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**Time of Terror, Terror of Time  
On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism  
(Early 1860s – Early 1880s)**

"[Normal girls] walked incomparably slower than ours ..."

*Nikolay A. Morozov<sup>1</sup>*

1.

Terrorism is an expression of political impatience. This idea can be found throughout the historiography of the Russian revolutionary movement. The literature is in fact littered with temporal terms, but decidedly the more common ones are those suggesting that terrorism is untimely and, especially, impatient. "Too early," "too fast," "ahead of its time," or just "impatient" – these are go-to adjectives for terrorism. Ultimately, what such language suggests is this: time can be measured, and terrorists are those who exceed the natural or agreed-upon pace on the path of historical progress. Predicated on the hegemony of bourgeois modernity's dominant regime of time (Walter Benjamin's "homogenous, empty time," Benedict Anderson's "meanwhile"), these temporal terms are code for a political attitude that frames terrorism as the violence of the historically underdeveloped or outdated, as violence perpetrated by those who lack a proper understanding of the 'laws of history,' be those conservative, liberal, or Marxist. What they thus obscure is the possibility that terrorists might have in mind alternative visions of history and alternative experiences of time. This article explores whether they do, what makes these visions and experiences coherent, and the ways in which this coherence complicates the "impatience" argument. Ultimately, its purpose is perhaps partly didactic: to present the history of terrorism in such a way as to block the continued resort to such simplistic and totalizing causal explanations for radicalization as are implied by the "impatience" narrative.

2.

The idea that terrorism is an expression of political impatience is both im- and explicitly present in the literature, scholarly and secondary, popular and primary. Implicitly, for example, it drives a standard narrative in western (and recent Russian) historiography about the late imperial period: if revolutionaries in the late 1870s had restrained themselves a

\* Research for this paper was completed during my year as a Jean Monnet fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute, 2007–08. For the opportunity to present an earlier version of this paper, I would like to thank the Russian History Workshop at Georgetown University, the University of Pennsylvania Kruzhok for the Study of Russian and Soviet History and Culture, and the Russian and Soviet History Kruzhok at UC Berkeley.

<sup>1</sup> MOROZOV *Povesti*, p. 75.

little longer, not formed "Narodnaya Volya," and not assassinated the "Tsar Liberator," then Russia would have had its constitution and, ultimately, avoided 1917, etc.<sup>2</sup> Underlying this liberal argument is a conservative preference for gradual change, the crux of which goes back to Burke's critical reflections on the French Revolution. Soviet historiography, however, likewise found terrorism – heroic though it might have been – guilty of rushing ahead.<sup>3</sup> Underlying this argument is the Marxist-Leninist critique of terrorism, which is not a critique of violence as such, but rather of violence that is premature, badly timed, or spontaneous.<sup>4</sup> Either way, terrorists are those who recklessly break the historical speed limit, then crash, and with their wreckage cause congestion (police intervention, political reaction, revolutionary delay) en route to the foreseeable future.

Explicit statements about terrorism as the violence of 'impatient' political actors can be found on various levels of the literature, not just in specialized scholarly works.<sup>5</sup> Suffice it to say that a Soviet high school textbook argues that terrorism emerged because "propagandistic activity stopped satisfying the young and impatient revolutionaries" and that a work of historical fiction about Narodnaya Volya's Andrey Zhelyabov is simply called "Impatience."<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, however, the terrorists' own writings stage this violence similarly: the terrorists, in order to justify violence, also always refer to time – and to the fact that patience has ended. So both outsiders and insiders frame terrorism as somehow causally linked to impatience, but the important difference is that while commentators present impatience as either the consequence of false consciousness or an essentialized psychological category, the terrorists themselves, as this article will show, understand it as a physical category grounded in unique historical conditions. In terms of understanding processes and patterns of radicalization, this is a crucial difference.

Finally for the record, it is true that not only terrorists have been characterized as 'impatient.' More broadly, impatience has been signaled as a trait belonging to all revolutionaries.<sup>7</sup> World-wide throughout modern history, moreover, power has arrested people in re-

2 See for example SAUNDERS *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*, p. 338. Writes Gregory Freeze: "Moralizing historians have long been wont to blame the revolutionary intelligentsia for Russia's failure to tread the Western liberal path, but in fact," etc. FREEZE *Russia*, pp. 193–194. For a recent Russian example, see ORLOV / GEORGIEV / GEORGIEVA / SIVOKHINA *Istoriya Rossii*, p. 398.

3 See for example VOLK *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 226.

4 Russian Marxists did not categorically oppose to terrorism, and the schism between the Social Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries on the question of terrorism was not as categorical as was once supposed. See BUDNITSKIY *Terrorizm*, pp. 263–335. According to Lenin, when outbreaks of violence ordinarily captured as 'terrorism' were properly timed (that is, when they coincided with mass violence, e.g. during the Revolution of 1905), then they underwent a qualitative change, becoming instead instances of 'partisan warfare.' See "Lenin's Rewriting of Terrorism as Partisan War," the epilogue to VERHOEVEN April 4, 1866.

5 Among academics, see for example POMPER Nechaev, p. 60; KAN *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 151; and BUDNITSKIY *Terrorizm*, p. 48 and 339. Cf. also Kel'ner (ed.) *1 Marta 1881 goda*, pp. 3–9.

6 FEDOSOV *Istoriya SSSR*, p. 34; TRIFONOV *Neterpenie*.

7 See for example YARMOLINSKY *Road to Revolution*, pp. 78, 125, 149, and 178; ROGGER *Russia in the Age of Modernization and Revolution*, p. 133. For a contemporary example: Dostoevsky, too, thought "haste" or "impatience" to be the primary characteristic of radicals. See FRANK *Dostoevsky*, p. 316.

volt through related rhetoric: groups traditionally characterized as 'slow' – the colonized, workers, women – are suddenly told that they are 'too fast,' that it is 'too soon' to meet their demands, and that they should 'wait' until the time is 'ripe.' Arguably, 'impatient' is thus one half of a principal political binary that is applied to all those who practice what power considers illegal, illegitimate, and irregular politics. All this suggests the potential value of a comparative approach to the study of political impatience, but also of starting such a study here with a concentration on Russian revolutionary terrorism, which reveals the phenomenon in its purest form, both because it is the 'classical' case in the history of terrorism and because the debate on radicalization among Russian revolutionaries themselves was so explicitly centered on the question of historical time/timing.

## 3.

Ultimately, a study of terrorism's impatience exposes more than just terrorists' vision and experience of history. This is because impatience, by its very nature, implies the rejection of another temporality; at the very least, impatience proves the presence of a wait. An inquiry into the exception cannot but also show the norm. At this point, though, things become complicated, for what can be said about the 'norm' of Russia's history? Surely not that it is uniform. Is not one of the narratives of Russian history precisely written as a dialectic of re/action, of change fast and slow? Closely bound to Russia's position between East and West, the idea that Russian history moves between inertia and hyper-speed informs literature, history, and political theory. Just take two famous moments from intellectual history: Chaadaev's claim in the "Letters on the Philosophy of History" (1836) that Russia exists "outside of time" and Gogol's question "Rus, where are you racing to?" at the end of "Dead Souls" (1842).<sup>8</sup> Diachronically, modern Russian history supposedly sways between these extremes, endless winters interrupted by quick-lived thaws, e.g. the long years under Nicholas I, the reforms/revolutions inaugurated by Peter I, Alexander II, etc.

Synchronically, this process works itself out between the speed and slowness of distinct social formations. "The mass [...] moves forward at a turtle's pace," declared Pisarev, to give an example of the radical intelligentsia's appraisal of its social surroundings.<sup>9</sup> His assessment of the mass is even generous, for the *narod* intelligentsia discourse tends to characterize as a 'swamp' that does not move at all. The most intractable discursive tic, though, is the one that sees society, the people, or even all of Russia as being 'asleep' (and the intelligentsia as 'waking' or 'rousing' this sleeper). The state, finally, is usually said to be slow, except in those cases when it is not, and then its pace is best personified by Peter I, whose great strides were famously so fast that others had to run to keep up with him while he was playing catch up with the West.

In any event, it is not the case (not even on the level of representation) that there exists the calm gradualism of Russian history on the one hand, and impatient revolutionary terrorism on the other (so that, at the very least, the historiography exhibits an internal contradiction between the way the history of Russia and that of the revolutionary movement are depicted). And just as impatience is only one aspect of a much broader spectrum of

<sup>8</sup> CHAADAEV *Letters on the Philosophy of History*, p. 67; GOGOL *Dead Souls*, p. 284.

<sup>9</sup> PISAREV *Bazarov*, p. 171.

Russia's temporality, only one of the symptoms – albeit perhaps a pronounced one – of Russian history's complicated relationship with time, so it is in fact but one aspect of terrorism's temporality.

This article focuses on two aspects of terrorism's temporality that may be related, roughly speaking, to theory and praxis. It first presents a reading of revolutionaries' proclamations, pamphlets, and newspapers so as to see how they explained and justified violence, and how they mobilized temporal categories to do so effectively. By showing the multiplicity of terrorists' understanding of historical time, this reading aims to undo that side of the 'impatience' argument that suggests terrorists are those who simply, albeit irresponsibly, force history forward faster before due time. Thereafter, the focus shifts to the experience of time in the daily lives of the terrorists. This part targets the side of the argument that frames 'impatience' as part of terrorists' peculiar psychology and shows instead how their 'rush' emerged from the nature of the struggle. The period covered stretches from the early 1860s to the early 1880s.

#### 4.

Let us begin at the beginning, with Dmitriy Karakozov, of whom especially Soviet historians said that his 1866 attempt to assassinate Alexander II was "ahead of its time."<sup>10</sup> However, as I have argued elsewhere, what this first act of Russian terrorism really did was to introduce into the revolutionary movement a new relationship to historical time.<sup>11</sup> Revolutionary terrorism implies a very specific temporal order: rather than a culmination of massive revolutionary processes already in progress, it is instead inaugural violence, an impetus *towards* revolution. The question that then arises is this: what justifies this violence if it is not, as for example it was with "la Terreur," massive support? The answer, indeed, is 'time.' But what time?

For someone who has always been described as some version of 'impatient,' and thus as insensitive to his times, Karakozov's proclamation, "To My Worker Friends," exhibits a surprising diversity of temporal planes. The text starts by inviting readers into the author's private, interior time: "Brothers, *for a long time* I was tortured by a thought."<sup>12</sup> This individual torturous duration is communicable, however, since it is rooted in a shared sense of endless duress that throws up the same question for all: why are things forever the way they are in Russia? "Idling parasites" exploit "eternal toilers," and all the while whatever tsar is blind to the people's poverty.<sup>13</sup> Time knows no change and it seems, moreover, that it should know none; this is how things should be, for this is how they have always been; it is an expression of the natural, god-given order.

Puzzled, the author continues: "I wanted to discover what clever people think about all this, and I started to read books, and I read many books about how people lived in earlier times. And what, brothers, did I discover – the tsars are the real culprits."<sup>14</sup> History thus unmasks as ideology what seemed like eternal truth. In fact, things are as they are because

10 See for example SHILOV D. V. Karakozov, p. 52.

11 See VERHOEVEN *The Odd Man Karakozov*, especially chs. 3, 4, 5, and 6.

12 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, p. 293. Emphasis mine.

13 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, p. 293.

14 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, p. 293.



they became that way. He offers a history lesson: "Tsars got themselves officials so that it would be easier to rob the people. That is how serfdom came to be in Russia."<sup>15</sup>

Knowledge of the past also allows the author to know the present, to understand why 1861 was necessarily but another turn of slavery's screw. Now free to sell their labor for too little, former serfs fall behind on payments for land that they "worked since time immemorial," thereby legitimizing further robbery: "they take the last little horse, the last cow from the peasant. Soon, they can start to take the last piece of clothing ..."<sup>16</sup> It is this 'soon' that is the reason for the introduction of violence: 'soon' there will be nothing left, 'soon' it will be too late, 'soon' there will be no more time; this temporal adverb announces the existence of crisis time, which is why it is at this point in the proclamation that the author announces his plan to assassinate the tsar.<sup>17</sup>

The right time for violence according to Karakozov, therefore, is anytime now: now that history has entered a critical phase, change can pivot on whatever moment. There is no right time but this time: 'too early' is unthinkable; there is only 'now' and 'too late.' Normatively, however, this is called 'impatience.'

If there was ever one revolutionary who 'got' Karakozov, it was Sergey Nechaev, himself dubbed 'impatient' by, among others, VENTURI.<sup>18</sup> For Nechaev, Karakozov is the event of which young radicals must be worthy. It is for this reason that Nechaev's time – even though only three years after Karakozov – is qualitatively different.

For Nechaev, historical progress starts with Karakozov: before (and partly irrespective of the likes of the Decembrists), everything was 'slow;' after, everything is 'fast.'<sup>19</sup> No sooner have the times changed than sides are chosen – on temporal grounds: "Those who have a lot of time" are told to keep reading, but "We don't have time!" – and will proceed to act.<sup>20</sup> There are two reasons why time, even though it has only just begun, is almost already running out: the first is momentum (Karakozov's "tracks" may "go cold"), the second is a deadline.<sup>21</sup>

We see this deadline – and the tight schedule it necessitates – in an early text, "Program for Revolutionary Activities," from 1868, so before Nechaev met Bakunin. It announces that the moment has come to speed things up towards revolution: until May, revolutionaries should work in the cities; until October, in the provinces; thereafter, revolutionary activities should start in earnest.<sup>22</sup> This will get them ready for what is declared as the most "convenient time" for revolution: spring 1870.<sup>23</sup> "Spring," explains the pamphlet, be-

15 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, p. 293.

16 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, pp. 293–294.

17 Pokushenie Karakozova, vol. 1, p. 294.

18 VENTURI *The Roots of Revolution*, p. 412. See also POMPER *Nechaev*, p. 63; YARMOLINSKY *Road to Revolution*, p. 149.

19 See for example NECHAEV / BAKUNIN *Vzglyad*, pp. 226, 228, 232, 233, 234, and then 236, 237, 240.

20 *Izдание obshchestva "Narodnaya Rasprava"*, no. 1/1869 (summer 1869, Moskva), in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 223.

21 NECHAEV / BAKUNIN *Vzglyad*, p. 240.

22 Multiple authors, but strongly influenced by NECHAEV, S.G. / TKACHEV, P.N. *Programma revolyutsionnykh deystviy*, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 204.

23 NECHAEV / TKACHEV *Programma revolyutsionnykh deystviy*, p. 206.

cause the forest leaves will provide good cover; "1870" because this was the date by which the peasants had to decide whether or not to relinquish "their" land.

To this may be added, however, another, deeper layer of time, featured more explicitly in Bakunin's writings. "The times are drawing near ..." he writes in May '69 in a text that famously introduced Russia's *razboynik* as its "real and only revolutionary."<sup>24</sup> A war is starting: "now more than before, and, as it were, for the last time."<sup>25</sup> Why now? The reason is rooted in Russia's rhythms: the 1870s will be the 'anniversaries' of the Razin and Pugachev revolts (1670s and 1770s).<sup>26</sup> Coming up fast, therefore, is the third and final centennial showdown between the state and its eternal 'other,' its only real adversary, the *razboynik*/revolutionary.

This is the backdrop for Nechaev and Bakunin's violent rhetoric in pamphlets that repudiate dialogue in favor of destruction, for violence 'now' and 'immediately.'<sup>27</sup> Everyone's only concern should be to get things started 'sooner' and all plans for after the revolution are branded "criminal."<sup>28</sup> Nechaev's activities – including, probably, the murder of I. I. Ivanov – should be seen in the context of this tense temporality, a moment framed by Karakozov on one end, 1870 on the other, and coinciding with Russia's 'eternal' rhythms.

A few years later, in the mid-1870s, Nechaev's former friend Petr Tkachev introduced a new, even shriller key into revolutionary discourse. Tkachev is self-consciously impatient, and explicitly justifies this on two levels. First, unlike peaceful progress, which is gradual and slow, revolution is fast as a rule and by definition: it appears whenever a minority "does not want to wait" for the majority to understand what it needs.<sup>29</sup> By the time the majority finally gets it, he sneers, "the sun, perhaps, will already long have burned out."<sup>30</sup> Hence also his hypertrophied evaluation of the individual revolutionary, a figure who lords over historical time: "not waiting until the course of historical events indicates the minute [for the revolution], [the revolutionary] chooses it himself."<sup>31</sup> In Russia, such decisionism is facilitated because, in a Bakuninist move, "the people is always ready for the revolution."<sup>32</sup> And so theoretically, revolution can begin whenever – except that practically it must be now: "Now, or very soon – perhaps – never!"<sup>33</sup> This is because – and this is the second reason for his impatience – Russia's eternal now was about to become history.

24 BAKUNIN *Postanovka revolyutsionnogo voprosa*, p. 218.

25 BAKUNIN *Postanovka revolyutsionnogo voprosa*, p. 214.

26 BAKUNIN *Postanovka revolyutsionnogo voprosa*, p. 218.

27 BAKUNIN / NECHAEV *Nachala revolyutsii*, pp. 219, 221–222.

28 BAKUNIN / NECHAEV *Nachala revolyutsii*, pp. 220–221.

29 TKACHEV P. N. Letter to Editors of *Vpered! Zadachi revolyutsionnoy propagandy v Rossii*, April 1874, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 330.

30 TKACHEV P. N. Letter to Editors of *Vpered! Zadachi revolyutsionnoy propagandy v Rossii*, April 1874, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 330.

31 TKACHEV P. N. Letter to Editors of *Vpered! Zadachi revolyutsionnoy propagandy v Rossii*, April 1874, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 331.

32 TKACHEV P. N. Letter to Editors of *Vpered! Zadachi revolyutsionnoy propagandy v Rossii*, April 1874, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 331.

33 TKACHEV P. N. Letter to Editors of *Vpered! Zadachi revolyutsionnoy propagandy v Rossii*, April 1874, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm v Rossii*, p. 332.

As did Karakozov and Nechaev, Tkachev justifies violence because he senses that time is running out – but he has a different sense of time, courtesy of, on the one hand, Marxism and, on the other, modernization. His was ostensibly the last moment when it was still possible to use Russia's 'natural order' as a springboard towards socialism. And here just a quick reminder that, after the failures of 1848, the radical intelligentsia, which had long argued that Russia must catch up with its western neighbors, had begun to rethink Russia's backwardness, the idea that, in terms of modernity, Russia had nothing. Consider these lines written by Herzen in the aftermath of 1848:

"The liberals [...] have grown pale with terror; nor is this surprising, for they [...] have something to lose, something to be afraid of. But we [Russians] are not in that position at all [...] Europe is sinking because it cannot rid itself of its cargo – that infinity of treasures accumulated in distant and perilous expeditions. In our case, all this is artificial ballast; out with it and overboard, and then full sail into the open sea!"<sup>34</sup>

After 1848, Russia's developmental time lag was rethought as an advantage: less (historical) baggage meant extra (historical) speed. With nothing to lose, Russia was simply going to skip capitalism and construct communism on the basis of its proto-socialist peasant commune.

Marxists would disagree with these 'utopian' tenets: Russia was not on some *Sonderweg*, for capitalist development was already well underway in the empire. Tkachev, however, intervened on behalf of the historical leap precisely by taking capitalism into account. Since any further economic development would mean strengthening power's hold of the empire (because it would be more modern and gain the support of a growing bourgeoisie), revolutionaries had to pick up the pace and introduce violence now: "Hurry! [Don't] delay! [Procrastination] is criminal!"<sup>35</sup> For Tkachev, therefore, violence effects not only a short cut to one future (revolution), but also a cutting-short or cutting off of another future (bourgeois modernity). It has a double temporal function: it tunnels through time, but also acts as a historical brake, as a wedge in the wheels of progress that threatens to catch up with and crush the revolutionary movement. Terrorism, thus, is as much an attempt to collapse the time that remains – until the revolution – as it is a protest against modern times. In this second sense, terrorism is in fact a protest against speed, a plea to slow down, to interrupt, to pull the brake on a course of history that marches onward blindly and rushes over everything without regard. (Here, indeed, is a source for the liberal – and neo-liberal – argument that terrorism is 'anti-modern,' when really what it opposes is bourgeois modernity.) It is this temporal threat that accounts for the shrill key of his discourse – and for his delight when the revolutionary organization "Zemlya i Volya" happened to Russia in 1878.

"Zemlya i Volya's" early programmatic writings feature familiar ideas: 1) only violence will bring change; 2) violence means assassinations now and revolution later; and 3) the revolution should take place "as quickly as possible" because of the spread of capital-

34 HERZEN *Sobranie sochineniy*, vol. 5, pp. 13–14.

35 TKACHEV, P. N. *Nabat* (Programma zhurnala), late 1875, in: RUDNITSKAYA *Revolutsionnyy radikalizm*, pp. 346–347.

ism and "bourgeois civilization."<sup>36</sup> But then – once violence became actual – things began to change.

"Zemlya i Volya's" first communication on actual violence followed Vera Zasulich's '78 shooting of General Trepov: as Karakozov had done for Nechaev, Zasulich changed for "Zemlya i Volya" the sense of history. The party printed an article asserting that the *Zeitgeist* had obviously changed and the struggle against the state now officially begun: "Death to Trepov! Death to other such scoundrels! Death! It is time to get them off the face of the earth, then truth will triumph on earth, time is moving in this direction now."<sup>37</sup> Let me underline what emerges here (and the text will come back to this below): *Zeitgeist*, Time on the Move, and, in another article, the Logic of Events: "There are anxious minutes when the logic of events [...] marks with irresistible force the next, necessary historical step [...] We are living through one of those decisive minutes."<sup>38</sup>

Six months later, *zemlevolets* Sergei Stepniak-Kravchinski stabbed to death the head of the secret police in Saint Petersburg, General Mezentsev. His pamphlet, "A Death for a Death," was framed from start to finish by this new sense of historico-revolutionary momentum: "This murder was not the first and won't be the last. [...] Our great movement is growing not by the day, but by the hour."<sup>39</sup> Then, though, in between this bold assertiveness and historical optimism, and obviously in response to a critique of political violence, there appears a new justification: "[Is] a death by stabbing not a hundred times better than the slow, multiple years of starvation in jail, among all kinds of moral and physical tortures [?]"<sup>40</sup> (The reference is to the years of "preliminary detention" prior to the "Trial of the 50" in Moscow and the "Trial of the 193" in Saint Petersburg.)

This tendency to emphasize the long duress to justify the 'sudden' violence continues up to the final assassination of Alexander II, when "Narodnaya Volya" addressed European society in an open letter and explained that, "For *long years* the tyrannical government [oppressed us,] the party *slowly* turned onto the path of active struggle with the government [...] It had become impossible to live."<sup>41</sup> A few citations from 1878–1881 to further prove this point: bloodshed is "unavoidable"<sup>42</sup>; "persecutions, arrests, and exiles forced us, finally, to make another attempt at political murder"<sup>43</sup>; "we were forced to take up weapons by the most unbearable yoke of the government"<sup>44</sup>; "Russia cannot live like

36 Program of "Zemlya i Volya" (late 1876 – early 1877), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 28.

37 Golos chestnykh lyudey, in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 51.

38 MIKHAYLOVSKY Letuchiy listok (April 1878), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, pp. 55–56.

39 KRAVCHINSKIY Grozovaya tucha Rossii, p. 13 and 21.

40 KRAVCHINSKIY Grozovaya tucha Rossii, p. 16.

41 Ispolnitel'nyy komitet evropeyskomu obshchestvu (8 March 1881), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, pp. 235–236. Emphasis mine.

42 Po povodu podvigov pressy, in: *Zemlya i Volya! Sotsial'no-revolutsionnoe obozrenie*, no. 1 (25 October 1878), in: *BAZILEVSKIY Revolyutsionnaya zhurnalistika*, p. 92.

43 Pokusheniya na zhizn' Drentel'na (13 March 1879), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 81.

44 Frantsuzskomu narodu ot ispolnitel'nogo komiteta russkoy revolyutsionnoy partii (11 February 1880), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 226.



this any longer".<sup>45</sup> The argument that a limit had been crossed – that there was no choice but to resort to political violence – informs all pamphlets from this period.

At the same time, another new notion appears in the rhetoric: the idea that what really mattered in the decision to commit violence was the personal history of the victims. This is a strain that is absent in Karakozov's thought, and it does not really feature in the writings of Nechaev and Tkachev, either (though it was of course Nechaev's official reason for killing Ivanov, who was said to be a spy and/or informer). Stepniak-Kravchinski, contrarily, writes about his victim: "Mezentsev was killed not as the personification of [autocracy]. [...] [He] was killed [...] as an individual having committed a series of crimes that he was not permitted to and should not have committed."<sup>46</sup> Two months later, the party's paper categorically asserted that it did not attack a single class or representatives of some idea, but only those who threatened its existence.<sup>47</sup> Proclamations issued thereafter continued this individualist trend.<sup>48</sup>

Now if we combine these new ideas – that the Logic of Events forces their moves, that they have no choice but to turn to violence, and that they are merely meting out punishments well-deserved – then what emerges is the fact that the revolutionaries have begun to primarily present themselves as the executors of historical justice, and that the temporal dimension of their terrorism has shifted. Rather than that the assassinations are inaugural, violence is vengeance for something done in the past, e.g. "[The tsar] deserves the death sentence for all the blood he shed and all the tortures he caused."<sup>49</sup> In the process, the party becomes the self-appointed agent of history with a capital H. "It's impossible to stop the movement of history," they write. Or phrases like this: "Woe to the madmen blocking the paths of history."<sup>50</sup> "Historical justice exists," Alexander III is told after the assassination of his father.<sup>51</sup> The sense of history so dreaded by figures like Arendt and Camus appears: to serve the 'laws of history,' to let 'History' flow as it supposedly should, terrorism is justified. The most perfect expression of this uniform concept of history is doubtlessly the one attributed to "Narodnaya Volya's" Zhelyabov: "History moves terribly slowly. It needs a push."<sup>52</sup>

To sum up this first part: revolutionaries justified violence by mobilizing temporal terms, and their understanding of history and historical time is more multifaceted than is allowed by those who, at times implicitly, characterize terrorism as either ignorant or negligent of the 'laws of history.' Karakozov's time, for example, is as if under a spell that only violence can break, and if it is not broken now, it will be forever too late, and there

45 Ot ispolnitel'nogo komiteta (1 March 1881), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 233.

46 KRAVCHINSKIY Grozovaya tucha Rossii, p. 18.

47 See the lead article in "Zemlya i Volya," no. 2 (15 December 1878), in: *BAZILEVSKIY Revolyutsionnaya zhurnalistika*, p. 104.

48 Proklamatsiya "Zemli i Voli" po povodu ubiystva Aleksandra II, in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 160.

49 From the Executive Committee (22 November 1879), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, pp. 221–222.

50 MIKHAYLOVSKY Letuchiy listok, p. 57.

51 From the Executive Committee (1 March 1881), in: *Volk Revolyutsionnoe narodnichestvo*, vol. 2, p. 233.

52 SEMENYUTA Iz vospominaniy, p. 219.

will be no future. Or Nechaev's time: eschatological end-time, but secularized: 'event-time.' For Tkachev, too, time is coming to an end, though then suddenly, from aside, another time appears and threatens to run him over; times are multiple, and dromocracy enters history. Only "Zemlya i Volya" and "Narodnaya Volya," whose violence had both momentum and enjoyed at least tacit approval by society, seem synchronized with their time – so much so, in fact, that they risk to only do that time's bidding.

## 5.

But now a question arises: is it possible, in fact, is it necessary to map all of this temporal talk onto distinct political ideologies? Is Karakozov best read through Chernyshevsky? Nechaev through Bakunin? Tkachev through Blanqui? "Narodnaya Volya" through a combination of these, plus Mikhaylovskiy and others? This would be the traditional approach. Literature on revolutionary terrorism, indeed, was for a long time – and sometimes still is – ideological in a double sense: over-determined by the ideology of the authors, yes, but also explicitly, even exclusively, concerned with identifying and classifying the terrorists' political ideologies – and this precisely in order to be able to explain the process of radicalization towards violence.<sup>53</sup> It remains unclear, however, whether, say, Chernyshevskiy, Pisarev, Bakunin, Lavrov, Mikhaylovskiy, and Eugen Dühring were the primary components for the combustible product that was revolutionary terrorism. Some revolutionaries, moreover, retrospectively claimed that ideology was not at all the root of radicalization. Lev Tikhomirov, for example, insisted that he and his former comrades, in moving towards violence, were motivated "not by a collective idea, but by a collective instinct," that they had acted "not with their mind, not with reason, but with feeling."<sup>54</sup> Granted, Tikhomirov was a revolutionary apostate, and his memoirs were written long after he had become a monarchist. But Tikhomirov's co-editor of "Zemlya i Volya," Nikolai Morozov, who even in his old age did not denounce terrorism, also claimed that the politics of "Narodnaya Volya" were in fact a "muddle."<sup>55</sup> Neither this nor that ideology moved the revolutionary movement at that time, Morozov claimed, but rather "the real unbearability of life."<sup>56</sup> Such assessments sit at the root of a second trend in the historiography that, in order to explain radicalization, opts not for ideology, but for psychology.<sup>57</sup> Plekhanov was probably the first to give explicit analytical expression to this idea when he wrote that the "titanic energy" with which his former colleagues had turned to terrorism was in fact an "energy of despair" that was rooted in disappointment with their political failures, especially the fact that they had not been able to "immediately" unleash a peasant revolt against the government.<sup>58</sup> An approach that stresses the role of psycho-

53 Especially where "Narodnaya Volya" is concerned, this task remains complex because its members' political convictions were notoriously diverse. For a recent historiographical overview, see KAN *Narodnaya Volya*, pp. 5–29.

54 TIKHOMIROV *Vospominaniya*, pp. 142–143.

55 MOROZOV *Povesti*, vol. 2. p. 414.

56 MOROZOV *Povesti*, vol. 2. p. 414. Cf. KROPOTKIN *Zapiski revolyutionera*, pp. 411–415.

57 See for example BUDNITSKIY *Terrorizm*, pp. 57 and 339–340, or HARDY *Land and Freedom*, esp. pp. 125–159.

58 PLEKHANOV *Sochineniya*, vol. 24, p. 177. Hardy challenges this narrative of disappointment among the *narodniki*. See HARDY *Land and Freedom*, pp. x–xii.

logy and emotions is an important corrective to the ideological one – provided that it neither essentializes, nor disembodies the psyche, i.e. provided that it embodies mind and matter in their historical context.

## 6.

No figure seems to personify terrorism's impatience more clearly than Karakozov, whose most serious crime, as mentioned, was not so much the fact that he attempted to assassinate the tsar as that his attempt was "ahead of its time." This "ahead of its time," however, only catches the tail end of the barrage of temporal adjectives that were once upon a time showered on Karakozov, such as "too early," "too rushed," "impatient," and so on. And indeed, all of Karakozov's activities, down to the most profane, were executed in a rush: "He would have organized everything better," said one friend, "but he hurried" (because he was residing in the capital *sans papiers*, because his friends were trying to stop him, etc.).<sup>59</sup>

Paradoxically, however, Karakozov was also that figure who never did anything, who was slowed down to the point of absolute inertia. "For days, he lay by himself in his room," testified a friend during the trial.<sup>60</sup> By all accounts, Karakozov was someone who barely broke his chronic silence, who walked with a slow gait, and who, according to his medical records, was disinclined to do much of anything.<sup>61</sup> But then, suddenly, having been idle for months, he switches gears, and the revolution *must* take place tomorrow!

Ultimately, this rush finds its logic on an existential level: Karakozov, who was very ill, or at least thought he was, was trying to outrun a death that would arrive too soon for him to see the revolution. Quite literally, then, his body could not bear any historical delay. To wit, it was precisely because of this that it became the bearer of history, precisely because his body could bear no more as a patient that it became the bearer of a historical impatience. Obviously enough, it was also this physical condition that Karakozov mapped onto the whole of Russian body politic and its foreseeable future ("soon," etc.).

Though Karakozov was without a doubt an odd man, his rhythms – the alternations between inertia and hyper-speed – are nevertheless characteristic of terrorist praxis. The discussion will come back to why this is so below, but must first address the material conditions that force terrorists, over the course of the nineteenth century, to accelerate – even while they themselves were attempting to accelerate history. This topic of acceleration we will enter through the example of the man said to have said that history moved so slowly that it needed a push: Andrey Zhelyabov.

Zhelyabov's biographers repeatedly call him "impatient," "fast," and "rushed."<sup>62</sup> The primary sources support this characterization. For example, P. Semenyuta, a friend from Zhelyabov's student days in Odessa, said of him that "patience was not one of his virtues," that he was "nervous to the point of hysteria, impatient to the point of fainting,"

59 BAZANOV *Khudyakov i pokushenie Karakozova*, p. 153.

60 KLEVENSKIY *Pokushenie*, vol. 1, p. 30.

61 KLEVENSKIY *Pokushenie*, vol. 1, p. 27–28; STASOV *Karakozovskiy protsess*, p. 279; and GARF, f. 272, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 307–310.

62 See for example FOOTMAN *The Alexander Conspiracy*, pp. 179, 200, and 201; VORONSKIY *Zhelyabov*, pp. 236, 240, 242, and 251.

and that he was "extremely impatient."<sup>63</sup> Fellow *narodovolets* A. V. Tyrkov, meanwhile, retrospectively wrote that the woodcut of the six tsaricides at the 1881 trial accurately captured Zhelyabov's character through his pose: "That pose [...] revealed an intense, lively interest, impatience, and a readiness to attack or to deflect a blow."<sup>64</sup> In more favorable terms, related testimonies abound. "In general," according to another old Odessa acquaintance, "every one of his movements expressed an invincible strength."<sup>65</sup> Olga Lyubatovich said his speech was "hot and impetuous" and gushed about his "energy."<sup>66</sup> Lev Deutsch likewise spoke of his having "great energy," and of his being "inexhaustible" and "unusually enterprising."<sup>67</sup>

Whether or not Zhelyabov was impatient, energetic, etc., "by nature," he certainly sped up over time. One colleague stated that during the years of "Narodnaya Volya's" existence Zhelyabov lived in such a way "that he barely knew sleep."<sup>68</sup> Another wrote that he was "always in a hurry, complaining that there was not enough time ..." <sup>69</sup> "Slowing down," Zhelyabov explained to him, "is disastrous for us."<sup>70</sup> This was because terrorism, according to Zhelyabov, would only ever be successful if it was systematic and speedy. This meant it had to be synchronized with the times – and these were ever faster. Terrorism came to stand under the sign of the race.

Like Karakozov's 1866 attempt, the first assassinations of the 1870s were walk-ups: Zasulich shot Trepov in his office, Stepniak-Kravchinski stabbed Mezentsev on the street. As officials stepped up their guard, however, such simple approaches – not to mention getaways – became increasingly difficult, and consequently the terrorists were forced to adopt new methods. Initially, they could draw on their jailbreak experiences: Petr Kropotkin, for example, was rescued from prison in a carriage drawn by the racing champion Varvar.<sup>71</sup> And so in the same way, and with the same horse, Stepniak-Kravchinski escaped the scene of his assassination.<sup>72</sup> Once targets became more mobile, terrorists ditched their carriages, but kept the animals: Leon Mirskiy, who in 1879 attempted to assassinate the new head of the secret police, got himself a good horse from the Morris Strass stables and then rode right up to General Drentel'n's carriage on the streets of Saint Petersburg.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, the tsar was the greatest challenge to catch. After all, the first attempt on his life was followed by the immediate formation of a special task force to protect his body, and this protection increasingly relied on distance and on speed.<sup>74</sup> In 1879, therefore, *zemlevolets* Alexander Solov'ev was only able to approach Alexander II because he did so by stealth: on the strength of a military disguise, he managed to trespass into a restricted area, then ended up emptying his pistol while chasing the tsar across the square facing the

63 SEMENYUTA *Iz vospominaniy*, pp. 218, 219, and 225.

64 TYRKOV *K sobytiyu 1 marta 1881 goda*, p. 159.

65 SHEKHTER *Iz dalekogo proshlogo*, p. 45.

66 LYUBATOVICH *Dalekoe i nedavnee*, p. 113.

67 Deutsch, cited in: *Delo 1-go marta 1881 goda*, p. 66.

68 ASHESHEV *Zhelyabov*, citend in: *VORONSKIY Zhelyabov*, p. 240.

69 IVANOV *Iz vospominaniy*, p. 231.

70 IVANOV *Iz vospominaniy*, p. 232.

71 KROPOTKIN *Zapiski*, pp. 359–364; *MOROZOV Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 316.

72 *MOROZOV Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 316. See also *TIKHOMIROV Vospominaniya*, pp. 158–159.

73 *MOROZOV Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 368.

74 See for example *SIDORENKO Iz vospominaniy*, p. 50.



Winter Palace. "Narodnaya Volya," for its part, was by and large forced to target the tsar-in-motion: what has gone down in history as, tellingly, the "emperor hunt" mostly consisted of attacks on railways, roads, boats, and bridges. (The only exception to this was Stepan Khalturin's February 17, 1880 dynamite attack on the Winter Palace.) Finally, the location where he was killed – right after a turn from the Mikhaylovskiy theatre onto the Ekaterininskiy canal – was the one place along his regular route where his coachman slowed down the speeding of the imperial carriage enough to allow terrorists an approach: "That's a good spot!" Sof'ya Perovskaya told her stakeout team.<sup>75</sup>

Contemporary chroniclers and early theorists of terrorism – mainly *narodovoltsy* like Morozov, Tarnovsky, and Stepniak-Kravchinski – knew that terrorism's advantage was its unthinkability, that it could, in the plain language of history's first explicitly named terrorist manifesto, "The Terrorist Struggle" (1880), "act unexpectedly and find means and methods which no one anticipates."<sup>76</sup> This, however, meant a heavy emphasis on strategic novelty and material innovation, that is, on the incessant need to locate a blind spot in the tactics of the enemy. And this was not easy – if ever it is – for if in the 1866 newspapers could still write of the tsar's "regularly scheduled walk" in familiar places, by the late 1870s, he constantly changed his routes.<sup>77</sup> Consider "Narodnaya Volya's" final attempt on the tsar in 1881 as an illustration: for weeks, efforts had been directed towards mining a street across which Alexander II was, at some point, expected to drive, but what killed him were a pair of nitroglycerine bombs that were but a last-minute addition to the plan. Last minute, because these bombs, designed so that they could be hurtled at moving objects, were but a very recent invention of the group's technical expert, Nikolay Kibalchich.<sup>78</sup> (Famously – and, for the purposes of this text, tellingly – Kibalchich designed a "flying machine" while awaiting trial.<sup>79</sup>)

If at this point we briefly look ahead to the first decade of the twentieth century, we will see that the need for technology, meaning the need for a speed that could collapse the distance between terrorist and target, increasingly became a pressing theme among terrorists, for ever more their stake-outs and intelligence gathering were simply too slow, too tried, too tested. Rumors about terrorists on bicycles date to these years, as do stories about the "Moskovskaya oppositsiya" group doing drive-bys in a brand new American Ford.<sup>80</sup> By 1906, the infamous Evno Azef continuously opined that considering the "fast pace of life" and "frequently changing character of [terrorists'] tasks," the means at the disposal of the Socialist Revolutionaries' "Boevaya Organizatsiya" (BO) were insufficient to battle the government.<sup>81</sup> Finally, in 1907, he proclaimed he had found a solution: a "flying apparatus" that a well-known German engineer had been developing.<sup>82</sup> While they are both vacationing in Alassio, Italy, Azef tells Vera Figner that he intends to bomb the imperial palace from the air.<sup>83</sup>

75 TYRKOV K *sobytiyu 1 marta 1881 goda*, p. 148.

76 MOROZOV *The Terrorist Struggle*, p. 77.

77 BAZANOV *Khudyakov i pokushenie Karakozova*, p. 153 and FIGNER *Memoirs*, p. 97.

78 FOOTMAN *The Alexander Conspiracy*, p. 311; FIGNER *Memoirs*, p. 100.

79 KIBALCHICH *Poslednie slova podsudimyykh*, in: *Delo 1-go marta 1881 goda*, p. 321.

80 PRAISMAN *Terroristy i revolyutsionery*, p. 221.

81 PRAISMAN *Terroristy i revolyutsionery*, p. 221.

82 PRAISMAN *Terroristy i revolyutsionery*, p. 244.

83 FIGNER *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, vol. 6, p. 161.

For early-twentieth century terrorists, the problem that technology was to solve was that of the body's inertia, passivity, or, indeed, excessive patience. The idea was to couple the body with steel (bicycle, brand new Ford, "flying apparatus") so that it could achieve sufficient speed to collapse said distance between terrorist and target, i.e. serve as a smooth transmission between the idea and the act. Problematically, however, the body offered resistance not only by not being fast enough, but also by not being strong enough for long enough, that is, by not bearing enough, by not being patient enough.

In "Underground Russia" (1883), Stepniak-Kravchinski argued that, "the strong is vanquished, not by the arms of his adversary, but by the continuous tension of his own strength, which exhausts him."<sup>84</sup> As it turns out, however, this exhaustion is precisely the problem that plagues terrorism.

Normally, the visible part of the terrorist's life is of course its terror: perfectly timed, over before you know it, often novel, and always newsworthy. But when not terrorizing, what does the terrorist do? "I told him that terrorist work does not just consist in going out onto the street with a bomb in one's hands," wrote BO leader Boris Savinkov, "I told him that it is much more petty, dull, and difficult than one would think; that a terrorist has to live for months on end as a commoner, barely meeting friends, doing the most difficult and unpleasant work – systematic stake-out."<sup>85</sup> Savinkov was discussing terrorist praxis circa 1900, but his assessment can be applied to the days of "Narodnaya Volya" without risking exaggeration: the stake-out for the March 1, 1881, attempt on Alexander II, for example, started as early as late 1880.<sup>86</sup> Deregulated from the rhythms of his or her own life, the terrorist records the routines of his targets. And after that, what the terrorist principally does is wait – until the time (to strike) is 'right.' The world of the terrorist is thus a world suspended in time, yet most attentive to timing. And what the sources tell us is that these extremities are utterly unnerving. Savinkov's "Pale Horse" (1909) is undoubtedly the most self-conscious meditation on this temporal experience, but decidedly not the only existing evidence thereof.

Sometime before 1909, in Alassio, the coastal resort on the Italian Riviera, where, "for some reason," as one historian put it, old revolutionaries liked to hang out, Vera Figner, as mentioned above, ran into Azef.<sup>87</sup> As can be gathered from her memoirs, the reason that Figner was there, in Alassio, was to rest and recover, to nurse her nerves, which had been devastated by twenty years of solitary confinement in a tsarist prison.<sup>88</sup> When she was nevertheless during this time-out approached by Azef to join the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SR), she therefore reasonably refused on account of these nerves, which, she writes, "would not be able to bear even a few weeks of the fevered revolutionary life" – a life she remembered, of course, from her years as an active member of "Narodnaya Volya."<sup>89</sup>

This "fevered" revolutionary life, indeed, bore down on the body and wore down the body with such force that nervous conditions were not infrequent among terrorists. The leadership of "Narodnaya Volya," for example, was psycho-physically wrecked by the

84 STEPNIAK *Underground Russia*, p. 257.

85 SAVINKOV *Izbrannoe*, p. 130.

86 SIDORENKO *Iz vospominaniy*, p. 50.

87 PRAISMAN *Terroristy i revolyutsionery*, p. 242.

88 See FIGNER *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, vol. 6., pp. 261, 293–295, 369, and 372.

89 FIGNER *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy*, vol. 3, p. 160.

"emperor hunt," with Zhelyabov losing sleep and appetite, suffering from fainting spells, and talking of his shot nerves and his plans to rest in some southern village as soon as the assassination was over and done with.<sup>90</sup> Tikhomirov, in fact, was at one point shipped south to recover, and after the final attempt on Alexander II, it was said that, "Sonya [Perovskaya] has lost her head."<sup>91</sup>

Now it has often been noted that there are many cases of insanity, suicide, and neurasthenia among terrorists (and not just Russian revolutionary terrorists). Karakozov, for one, claimed to have decided to assassinate the tsar while he, Karakozov, was a patient in a Petersburg clinic, where he was undergoing electroshock treatment for the "not entirely normal state of the nervous system."<sup>92</sup> Besides Karakozov, Governor Kropotkin's assassin, Grigoriy Gol'denberg, seems not only to have been suicidal – twice, at least, he forced his friends into allowing him to commit an act of terrorism by threatening that he would otherwise, "put a bullet in his head," and he did finally kill himself in prison – but also to have suffered (epileptic) seizures.<sup>93</sup> Such examples, as Anna Geifman has shown, multiply in the early twentieth century.<sup>94</sup> But the wrong move to make is to then conclude that this tells us something essential about terrorist psychology, to assume that there exists an unproblematic link between, so to say, psychiatric patients and political impatience. Instead, we should inquire into how this impatient psychology was politically and/or culturally conditioned, or at least how it emerged from the experience of the revolutionary struggle.

During the 1881 trial of the tsaricides, prosecutor N. V. Murav'ev repeatedly cited testimony (obtained from the first bomb thrower – and turncoat – Rysakov) showing that especially the days just prior to March 1 had been very taxing – and very rushed: "We have to hurry," said Zhelyabov [...] – and they hurried;" "They had to hurry [...] the last hurried preparations were made;" Rysakov [began to notice in Zhelyabov and his friends] "a feverish hurry."<sup>95</sup> In her testimony, Perovskaya refused to explain the reason for this "rush," but we now know that it was because time seemed to be quickly running out. Members of "Narodnaya Volya's" Executive Committee were being arrested one after another during those days – most damagingly, Zhelyabov on Friday February 27 – and on Saturday February 28 the conspiratorial cheese shop on the Malaya Sadovaya had been searched.<sup>96</sup> After the search, members of the Executive Committee "immediately" gathered and decided that, "come what may," they would act "tomorrow, March 1."<sup>97</sup> Zhelyabov called this time "hot" and Figner, too, as mentioned, described life during the

90 FOOTMAN *The Alexander Conspiracy*, p. 247; VOLK *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 111; VORONSKIY *Zhelyabov*, pp. 161–162.

91 FOOTMAN *The Alexander Conspiracy*, p. 198; TYRKOV *K sobytiyu 1 marta 1881 goda*, p. 151. On Perovskaya see also TYRKOV *K sobytiyu 1 marta 1881 goda*, p. 150 and IVANOV *Iz vospominaniy*, p. 239.

92 GARF f. 272, op. 1, d. 10, l. 38.

93 IISH, *Partiya Socialistov-Revolyucionerov (PSR)*, 70: L.A. Dichiskulo: *Vospominaniya o Gol'denburge*.

94 See GEIFMAN *Thou Shalt Kill*, especially chs. 4 and 5.

95 Delo 1-go marta 1881 g., p. 28 and pp. 162–163.

96 Testimony of Perovskaya cited in Delo 1-go marta 1881 goda, p. 261.

97 A. V. Yakimova, cited in Delo 1-go marta 1881 goda, p. 102.

"emperor hunt" as "feverish and anxious," and referred to the period as a whole as "those hurried times."<sup>98</sup>

Terrorism, that is, tested the nerves not only of those who became its targets, but also its perpetrators, and tested them so sorely, Figner insisted, that: "No nervous system could long endure such an intense strain."<sup>99</sup> Other sources support Figner's claim – and, perhaps, the idea that *therefore* nerves actually propel terrorism forward, past the wait.

Why was the wait so unbearable? First, there was the sheer challenge of living underground. The effects this life had on the nerves, for example, were the reason why Zhelyabov "rushed" Khalturin to hurry up and execute his plan to blow up the Winter Palace already: having posed as a palace worker for four months, Khalturin, according to Zhelyabov, was at the breaking point. Khalturin denied it, though in fact he broke down immediately following the explosion.<sup>100</sup> Second, there was the moral strength needed to prepare oneself for death, that is, for both killing and dying, and there were plenty of terrorists who did not know themselves well enough and could not go through with their planned attempts. Timothy Mikhaylov, for example, got cold feet and did not throw his bomb at Alexander II on March 1, 1881.<sup>101</sup> Even Stepniak-Kravchinski, whose daredevil daylight stabbing of Mezentshev astonished all, had already twice before passed Mezentshev on the street and not stabbed him.<sup>102</sup> (According to Morozov, it was only the news of fellow revolutionary Koval'skiy's hanging that gave Kravchinskiy the moral fortitude to overcome his nature and carry out his plan.<sup>103</sup>) And finally there was the stamina required for the actual struggle, for – witness "Narodnaya Volya's" "emperor hunt" – success was rare and failure the rule.

No wonder that according to revolutionaries, the best trait to have was "energy," the worst, "nerves." Lyubatovich, as mentioned, read Zhelyabov's energy as a sign of his revolutionary superiority. Morozov said Mikhaylov was "the most energetic" among members of "Zemlya i Volya" and Tikhomirov that Mikhaylov's constitution was such that "every doctor would have fallen in love with him."<sup>104</sup> In general, Tikhomirov wrote that those who would become members of "Zemlya i Volya" were "especially energetic," that Zundeleovich had "strong nerves," Aptekman was "all nerves," and Plekhanov was marked by a "nervous timidity" and "great nervousness."<sup>105</sup> Therefore, time-out in European resorts, imperial clinics, and southern villages were in fact quite real emergency measures against "neurasthenia," against the damage done to the body by the nerve-wrecking experience of life as a terrorist.

So can a real link be forged after all between nerves and terror, nervous patients and impatient terrorists? Some terrorists, e.g. Figner, did actually posit such a link, but – and this is crucial – via history: "The weaker their nerves, *and the more oppressive the life*

98 IVANOV *Iz vospominaniy*, p. 229; FIGNER *Memoirs*, p. 113.

99 FIGNER *Memoirs*, p. 97 and p. 99.

100 FOOTMAN *The Alexander Conspiracy*, pp. 179–182; VOLK *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 103; VORONSKIY *Zhelyabov*, pp. 186–189.

101 TYRKOV *K sobytiyu 1 marta 1881 goda*, p. 150.

102 MOROZOV *Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 317.

103 MOROZOV *Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 333.

104 MOROZOV *Povesti*, vol. 2, p. 411, and TIKHOMIROV *Vospominaniya*, p. 131.

105 TIKHOMIROV *Vospominaniya*, pp. 125, 126, and 128.



around them, the greater was their exaltation at the thought of revolutionary terror."<sup>106</sup> The less the nerves could patiently bear the strain of life, all the more did a taste for political impatience make itself felt. But because "impatient" refers to an inability to suffer not only delay, but also "pain, trouble, or evil," the term must be read with respect to time and space concurrently; it must be read, that is, with respect to, and respect for, history.<sup>107</sup>

## 7.

In general, revolutionary discourse is about motion: the revolutionary *movement*, going to the people, "Narodnaya Volya" meant to 'accelerate' history, was a motor, became a brake, a broken carriage, etc.<sup>108</sup> History is a highway, apparently, or a race on that highway, or a vehicle in that race on that highway.<sup>109</sup> Or terrorism is that vehicle, or a short cut taken in that vehicle, a time warp, or a wormhole. The sources are not at all always consistent, but that, in fact, is partially the point.

Terror was fast from the start ("Terror," said Robespierre, "is nothing other than justice, prompt ..."), but it was never always only impatient.<sup>110</sup> The time of terror was thick. Terrible, of course, and tense, but also sometimes just unbearably boring. Then hot and hurried, running ahead, running a fever, and sleepless, but suddenly slow again, and again just unbearably boring. The time was supposed to be soon, and supposedly on schedule. Or maybe not, and maybe even never. There were delays and repetitions, and frequently a dull routine. Time was lost, times flew. It was a time of events, expectant of decisive moments, and of the end.

<sup>106</sup> FIGNER *Memoirs*, p. 120. Emphasis mine.

<sup>107</sup> The cluster "pain, trouble, or evil" was culled from definition 1.a. under the heading "patience" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 11, p. 342.

<sup>108</sup> Kel'ner writes of the terrorists as those who wanted to kill and be killed so that "the wheel of history would sharply and decisively accelerate." (KEL'NER, in *Delo 1-go Marta 1881 goda*, p. 3). For the language of the brake, see for example A. I. Guchkov at the Third Duma apropos of the Stolypin assassination: "Terror at that time [i.e. 1860s – early 80s] acted as a brake on the progressive pace of reform – and has done so ever since." Cited in BUDNITSKIY *Terrorizm*, p. 4. Volk posits "Narodnaya Volya" as a motor of the revolutionary movement, but those who tried to restore "Narodnaya Volya" during the 1890s as a "brake" on that movement. (Volk *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 463). The language of the motor and brake he cites and adopts from *Istoriya Kommunisticheskoy partii*, vol. 1, p. 533. Finally, Plekhanov compared "Narodnaya Volya" of the 1890s to a carriage, the only part of which remained was a wheel: "We can all agree that it was a good carriage in its time, but the wheel that remains is nevertheless not a vehicle, and you cannot travel in it." Cited in BUDNITSKIY *Terrorizm*, p. 104.

<sup>109</sup> "The wheel of history" is a tic in this discourse, e.g. Figner writes "The wheel of history is against us," Plekhanov that populists thought they could "turn the historical wheel in this or that direction." Figner cited in KAN *Narodnaya Volya*, p. 119; PLEKHANOV *Sochineniya*, vol. 2., p. 132.

<sup>110</sup> ROBESPIERRE *Virtue and Terror*, p. 115.

## Abbreviations

BO	<i>Boevaya Organizatsiya</i> (Fighting Organization)
GARF	<i>Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii</i> (State Archive of the Russian Federation)
IISH	International Institute for Social History
PSR	<i>Partiya sotsialistov-revolutsionerov</i> (Socialist-revolutionary Party)

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*Summary*

**Time of Terror, Terror of Time  
On the Impatience of Russian Revolutionary Terrorism  
(Early 1860s – Early 1880s)**

A principal discursive tic in the history and historiography of the Russian revolutionary movement identifies terrorism as „impatient“: terrorists are those who constitutionally cannot abide the natural unfolding of the historical process and therefore try to force history forward faster through artificial crises. On this reading, terrorists stand twice condemned: they are politically immature and historically ignorant. On the basis of evidence culled from revolutionary proclamations, newspapers, and memoirs from the early 1860s to the early 1880s, this article argues that temporality is indeed the essential category through which to grasp terrorism, but that the process of radicalization that leads towards the emergence of this type of political violence can only be understood by taking into account the terrorists' own visions and experiences of historical time, and that these, ultimately, undermine the simplistic and totalizing causal explanations of terrorism that are implied by the “impatience” narrative.