

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONCEPTS  
„TERROR/TERRORISM” IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-  
PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE**

**Karabulatova Irina Sovetovna, Lyusheva Svetlana Aslanovna,  
Yanguzin Aibulat Rimovich, Setova Setenay Asfarovna, Kotik  
Ksenia Nikolaevna**

**Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Russian Federation  
Adyghe State University, Russian Federation  
Bashkir State University, Russian Federation  
Ufa State Petroleum Technical University, Russian Federation**

**Abstract:** *Terror and terrorism are being studied not only and not so much in the academic context. Criminologists and military experts are exploring the technologies of terrorist and anti-terrorist struggle. Lawyers are engaged in understanding the legal status of various types of modern terrorism. Politicians develop political strategies to counter the threat of terror. In various fields of social and human sciences, many works written by political scientists, jurists, historians, sociologists, social psychologists, culturologists, philosophers, etc. have been devoted to the problems of terror and terrorism. Even the best definitions of terror/terrorism suffer from incompleteness. Last but not least, this is because the overwhelming majority of studies are devoted exclusively to studying the actual side of the problem, and extremely little to the analysis of social reflection on it. In particular, certain types of terror and terrorism are studied, classifications are created, socio-political preconditions of terrorist acts are analyzed and the ideological foundations of the policy of terror are analyzed. In a word, first of all, the phenomenon itself is studied, and not the ways of its representation and conceptualization in intellectual culture, socially significant discourses, public sphere and everyday communication. After all, in addition to the very facts of extremism and the use of political violence, there is still the construction of the notion of these practices in the public consciousness. In addition to the very phenomenon of terror / terrorism, there is still a concept, the context of its understanding and interpretation, as well as a socio-political discussion of its meaning, a complex of emotional reactions and a discursive formulation of judgments about it.*

**Keywords:** terror, terrorism, transformation, expansion of semantics, social philosophy, discourse.

This intellectual layer of „*terror/terrorism*” is extremely confusing and poorly understood. And meanwhile, it is precisely from the interpretation of concepts of this type that can be attributed to the fundamental concepts of our social life that the structure of social knowledge about the phenomena designated by them largely depends. Consequently, to some extent the understanding and application of such concepts will determine social actions and practices. „*Terror/terrorism*” is a

concept endowed with a powerful social and practical potential. Exactly how such a concept is filled with meaning, often determines the strategies of power („*anti-terrorist operations*”), social practices (types of protest actions, methods of political influence, national security structures and complexes of measures related to the threat of terrorism), and the nature of social criticism and political struggle, including international, interethnic and civilizational conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

If there is a huge body of literature on the problem of terror and terrorism, the question remains whether they are a single term in modern discursive space or they are still different concepts. Therefore, one of the urgent problems we see is an analysis of the modern vocabulary meanings of the words „*terror*” and „*terrorism*”, as well as the reconstruction of the meanings of these words in contemporary socio-political journalism and research works of historians, political scientists, sociologists, culturologists etc. With close examination of this array, a deficit of reflection over the meaning of this concept (concepts) becomes noticeable, which in many ways remains semantically vague. It turns out that the available definitions are not generally universal not only in the theoretical or historical sense, but they do not even cover those meanings of the concepts (concepts) that exist in modern society (in a synchronous cut). Insufficient for their understanding are both the desire to give an integral definition of the concepts of „*terror*” (the practice of political violence and intimidation) and „*terrorism*” (policies aimed at this practice), and rigidly theoretically differentiate these concepts. It is hardly satisfactory to establish consistent historicalism in the definition of terror and terrorism, since it does not take into account the historical development of the concept itself, which in time has broken up into two separate semantic units.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Seidina, I. Karabulatova, Z. Polivara, A. Zinchenko, „A publicist Discourse of the Islamic organizations of the Central Federal District of Russia and the issue of tolerance”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 18, 2017, pp. 109-117; G. Rakisheva, I. Karabulatova, A. Abibulaeva, „Ethno-Sociocultural deviations in the educational environment of the modern Eurasian higher education institution as a reflection of transcultural globalization factor”, in *Man in India*, no. 97 (23), 2017, pp. 115-131; Z. R. Khachmafova, I. S. Karabulatova, S. V. Serebryakova, A. V. Zinkovskaya, E. N. Ermakova, „The Specifics of an Estimate discourse of gender stereotypes in small forms of Folklore in a Network Discourse of Electronic and Information society at the Beginning of 21st Century”, in *Pertanika Journal of Social Science & Humanities*, no. 25, 2017, pp. 137-150.

## Materials and Methods

The object in this context is the texts and oral statements of politicians, public figures, writers and thinkers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries that significantly influenced the transformation of the semantics of the concept of „*terror/terrorism*”. The facts of not only intellectual culture and art (for example, movies) are involved in the orbit of the analysis, but also the characteristic phenomena of mass culture (telecasts, television films, etc.) that may indicate an understanding of the concept under study at the level of the mental structures of society on a particular historical stage of development of its semantics.

Since the notion of „*terror/terrorism*” is international, we did not limit the material for analysis only to the material of Russian history and social thought, while trying to emphasize the specifics of its interpretation in relation to individual historical contexts.

Theoretical and methodological base of the research was:

-Modern critical discourse theory combined with the analysis of ideologies and the study of the processes of formation of discourse-ideological hegemony (M. Foucault, M. Pesce, P. Serio, E. Laclau, S. Mouffe, T. van Dyck, etc.);

-philosophical criticism and philosophical anthropology of violence (J. Sorel, B. Benjamin, J. Bataille, R. Girard);

-socio-political theory of the revolution, the theory of power and the analyst of the „*state of emergency*” (K. Schmitt, H. Arendt, J. Agamben, C. Lefort, etc.).

In our opinion, modern social studies have a methodology that will allow us to „*place*” the problem in two planes-diachrony and synchrony.

A diachronic perspective is given by the „*history of concepts*” mentioned by us (in the version of R. Kosellek’s school), which treats concepts not simply as words that are significant from a particular point of view for social history and cultural history, but as tools for the social construction of reality. The concept in this coordinate system of interest is one of the key, because, on the one hand, it represents terrorist practices in discourses and, on the other hand, influences the formation of policies and social strategies (protective, negotiating, critical) that have to take into account terror/terrorism in as an essential factor of social life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> R. Kosellek, *Futures Past. On the Semantic of Historical Time*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1985; Idem, *Begriffsgeschichten. Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2006.

Synchronous contextualization of the concept allows the modern social theory of discourse to be implemented (approaches by Sh. Mouff, N. Fairclaw, T. van Dyck, R. Vodač, and others). Within the framework of this theory, different aspects (levels) of existence of social discourses are distinguished. At the level of „*political*” (in terms of Mouff) the notion of terror/terrorism exists in the field of the struggle of political positions and ideologies (including as an ideological means). In this field, as a rule, the „*discursive hegemony*” of one or another position becomes relative to which the rest are placed. In this sense, the predominance of the generally positive semantics of the word „*terror*” is typical in discourses of the XIX century, which has direct semantic connections with the revolutionary struggle and the corresponding body of exercises.<sup>3</sup> There is also a noticeable increase in the negative assessment in the treatment of terror/terrorism in the twentieth century, when their link to the revolutionary tradition is problematic. The very concept of revolution is extremely multiplying, and „*terror*” and „*terrorism*”, gradually becoming autonomous from the political discourse of the revolution, become independent concepts.

## Discussion

We take into account the gap between the descriptions of contemporary versions of terror and terrorism and the study of related phenomena in history, it seems obvious that the terrorist paradigm as such goes back to the era of the Great French Revolution, when the notion of „*terror*” appeared. Of course, all the historians of the revolutionary movement, particularly the historians of the French Revolution, faced the problem of interpreting this historical concept. The largest of them (F. Minier, T. Carlyle, A. de Tocqueville, O. Cotchen, A. Olar, A. Sobul, F. Fure, and others) paid great attention to the reconstruction of how terrorism was conceptualized during the revolution, to separate this authentic understanding from its later interpretations.<sup>4</sup> However, however, the interpretation of the concept in

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<sup>3</sup> T. Van Dyck, *Discourse and Power. Representation of dominance in language and communication*, M. URSS, Book House „LIBROKOM”, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> I. Karabulatova, E. Ermakova, „The concept „abrek” in the modern Russian linguistic consciousness: from the mountaineer-robber to the terrorist-migrant”, in *Man in India*, no. 97 (23), 2017, pp. 439-445; M. Ryklin, „Apocalypse now. Philosophy after 11 September”, in *Otechestvennyye zapiski*, no. 3, 2002, pp. 319-337.

historical works still experienced a strong influence of the ideological and methodological position of the historian.<sup>5</sup>

There is also a great tradition of studying the policy of terror/terrorism, which was practiced by various opposition forces in the era of the absence of an open revolutionary confrontation of social forces. One of the most interesting historical contexts of the conceptualization of revolutionary terror/terrorism under conditions of relative social stability in the framework of our consideration is the history of Russian terrorism from the shot of Dmitry Karakozov in Alexander II in 1866 before the assassination of Stolypin in 1911. A lot of remarkable works have been devoted to this period. But the conceptual dimension of terror/terrorism is mentioned only in some works, for example, in the book named O. V. Budnitsky, as well as in the framework of the approach of M. P. Odessa and D. M. Feldman.

Specialized historical studies of the conceptual complex associated with the phenomenon of terror/terrorism have also been conducted for a long time. It is worth mentioning the complex works on the evolution of the concept in the countries of Europe and Russia, carried out within the framework of the German school of the history of concepts (O. Bruner, V. Konce, R. Kozellek, R. Reichardt etc.), in particular, the corresponding articles in the dictionaries *Historical concepts: historical vocabulary of socio-political language in Germany* and *Handbook of socio-political concepts in France 1680-1820*.

However, the history of concepts as such, extremely carefully referring to the smallest twists and turns in the historical semantics of the words „terror” and „terrorism”, is generally limited to a description, avoiding a complete conceptual reconstruction of the concept’s evolution from its inception to the era of the French Revolution to the present day.<sup>6</sup> This conceptual socio-philosophical basis for historical analysis is assisted by the work of contemporary philosophers dedicated to the phenomenon of terror/terrorism (J. Baudrillard, S. Zizek, P. Virillo, S. Bac-Mores, J. Derrida, B. Groys, M. Ryklin, V. Podoroga and others).

The combination of two perspectives—diachronic historical and synchronous socio-philosophical—allows us to approach a holistic analytic of this concept. In addition, combining the historical and theoretical

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<sup>5</sup> J. Baudrillard, *The spirit of terrorism*, [www.inosmi.ru](http://www.inosmi.ru), accessed in 9.IV.2013.

<sup>6</sup> M. Mogilner, *Mythology of the „underground man”: a radical microcosm in Russia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a subject of semiotic analysis*, M.: UFO, 1999.

approach to the problem makes it possible to distinguish between the object and the subject of research.

## Results

The revolutionary terror implies a syncretic unity of both the policy of revolutionary power and the violent actions of the crowd (mass and individual). Subsequently, these meanings of the concept of „terror” were divided. However, in the chronotope of revolution between them it is impossible to draw a dividing line. Terror encompasses all, permeates all strata of society, the entire „melting” revolutionary sociality, becoming the quintessence of the revolution itself.

In the future, especially if we take the discursive existence of the concept outside the context of the revolution, there is a significant narrowing (specialization) of its meaning. For example, in Russia in the second half of the XIX century „terror/terrorism” means the method of individual political assassinations in conditions of revolutionary actions outside the real chronotope of the revolution.<sup>7</sup> However, with such a narrowness of meaning, the concept is so closely associated with the revolutionary tradition that an illusion of the revolutionary chronotope arises and the specialized concept is subjected to secondary generalization: „terror/terrorism” becomes a contextual synonym for revolutionary terror as such. A close connection with the revolutionary paradigm allows to support the heroics of the revolution, which is combined with a unique myth about the victim in the context of the „underground” subculture. This myth contributes to a sharp increase in the cultural and anthropological significance of the figure of the revolutionary. Prominent people of different views sympathize with terrorists, despite the dubious value of the attacks themselves. Thus, the figure of the hero ensures the attractiveness of the revolutionary myth, which determined the hegemony of revolutionary discourse in this period.

On the contrary, in the late XIX-early XX century, observed, on the one hand, the axiological crisis of the concept under study, on the other hand, a semantic prototype of the modern concept of „terrorism” is being formed. This implies understanding the criminal nature of subversive activities, as well as the orientation of terrorists to using the media to create resonant events designed to „shake” society. In addition,

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<sup>7</sup> I. Karabulatova, S. Galiullina, K. Kotik, „Terrorist threat in Russia: Transformation of confessional relationships”, in *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, no. 18, 2017, pp. 93-104.

there is a large-scale expansion of the „*objects*” of terrorist violence, among which the townsfolk fall, and the „*addressees*” of that „*message*”, which is contained in the terrorist act as a communicative act. Most clearly, these transformations can be traced in the „*actions*” and declarations of the French anarchist Illegalists and their predecessor Ravachol (1890s), as well as in the crisis, contradictory attitude to the terror of the SR militants of the 1900s.<sup>8</sup>

Subsequently, the crisis of the concept deepens, and, presumably, by the 1930s and 1940s, there is a semantic divergence between the previously interchangeable words „*terror*” and „*terrorism*”. They begin to correlate with different poles of the socio-political spectrum. The first of them is increasingly associated exclusively with the system of power, resorting to emergency measures in relation to the rights and freedoms of citizens. Terrorism is increasingly seen as an anti-systemic activity, criminal violence that damages the rule of law and threatens the life and health of citizens.

We remember that both meanings, forming a semantic opposition, originate in the revolutionary tradition. In the dissertation, the devaluation of the notion of „*terror*” will be considered on the example of the formation of a Stalinist state, revolutionary in nature, but lost its revolutionary source. In the case of Stalinism of the 1930s there is a degeneration of revolutionary power, using the resources of a state of emergency outside the real reason for their use (revolution or war). The Violence of the System becomes „*mythical*” (in the sense of B. Benjamin). As a result, it becomes possible to associate the concept of „*terror*” no longer with the actions of revolutionary governments or with the actions of despotic rulers in the context of the revolutionary confrontation that the autocracy looked like in the eyes of Russian terrorists. Terror is now associated with routine bureaucratic violence, which has no justification from the point of view of revolutionary struggle. After World War II, „*terror*” becomes a critical term, through which fascist regimes are exposed, communist dictatorships, and then-any organized state or public mechanisms of violence.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. Laclau, Ch. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985.

<sup>9</sup> E. Ermakova, M. Jilkisheva, G. Fayzullina, I. Karabulatova, Kh. Shagbanova, „The media end fiction: postmodernist discourse of contemporary terrorism in the context of apocalyptic rhetoric”, in *Central Asia and Caucasus. Journal of Social and Political Studies*, volume 17, no. 2, 2016, pp. 61-69.

The word „*terrorism*” in this new semantic configuration begins to mean not only actions of combat groups and acts of individual terror „*from below*”, the concept of which survived a deep crisis as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, but any antisocial activity of extremist persuasion regardless of its political nature. „*Terrorist*” becomes a universal figure of the social Other, the unconditional enemy of modern societies. Stalinism clearly demonstrates the paradoxical nature of this figure. On the one hand, it represents a real public danger (the killing of Kirov in 1934). On the other hand, it performs a destabilizing function within the state system, justifying emergency measures in society.

### Conclusion

If we endorse the monstrous scale of Stalin’s terror, it seems that the model formed by him remains relevant for modern states, including democratic ones, for which the application of the state of emergency, including in its terrorist forms, becomes „*not an exception but a rule*” and even the „*management paradigm*”. In the post-war period and especially in the 1950-80s in the context of the intensive development of national liberation and left radical movements in the countries of Latin America, Europe, the Near and Far East, the concept of „*terrorism*” as an antisystemic revolutionary resistance, which is striving for the radical transformation of modern society, is being actualized.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, according to the prevailing viewpoint in the protest environment, the revolutionaries are fighting not only for political power, but also for „*terror*” and violence that permeate all levels of social life, including the media, the economy (terror of consumption), culture and privacy . The revived sympathy for terrorist methods of struggle is connected with their transformation both in terms of practices and in terms of discursive design.<sup>11</sup> Terrorism is included in the new paradigm of revolutionary activity, which became known as the „*guerrilla war*” (Ernesto Guevara) and as the „*urban guerrilla*” (Carlos Marigella). In some cases, the meaning of the concept of „*terrorism*” is greatly narrowed and it is regarded as one of the tactical methods of guerrilla. In other cases, these concepts are identified. In the practice of the „*urban insurgents*” (the German „Red Army Faction”, the Italian „Red Brigades”, the French „Direct Action” etc.) the concept of „*guerrilla warfare*”, which has positive connotations,

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<sup>10</sup> B. Groys, *The Communist postscript*, M.: Ad Marginem, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> N. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, London, Longman, 1989.



euphemistically replaces the word „*terrorism*” as compromised in the course of the previous history of socio-political discourses. In general, during this period, one can state the predominance of a positive evaluation of terrorism both among revolutionaries and among sympathizing people. This is particularly revealing, since it is precisely at this time in the world community that there is a parallel increase in the rejection of terrorism, regardless of its goals and the motives behind it. This „*counter-terrorism*” discourse prevails in the 1990-2000s, which is connected both with an ever-increasing advancement on the agenda of the fight against terrorism and with the internal crisis of the revolutionary movement. The historical decontextualization of the concept provides opportunities for various ideological manipulations in the context of its competition and conflict of political systems of the mid-second half of the 20th century, especially productive in the years of the Cold War and continued during and after the collapse of the USSR. For example, the ideological effect arises from the identification of modern forms of terror (including fascism, right-wing military dictatorships, and broader-any forms of authoritarianism and totalitarianism) and the terror of revolution while ignoring the specialization of the historical semantics of „*terror*” and the subsequent differentiation of these concepts. In our opinion, this identification aims to discredit leftist revolutionary thought, while preserving a favorable image of the revolution (without the „Jacobin episode”), which gave the world civil rights and freedoms, democracy and the constitution. Such examples show how concepts similar to those we are considering are functioning as instruments of ideological struggle.

**Acknowledgment:** The authors performed this work within the framework of the grant of the President of the Russian Federation for state support of young and scientists and on state support of the leading scientific schools of the Russian Federation „Islam in the regional social and cultural space of Russia: diagnosis of the state and transformations (on the example of the Republic of Adygea)”; as well as with the support of grant RFFI 17-13-02010 „Islam in Bashkortostan: Risks of Politicization”. This work was supported by the grant RFBR 17-04-00607 „Ethnolinguistic and Cultural Screening of ISIS Technologies during Work on the Protest Behaviour of the Russian Youth”. This paper was financially supported by Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation on the program to improve the competitiveness of Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia (PFUR University) among the

*Astra Salvensis*, an VI, număr 11, 2018

worlds leading research and education centers in the 2016-2020. This publication was supported by the Ministry of Education and Science of Russian Federation (the Agreement number 02.A03.21.0008).