies, these female sympathisers of ISIS were later persuaded to migrate (perform “Hijrah”) to ISIS-held territory to support their brothers and sisters (Neumann, 2015). Once they had completed their “Hijrah”, they then assumed a new identity within ISIS and called themselves “Muhajirah” as mentioned (Klaussen, 2014). Some of the gendered roles that these women are expected to perform in ISIS include mothers to a new generation of believers or soldiers in the new caliphate (Neumann, 2015). This provided the research gap that this study tries to unravel, which is how the media and the female sympathisers use language in illustrating the gendered roles these women performed in ISIS.

Islamic State (ISIS) female sympathisers disseminate pro-hijrah propaganda through social media and provide information or connections on the ground to help facilitate their journey (Hoyle & Frenett, 2015). This phenomenon has garnered significant media attention and sparked widespread panic around the globe (Neumann, 2015). This creates a strong reason for this study to attempt to contribute to the existing literature on these female sympathisers of ISIS. Moreover, this research aims to fill the gap in linguistic studies on discourses surrounding terrorism, focusing on the linguistic resources that the