

*The importance of new methods for
old problems: Using Critical
Discourse Analysis in studying
terrorism in Africa*

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- ▶ “Discourse theory is, in its simplest form, a theory of politics: of the hegemonic formation of social relations - of discourses - that involve hierarchies of power and relations of inclusion and exclusion.”
- Dahlberg, 2011.
- ▶ By using something like CDA, one can attempt to deconstruct the hegemonic formation of social relations within terrorism groups itself, but also understand the relations between terrorist groups and media usage/communication.

What can CDA do?

- ▶ 1. Identify and explain how terror organizations use language itself as a means of communication
- ▶ Example: Boko Haram and the usage of Hausa and/or Arabic in their messages throughout 2011 - 2015
- ▶ OR Boko Haram NOT using French, while advocating to expand jihad to francophone countries like Chad and Niger
- ▶ AND BH advocating for global jihad, but only doing so in a local (regional at best) language

What can CDA do?

- ▶ 2. The researcher is able to create, by means of analysis, a form of organization of discourse - creating different categories of discourse, and explain the essential elements of each category
- ▶ Example: Analyzing Boko Haram messaging through themes (What is the message about?)
- ▶ Analyzing Boko Haram messages according to who they are affiliated with, what their local/global stance is at that moment in time

What can CDA do?

- ▶ 3. Establish ideas on how these different forms and categories of communication take place
- ▶ Establish patterns to identify possible courses of action

CDA, Terrorism and Social Relations

- ▶ Social relations are super complex, and can be described as layered, because they include sub-relations within social relations. Discourses are used, and can be studied across different media, meaning: studying people who communicate by talking, writing and in other ways send a message to the world.
- ▶ Within this specific area, the concept of discourse is not a stand-alone concept, it works with analysis of different sets of relations and how they interact. Like how does Boko Haram interact with the media? How do they interact in social life, and make meaning for those who send a particular message, how does those discourses play a role in making terrorism a feared discourse?

CDA, Terrorism and Social Relations

- ▶ By looking at discourses' emotive and persuasive value, it is possible to look at the effects of the idea of “selling” war, or ideology and other fear-inducing discourses.
- ▶ When using something like CDA to study terrorism in Africa, discourse becomes a product of the society in which it is used, as well as a force that, with its continuously changing nature, influence social values.
- ▶ Using differing Trans- and interdisciplinary research as a source of theoretical and methodological development leads to a continuous process of change within the academic field.

CDA, Terrorism and Fear

- ▶ The ability of terrorism to induce fear and anxiety can be largely attributed to the discourses that arise with acts of terrorism, not even mentioning the obvious fear that the act itself induces.
- ▶ *“Terrorism is violence or its threat intended as a **symbolically communicative** act in which direct victims of the action are instrumentalised **as a means to creating a psychological effect** of intimidation and fear in a target for a political objective”*
(Richard Jackson)

CDA, Terrorism and Fear

- ▶ *“Terrorism is an **anxiety inspiring** method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individuals, group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct **targets of violence are not the main targets**. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative of symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as **message generators**. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience[s]), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, **or a target of attention** depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.” (A.P Schmidt)*

CDA, Terrorism and Fear

- ▶ Terrorism + Specific discourses = fear
- ▶ There is much research to be found on the impact of media coverage of negative events on audience's emotional states. The findings differ from finding that the media is a gateway for spreading powerful propaganda (Herman & Chomsky, 1988); to finding that maintain the media's influence should not be overestimated (Curran, Gurevitch & Woollacott, 1982).
- ▶ For the most part, it has been clear that media coverage of violence and brutality provoke feelings of fear - even among audiences that have never been directly part of - or victims of said violence.

What these discourses does

- ▶ The use of selective discourses can not only change the recipient of public's opinion on a certain matter, but can serve as an instrument of justification in terms of actions - be that an act of war, policy changes, or both.
- ▶ Today, the shrinking of the world through the development of larger public spaces by new and old media offers terrorist organization much easier access to vastly larger audiences. The internet has, by offering terrorist organization this added element, become a means of inflicting damage on governments, businesses and citizens in ways which was not possible before.

What these discourses does

- ▶ This has actually placed all those in positions to influence an audience in a better position to disseminate the specific discourses that they wish to “sell to the public”.
- ▶ So, there is this continuous process of change within the social field of discourse, and the academic world should follow suit if we wish to study what is happening in the real world.

So how will CDA help?

- ▶ Not only analyze discourses in itself, in terms of texts and words, but it forms part of a systemic interdisciplinary analysis of texts, as well as other relations and elements in the social process.
- ▶ Researchers won't only be commenting on discourse in terms of words used, it would include the systematic analysis of different forms of texts as well.
- ▶ Research is no longer only descriptive, it can, and should include more normative elements as well. This then addresses the social cleavages in terms of their discursive values and includes possible ways of changing or mitigating them.

Thank you!