Packaging anti-terrorist attitudes through the powerful language of colouring books

The overall aim of this paper is to explore how the genre of colouring books has been exploited (Bhatia 2004) by the American publishing house Really Big Coloring Books, Inc. in the attempt to shape reality according to a specific cultural perspective. The present study focuses on how these books, published and distributed mainly in the United States, activate processes of power that pervade social life and institutions (Fitzpatrick and McPherson 2010) through the use of visual and verbal features which are used to engage young adults (Newman and Newman 2014) in the discourse of freedom and democracy now that these principles, according to Wayne Bell, the CEO of Really Big Coloring Books, are being systematically undermined by terrorist attacks. The view that is put forth in this study is that the conventions of colouring books have been reinvented in order to provide an anti-terrorist response to the provocation of terrorist organizations, al-Qaeda first and the Islamic State after, whose online magazines are being used for the recruitment and self-radicalization of young Muslims living in different parts of the world. By conducting a comparative analysis of these two different genre types, namely the colouring books and the terrorist magazines, and by drawing attention to the stark contrast between their divergent purposes, the author intends to reveal a stimulus/response pattern underlying their communicative action whose purpose is to establish their own version of the truth. The study’s methodological framework is based on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996, 2001, 2006) social semiotic approach to multimodal analysis (van Leeuwen 2005). Through the interdisciplinary tools of multimodality, the meaning-making resources of visual and verbal conventions (O’Halloran and Smith 2011) employed to communicate contrasting views of terrorist representation are revealed.