

Narratives of Exclusion in the Discourse of the Stalinist Great Terror

Vladimir Paperni

Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, University of Haifa, Israel

Copyright © 2015 by authors, all rights reserved. Authors agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

Abstract The Great Terror in the USSR of the mid-1930s was an implementation of a social engineering policy aiming at exclusion (extermination or isolation) of certain social, political, and ethnic groups. This policy was embodied in the "Manichean" Stalinist discourse, which was based on imagery of the ideal, absolutely good Soviet polity enclosed within multiple real and symbolic boundaries that various evil "enemies" were constantly trying to trespass. Identification/invention of "the enemies" was realized by means of narratives of exclusion. The author of the offering article analyzes mechanisms of generation, structural peculiarities, and cultural background of narratives of exclusion, which played exceptionally important role in the Stalinist repressive practice.

Keywords Stalinist, Terror, Narrative, Exclusion, Boundary

1. Introduction

This article focuses on analyses of the narratives of exclusion which were systematically generated within the framework of the Stalinist discourse used by the Soviet regime in the years of the Great Terror. The analyses is based on documentary sources – mainly, on decrees of the Soviet leadership and orders, protocols of interrogations and other acts issued by Soviet secret police, NKVD, officials which were published in [2], [5], [8], and [16].

Mass purge campaign in the USSR in mid-1930s is usually called the Great Terror – following the title of the Robert Conquest's classic book [3]. However, as I (after and with many of the researchers of that epoch) suppose, the major content of that epoch had been the social engineering – transformation of the Soviet polity. Soviet leaders openly declared their intention to build the ideal communist polity by means of the *exclusion* ("purging", "cleansing") all the "enemies", "criminals" and "socially dangerous elements". Terrorization and intimidation of the population had only been an instrument for achieving this goal.

The Soviet regime was repressive in its political nature. Mass executions, mass arrests, mass imprisonment in the "labor" camps, and mass deportations were for this regime a normal way of controlling and changing the polity. From its first year till the end of epoch of Stalin in 1953, this regime consistently used repressions as the major method not only for suppressing its political and ideological opponents, but also for solving relevant social, political and economic tasks. After Stalin, the level of repressions and their cruelty sharply decreased, but even in that relatively "vegetarian" period, thousands of people a year became the victims of politically motivated prosecutions.

The Great Terror was one of four mass repressive campaigns which are carried out by the Soviet authorities – along with the Red Terror (1918 – 1921), the terror in the time of Collectivization (1929 – 1933), and the terror in the period of World War II. The victims of every one of these campaigns amounted to many millions of people. However, even in comparison to the other Soviet repressive campaigns, the Great Terror stands out due to its extreme cruelty, broadness of targeting numerous different social groups, and intensity of terrorizing the society propaganda.

The Great Terror, in its narrow and specific definition, constituted a short-term, perfectly organized, and exclusively intensive mass-repressive operation, which lasted for about 16 months, from August 1937 to November 1938. The purge campaign which followed the killing of Kirov in December 1934 was some kind of prelude to this operation. The Great Terror was launched by a secret decree of the Bolshevik Party's Central Committee Politburo *On anti-Soviet Elements* issued on July 2, 1937 and by the "operational order" no. 00447 *Concerning punishment of former kulaks, criminals, and other anti-Soviet elements* issued on July 30, 1937. These acts established the initial list of target groups to be repressed, the initial limits/quotas of "persons subject to punitive measures", and special extra-judicial institutions for providing fast repressions – regional "troikas". Additional Politburo decrees and NKVD orders issued later regulated expansion of the mass-terror operation as well as its halting at the end of November 1938 (see in English the documents mentioned above in [5, 470 – 471; 473 – 480]).

2. Background

The discourse of the Great Terror, as well as all other variants of Bolshevik/Soviet discourse, was built as two levels' semiotic construction. The upper level of this construction was organized as relatively sophisticated, abstract, and (pseudo)scientific theoretical *doctrine* (named as Marxism, or Marxism-Leninism, or "teaching Marx – Engels - Lenin – Stalin"). The low level of this construction was organized through storytelling - as a great many of very simple, primitive, concrete, and available even for uneducated people or young children *narratives*. All these narratives were integrated by means mythological, messianic, utopian, and eschatological meta-narrative of the Bolshevik worldview. According to this meta-narrative, the Last Great Struggle between the Sons of Light (i.e. World Proletariat and his "Child", the Soviet state) and the Sons of Dark (the World Capitalism and his agents) is committed in the history as well as in the everyday life, and the happy end of that Struggle, i.e. the full victory of the Sons of Light, is close. As A. Akhiezer marked, the Bolshevik interpretation of the reality in such strong dualistic terms was emerged from the traditional for the Russian Culture archaic Manichean vision [1, 72 -78; 393 – 395].

Interpreting the world through storytelling the new Stalinist "Manichaeism" produced two opposite kinds of narratives – narratives of glorification, in which the Heroes of the Last Struggle were praised, and narratives of humiliation, in which Anti-heroes of the Last Struggle were shamed.

On the doctrinal level of the Leninist discourse and of the early Stalinist one, two frontlines of the class struggle were recognized: external (against the World Capital) and internal (against landlords, capitalists and kulaks within the new Soviet society). In July 1928, Stalin declared "aggravation of the class struggle in the period of transition from the capitalism to the socialism" [14, 170]. This doctrinal motto legitimized the repressive politics of "the collectivization and elimination of the kulaks as a class". But in November 1936, in his speech on the new Soviet constitution, Stalin stated that the new, socialist society without class antagonisms and national conflicts had been generally constructed in the USSR [15, 125 – 129]. This statement initiated a new version of the major Stalinist discourse spectacularly cancelling the internal frontline of the class struggle. At the same time, the internal enemies were not canceled by any means, they were only *renamed*. For the new general nomination of the internal enemies the updated traditional term (which was trendy in the very early discourse of the Bolshevik regime) the "enemies of the people" returned to be used. "Class enemies", "counter-revolutionists", "remains of exploiter classes" begun to be interpreted as sorts of "the enemies of the people", which are connected with the Main Enemy from abroad.

Such semiotic maneuvers, such manipulation with the discourse had a certain political objective. They legitimized

the increasing of repressions by means creating a new word-picture in which the Soviet polity was represented as deeply divided by invisible boundary into two different parts: "bright", "pure", "monolithic" and "happy" multinational brotherhood of "builders of communism", from one side, and uncountable and omnipresent mass of dirty and evil enemies, from another side. This word-picture was *completely fictional* and it needed to be supported by fabrication of *fictional* narratives on activities of the enemies. In fact, Stalinist discourse was not really aimed at fighting with foreign enemies – "German fascists", "English and French imperialists", "Japanese militarists" and their real agents. The ones to be humiliated, excluded, and repressed were certain "elements" (individuals) and "contingents" (social and ethnic categories) within the Soviet population. As a result, in the Stalinist storytelling, not the narratives about foreign enemies, but the *narratives of exclusion*, which labeled selected people as enemies, played the crucial role.

In the real Soviet society at the mid 1930s, there were many people (may be, the majority of the population), which didn't accepted and/or were potentially dangerous for the Soviet regime. On its the doctrinal level, the Stalinist discourse labeled as a target of repressions exactly such real categories of people: common criminals, "ex-kulaks", "ex-landlords", "ex-capitalists", ex-members of former parties (Socialists-revolutionaries, Mensheviks, etc.), members of the former oppositional groups within the ruling party (Trotskyites, Bukharinites, etc.), and so on. However, on its narrative level, the Stalinist discourse labeled as a target of repressions a virtual many of spies, terrorists, wreckers, and saboteurs sent by foreign intelligence services. Hundreds of thousands of denunciators, thousands of interrogators, hundreds of Bolshevik leaders, and – last but not least – Stalin himself invented uncountable stories about the enemies and their crimes. In the process of "inventing the enemy", a many of ordinary people was involved (see on this theme in [6]). A many of people believed in the virtual world-picture, which was created by the Stalinist discourse, as authentic. They actually lived in the fictional world and transformed themselves into some sort of literary personages – participants of the Great Struggle with the enemies of the people. G. T. Rittersporn pictured a remarkable portrait of one of such personages - a young NKVD officer who was captured by Germans during their invasion in the USSR and narrated them, to their great surprise, about numerous and omnipresent German spies which were infiltrated into the Soviet society [12, 99 – 100].

3. Metamorphoses of the Concept of Boundary

The crucial element of the narrative text is boundary. As J. Lotman marked, "within the framework of each of substructures which makeup the semiosphere there are elements which are fixtures in the space and elements with relative freedom of movement. The former belong to social,

cultural, religious and other structures, while the latter have a higher degree of freedom of choice in their behavior. A hero of the second type can *act*, that is can cross the boundaries of prohibitions in a way that others cannot. Like Orpheus or Soslan from the epic of Narts, he can cross the boundary separating the living from the dead, (...). He may be a noble robber or a *picaro*, sorcerer, spy, detective, terrorist or supermen – the point is that he able to do what others cannot, namely to cross structural boundaries of cultural space” [10, 151]. In the Stalinist narratological semiotics, the term boundary was connected with two different realities - with the geographical borders of the Soviet state (that had to be “locked” in order to prevent the “hostile environment” from harming the Soviet polity) and with borderlines of the social, national and ideological differentiation within the Soviet society (that had to be eliminated in order to achieve social homogeneity of the Soviet polity). But in the both of its meanings, the boundary was interpreted in a strong mythological Manichean way as separating the inner world of Good from the outside world of Evil. Everyone who considered being a representative of the outside world was a subject to accusation of trespassing a boundary, of arriving from the otherworld.

First of all, such accusations were imposed on foreign emigrants, on Russian re-immigrants, on former prisoners of war, on Soviet citizens who had worked abroad, including Soviet diplomats and spies. A series of special orders that demanded to search spies and enemies inside that category of the population were issued (see [16, 281 -285]), and many tens of thousands people were executed or sent to labor camps. In many cases, people had got 7 – 8 years in a labor camp as “suspects of espionage” without any specific accusation, i.e. without any specific narrative, which describe their criminal activities. Soviet citizens who had worked for foreign companies or had contacts with foreigners, or even fluently spoke or studied foreign languages were also subject of suspicions of espionage, because in the mythologized thinking of their prosecutors, they also trespassed a boundary between “ours” and “enemies”.

In late 1937, an “Estonian espionage organization” called “The Military Fraternity” was “disclosed” in the Tartaric Republic. According to the report written by the People’s Commissar for Internal Affairs of Tartary Mikhailov, the name of this organization was “a legal name of the Red Guard section of the Estonian culture house” [8, 239]. The real background of this case is absolutely transparent: NKVD had to find a group of Estonians to arrest and sentence to death. In order to create the narrative of exclusion for these people, the fact of their belonging to that specific club was used. The fact that the repressed Estonians were loyal to the Bolshevik state and had fought for it during the Civil War was not taken into consideration. The fact that they actually were not foreigners (they lived in Estonia before the Civil War when Estonia was a part of Russian state) was also irrelevant. The only relevant fact was the belonging of these people to a “national contingent suspected

of espionage”.

In the epoch of the Great Terror, repressions were conducted against Poles, Germans, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Greeks, Koreans, Japanese, Afghans, Iranians, Romanians, Bulgarians, and some other national minorities belonging to the main nationalities of the countries, directly bordering the USSR (see on this theme [16, 267 – 268, 275 – 277, 285 -286], [11, 297 321]; according to L. Naumov, in the framework of “national operations” about 335 thousands of people were repressed, 247 thousands of them were executed [11, 323 – 325]). The secret documents of repressive authorities disguised those minorities under such euphemisms as “espionage contingents”, “malevolent contingents of other nationalities”, “contingents suspected of espionage”. However, direct nominations were also frequently used: the “Polish operation”, the “German operation”, etc. Reports of regional NKVD branches did not resort to any discourse ceremonies whatsoever: their statistic tables explicitly listed the number of the arrested per this or that nationality.

The Stalinist meta-narrative of exclusion symbolically identified all these national groups with the relevant foreign states (Poland, Finland, Estonia, and so on) and symbolically interpreted these groups as potential trespassers of the border of the Soviet state. It was the task of Stalinist storytellers, NKVD interrogators, to invent an appropriate individual narrative about espionage for everyone from that category of people, which was selected by them as a target of repression.

An additional group of the narratives of exclusion was comprised of the narratives about saboteurs, wreckers, socially dangerous elements, anti-Soviet conspirers, terrorists and propagandists, etc. It was assumed that the enemies of this type were acting from the other side of the virtual boundaries separating the ideal Soviet polity from its internal otherworld. The boundaries of this kind were located not only in the social space but also in the social time. The trespassers of the boundary in the time were called “ex-people”. Official documents thoroughly listed the categories of these ex-people: ex-kulaks, ex-landlords and ex-capitalists, ex-members of the former anti-Soviet parties, ex-members of the former anti-party oppositions, etc [5, 474 – 475].

Not long before the Great Terror began, in January 1937, the USSR population Census was conducted. This Census revealed the fact that 57, 7% of its participants had openly admitted that they believed in God. All this happened after 20 years of severe struggle of the Soviet government against religion. The official ideological doctrine positioned the Soviet society as an atheistic one. All the believers were considered “ex-people” – the people from the past. However, the number of these people was too big to repress them all. The repressions (and this was mentioned in the respective documents) were geared not against the “common believers” but against “active religious functionaries”: priests, mullahs, ministers of Protestant communities, etc [see 5, 301 – 302, 306]).

The official ideology depicted the ideal Soviet society as

totally free from crime. Masses of common criminals that existed in the Soviet society were also considered “ex-people” who came from beyond the boundary, which separates the bright present from the dark past. Such an argumentation enabled the authorities to attribute common criminals to the category of anti-Soviet elements.

In November 1938, the end of the Great Terror was marked with the dismissal of its chief organizer, the head of NKVD Nikolai Yezhov. Half a year later, Yezhov was arrested. According to the standard procedure of investigation which was arranged under his control, he was tortured, agreed to cooperate with his interrogators, and told them numerous fictional stories about his anti-Soviet activities. The protocols with these stories were sent personally to Stalin by the new NKVD chef Lavrentii Beria. On the base of these stories, Yezhov was charged with multiple indictments [2, 60 - 146]. These indictments are very interesting within the context of the topic discussed here. In fact, they contain stories that belong to all the three main genres of the Stalinist narratives of exclusion:

1. Stories about his spying for several foreign intelligence services (Polish, German, English, and Japanese), as well as a story about his “promise of territorial concessions” in favor of Poland, Germany and Japan (changing the Border!) belong to *a narrative genre about the foreign agents - trespassers of the boundary between the Soviet state and the evil outside world*;
2. Stories about his participation in the anti-Soviet plot, his intention to commit terrorist attacks against the leaders of the Soviet government, and his preparation towards the anti-Soviet putsch belongs to *a narrative genre about internal enemies of people – trespassers of the virtual boundary between the ideal Soviet polity and its alien otherworld*;
3. Stories about his activities “for anti-Soviet and self-interest purposes”, as “an organizer of a number of murders of people undesirable for him”, and as a homosexual, “involved in the sexual intercourse with men (sodomy)” [2, 240] belong to *a narrative genre about terrible criminals, who had trespassed all kinds of symbolic boundaries, including those separating normal humans from monsters and "scum of the earth"*.

Narratives about super-criminals - trespasser of all the boundaries were usually used for excluding former high-rank Bolshevik party and government leaders who had been ousted from power. Yezhov was one of them, and his investigators had to obtain a many of horrifying stories about him as a spy and anti-Soviet plotter, but they had no need to invent the stories about him as a murderer and sexual pervert. They successfully interpreted some of his routine activities as murders and they only based on facts when they accused him in prohibited sexual behavior. In the course of the investigation, Yezhov was forced to tell the detailed story of his sexual contacts with multiple women and men. The investigators thoroughly recorded his sexual partners’

testimonies about his predilection for oral and anal intercourses. The investigators’ purpose in this case was quite obvious. They had to exclude Yezhov as a terrible pervert, because deposed Soviet leaders had to be subject to this type of exclusion. The official propaganda of the Great Terror period used to glorify Yezhov as a national hero. The depth of his fall had to be correspondent with the height of his elevation. Yezhov’s sexual record perfectly fit that goal. In the bill of indictment, the investigator did not forget to mention that Yezhov had committed his sexual perversions for “anti-Soviet purposes”, i.e. that he was not a simple pervert, but an anti-Soviet one.

Yezhov’s trial was a secret one; therefore, his prosecutors did not bother to support the indictments against him with a broad-scale propagandistic argumentation. The picture was quite different when we take a look at the indictments against the victims of the Moscow Show Trials, especially at the indictments against defendants of the third of them - the members the “Bloc of Trotskyites and Bukharinites” (March 1938). In the course of that trial, which became a real propaganda gala of the Stalinist discourse, the 21 defendants were accused in espionage, sabotage, wrecking, anti-Soviet plots, terror, adding powdered glass to the flour, murdering the writer A.M. Gorky, his son Maxim and several Soviet leaders by means of harmful medical treatment, attempts to poison the People’s Commissar Yezhov as well as preparation for Lenin’s assassination, and other terrible crimes. During the trial, the Procurator General Andrey Vyshinsky referred to its defendants as “rabid dogs” and “cruel monsters”. He accused them of having originally been the monsters and at the same time the enemies of the people who masked themselves as honest Soviet leaders. These accusations were persistently and frequently repeated and developed by the official Soviet propaganda.

We may find a very typical example of such propaganda in the poem *Unichtozhit! (Obliterate!)* published in *Pravda* in the time of the third trial and signed by the “*Kazakh people’s poet*” Jambul Jabayev. The real authors of his numerous poems dedicated to glorification of the Soviet leaders and to humiliation of the enemies of people were his Russian literary secretaries. In the poem *Unichtozhit!* they write:

The traps have caught those bloody dogs,
 As fierce as a wolf and as sly as a fox,
 With blood being cold as the gray vipers’ one,
 They used to effuse their poisons around.
 Contemptible carrion, putrescible creep,
 Like cadavers did they infection transmit.
 These blood-stained hirelings have nothing in equal,
 They are fascist bastards, assassins, delinquents.
 This dark-soul riffraff must be terminated,
 And plague-stricken corpses must be liquidated [4].
 (Translated by F. Furman)

In the cited fragment we find a collection of pseudo-folkloric (fakeloric) images in an oriental style, which identified enemies of people with animals – alive and

dead ones. This kind of images was systematically used by the Stalinist propaganda in verbal and in visual forms. In uncountable caricatures published in the Soviet press enemies of people were pictured as dogs, snakes, octopuses, pigs, and other animals, and as demonic beings (see examples of such caricatures with some commentaries in [7, 229 – 245; 336 -351]).

Comparing a cruel murderer to an animal is a widespread cliché. However, the Stalinist discourse used this cliché in its direct archaic, mythological meaning. The “enemies of people” were claimed to be inhuman – animals or demons in the human guise.

As Alexander Akhiezer have marked, constructing images of the enemy the Stalinist ideology appealed to the widespread archaic belief in shape-shifting, which had preserved in the mentality of many of Russian people [1, 525 – 535]. This Akhiezer’s observation is supported by testimonies concerning the reaction of common people to Stalinist repressions found in NKVD secret reports. In the report written by S. Mironov, the head of the West Siberian branch of NKVD (dated August 9, 1937), we find the following words of an “ex-kulak from Petrovsky District”: “Kulaks are being arrested so that they do not understand what is going on now, because the power is in the hands of traitors with foreign connections” [8, 180]. This “ex-kulak” opposed the Soviet system; however, it is typical that he explained mass repressions according to the cliché dictated by the official repressive discourse (the people in power are not the ones they claim to be; they are shape-shifters – foreign agents who pretend to be the correct, *bona fide* government). In his report to Stalin (dated September 8, 1937), Yezov cited the following fragment from the denunciation sent to the NKVD by a group of peasants: “We request that the Velizh NKVD cleanse our kolkhoz from enemies. The kolkhoz chairperson Kosarev is a drunkard. The kolkhoz has not been audited for more than a year. We had written to the district land department but there was no reply. Evidently, Trotskyites are sitting there” [8, 203]. This denunciation reveals its authors’ desire to interpret such routine phenomena as alcohol abuse and bureaucratic faults in the context of searching for a hidden demonic enemy – shape-shifters. It is no wonder the Trotskyites have been mentioned there. Of course, the peasants-denunciators were unlikely to have seen at least one real Trotskyite, but they were well aware of the Trotskyite’s image created by the official propaganda. And just like the members of the archaic society would ask an expert-sorcerer to kill a shape-shifter, these Russian peasants addressed their request to the “sorcerers” from NKVD.

Exceptionally interesting example of perception of the enemies in the Russian province we find in the article by a researcher of the contemporary folklore N.G. Komelina [9, 147 – 177]. N.G. Komelina focuses on analyses of narratives about a religious community of *runners-wanderers* headed by Christophor Zyrianov, which was active in the in the Vyatka/Kirov region of Russia in 1920s – 1930s. The members of the community refused to have permanent

houses and personal documents, they lived in forests, and they refused to get in touch with the authorities. That was their manner of “running away” from the evil and corrupt world of the Antichrist. Zyryanov and other members of his community (officially called a “sect”) were arrested by NKVD and accused of counter-revolutionary activities and ritual killings more than 60 people including young children. After the long interrogation, the leaders of the “sect” confessed that they forced its members to commit suicides in the form of self-immolation, starving to death, drowning and self-poisoning, and so on. Stories about terrific crimes of runners-wanderers were published in the local press – and were briefly retold by the Procurator General Andrey Vyshinsky in his report to Stalin (1936). N.G. Komelina brings quotations from stories accusing runners-wanderers of various ritual killings, which were told by her informants – our contemporaries, before a few years ago. These stories include such motifs as sacrificing girls who were allegedly sunk in the Black Lake, kidnapping children, self-immolation, suffocating ill elderly with pillows, etc. According to N.G. Komelina, many of her informants preserve old newspaper clips with the articles about those “sect” members called killers, and rely on information contained in these clips. On the other hand, N.G. Komelina mentioned that the stories about ritual killings allegedly performed by the runners-wanderers had appeared long before the Stalin’s era – back in the 18th and 19th centuries, when these stories were supported by the official Orthodox Church. This leads us to very simple conclusions. Stereotypes and prejudices of the archaic mythological beliefs determined in the past and determine in our time the social consciousness of a many of habitants of Russian villages and small towns. These people were in the past and are ready now to believe that their neighbor, who is different from them, who is alien and other, is a dangerous demonic enemy of the people, is a shape-shifter, who came from “beyond the border” and is capable of committing the most horrible acts. In the long run, this is a key to the success and longevity of the Stalinist discourse.

As J. Lotman have pointed out, “one of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary. (...) Every culture begins by dividing the world into ‘its own’ internal space and ‘their’ external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture. But the actual division is one of human cultural universals. The boundary may separate living from dead, settled people from nomadic ones, the town from the plains; it may be state frontier, or social, national, confessional, or any other kind of frontier” [10, 131]. It is well known that in the traditional (“folkloric”) cultures of small and religiously and ethnically homogeneous communities, the alien, as a habitant of otherworld beyond the boundary, is usually subject to dehumanization and demonization: he considered to be an enemy with a soul of an animal or a devil. In the 20th century, political leaders of two gigantic and exceptionally heterogeneous countries, Russia and Germany, tried to transform their countries into homogeneous and similar to

small traditional communities. As a result, they constructed their political strategy on the archaic basement of dehumanization and demonization of the religious, ideological, social, and ethnical *other*. A prominent German anti-liberal and pro-Nazis political thinker Carl Schmitt mentioned: “the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy. (...) The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions. The political enemy needs not to be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible ” [13, 26 -27]. Aspiring to speak in moderate and pragmatic way Carl Schmitt carefully avoided total dehumanization and demonization of the other. Bolshevik and Nazi leaders had no need in such careful approach: they constructed archaized and mythologized images of enemies as inhuman beings in the purpose to exclude and exterminate from the polity all the socially, ethnically, and ideologically undesirable people.

4. Ambivalence of the Stalinist Discourse. Conclusions

The exclusion of the enemies was constantly formulated in the Stalinist discourse on the grounds of judicial concepts. The very concept of crime in the Russian language is known to be clearly associated with the idea of crossing a boundary established by law. This is an exact etymological meaning of the Russian word “*prestuplenie*” (crime) - literally: transgression, trespassing beyond the boundary. However, according to the Stalinist doctrine of the crime, not only persons who considered to be actual law breakers, but also ones who considered to be capable to commit crimes (“socially dangerous elements”, “socially dangerous children” (of prominent “enemies of the people”, etc) were interpreted as criminals.

In early 1938, some NKVD lieutenant Vlasov in the Vologda region invented the following simple method of obtaining confessions of “enemies”. An arrested person was brought from the prison allegedly in order to face a medical examination board. After this “medical examination”, the person was requested to sign a protocol without reading it. The protocol, however, did not contain any medical diagnosis, but the person’s confession in “anti-Soviet crimes” instead. Such protocols were later sent to Vologda and submitted to the “troika”, which used them as legal foundations for sentencing about 100 people to death [8, 438 – 440].

This case was disclosed at the end 1939, when the Soviet leaders conducted campaign of “the resurge the socialist legality”. It was reported by the Procurator General Andrey Vyshinsky to Stalin and Molotov [8, 448 – 449]. The cause of the top Soviet officials' rage ignited by this case is transparent. Vlasov was a rank-and-file soldier of repressions. Executives of his rank had a duty to act according to the pseudo-judicial procedure of prosecution of enemies, which was imposed onto the executive level of the repressive bureaucracy by its top, directive level. They had a duty to accuse their victims in committing crimes, to obtain appropriate narratives about those crimes, and to help (using tortures, if necessary) to their victims to confess those crimes. But Vlasov brutally violated the prescribed procedure. His activity became autonomous. He launched his own repressive discourse. Thus, at one of the meetings with his subordinates, he declared: “The Bolshevik Party Central Committee has ordered us to kill seventy people. We will use cold weapons” (some of Vlasov’s victims were killed in closed rooms with an iron hook, inkpot, etc., other victims were sledged in the winter to the cemetery, where they were axed, and the pieces of their bodies were thrown into graves).

It must be mentioned that Vlasov acted exactly in the terroristic manner of the top Soviet officials, which determined the “limits”, or quotas, of the subjects of repressions without any motivation. The initial “limits” were determined by the Politburo but were occasionally increased upon request of the regional Bolshevik party and secret police leaders. For example, in his letter to the Politburo (dated September 22, 1937) the People's Commissar Yezhov suggested: “Comrade Mikoyan requests permission to shoot 700 additional people belonging to “Dashnaks” (“Dashnaks” – members of a former Armenian national party – *V.P.*) and other anti-Soviet elements in order to cleanse Armenia from anti-Soviet elements. I suggest shooting 1,500 additional people, that is, 2,000 people together with the previously approved number” [8, 207]. This Yezhov’s suggestion – lacking any reasoning whatsoever – was approved by the Politburo, and this decision was *normal* for this top Soviet political body. But *quod licet Jovi non licet bovi*. The rank-and-file executives of the Great Terror had to adhere to certain rules. The fact that many of them frequently got beyond control and used to infringe on the competence of their masters had become the decisive factor, which spurred the authorities not only to halt mass repressions in November 1938 but also to modify their discourse under the slogan of “strengthening of socialist legality”. In the “new” Stalinist repressive discourse, the legal component of the “old” one was increased, and its mythological component of exclusion of the enemies was substantially weakened. Nevertheless, NKVD officials, including their chief Yezhov, which were found responsible for excessive repressions, were accused in being masked “enemies of people” who prosecuted innocent Soviet people for “anti-Soviet purposes”.

Setting up certain *a priori* “limits” regarding the number of anti-Soviet criminals restricted the formal judicial intention of the Stalinist repressive discourse. Yet, this

restriction was not the only one. The “enemies” had to be excluded, and the requirement for that exclusion was accompanied by their exclusion from the system of rules determined by the law. The cases of “the enemies of the people” were investigated in a simplified manner. They were deprived of the right to defense. Their trials were speedily conducted in special courts, mostly by pseudo-court institutions.

Paradoxically but typically, the orders to persecute the enemies who trespassed boundaries of law were arranged as the lists of permitted violations of law, i.e. permitted crimes. It is not too surprising, therefore, that when the supreme power decided to reduce repressions it launched reconsideration as crimes of part of previous activities which were organized under its control. Almost at the same time and on the base of the same principles, the masters of the Stalinist storytelling and their servants invented not only narratives that excluded others, but also narratives that excluded themselves. This ambivalence of the Stalinist repressive discourse caused it to become self-contradictory and self-controversial. In fact, it was the discourse of self-destruction of the ruling party, which had given birth to it. During the Great Terror, the Soviet Communist Party and the new Soviet polity turned to become the mythological Ouroboros snake, which bit its own tail.

As it is well-known and as I have noted above, the discourse of the Great Terror was eventually only a variation, only one of the stages of development of the major discourse of the Bolshevism. From the formal point of view, the Leninist discourse of the Red Terror and the early Stalinist discourse (of the period of the collectivization and the industrialization), from one side, and the Stalinist discourse of the Great Terror, from another side, differ from each other only by some peculiar, albeit very important details. However, the functional difference between these discourses is fundamental. The Leninist terroristic discourse as well as the early Stalinist one orchestrated *revolutionary* policies of the ruling Bolshevik Party, which was aimed at changing the existing structure of the society. The discourse of the Great Terror served completely different policies - conservative policies of maintaining the existing social structures. For these new policies, the old revolutionary turbulent Bolshevik party was no longer needed, and it was destroyed by its own leaders. The new conservative bureaucratic machine which was created by these leaders replaced the old Bolshevik party - under the same name and the same ideological slogans. This machine does not tolerate all innovative and all alien. The years of the Great Terror put an end to the policy of westernization of the previous period, when the Soviet society absorbed numerous foreigners. Now almost all these foreigners were announced spies or suspected in espionage and were purged. It is very characteristically, that repressed

former Bolshevik leaders were usually accused of espionage, i.e. were interpreted as some sort of foreigners/aliens. Within the discourse of the Great Terror, a symbolic identification of a troublesome revolutionary Bolshevik and a foreigner/alien was quite natural: both these figures personified the image of the enemy who came from beyond the boundary to bring disquiet and disorder to the not wishing any radical change, any revolution polity.

REFERENCES

- [1] Akhiezer A.S. *Rossia: kritika istoricheskogo opyta (Sotsiokul'turnaia dinamika Rossii)*. Tom 1: Ot proshlogo k buduschemu. Novosibirsk, Sibirskii khronograf, 1997.
- [2] Beria L.P. *Stalin. Missiia NKVD*, Moskva, Algoritm, 2012.
- [3] Conquest, R. *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.
- [4] Dzhabaiev, D. 'Unichtozhit!' In: *Pravda*, 1938, 3 marta, #61 (7386)/
- [5] Getty, J.A. & Naumov O.V. *The Road to Terror: Stalin and Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999.
- [6] Goldmann, W.Z. *Inventing the Enemy. Denunciation and Terror in Stalin's Russia*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- [7] Halfin, I. *Stalinist confessions. Messianism and Terror at the Leningrad Communist University*. Pittsburg, Pa., University of Pittsburg Press, 2009.
- [8] Junge M., Bordiugov G., Binner R. *Vertikal' bol'shogo terrora. Istoria operatsii po prikazu #00447*. Moskva, Novyi khronograf, 2008.
- [9] Komelina, N. D. 'Khristofor Zyryanov i iego posledovateli v Viatskom kraie: Is istorii konfessional'nykh stereotipov'. In: *Rossiiia- Zapad – Vostok. Literaturnye i kulturnye sviazi*. Vyp. 1, p. 147 – 177.
- [10] Lotman J. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. London, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Publishers ltd., 1990.
- [11] Naumov, L. *Stalin i NKVD*. Moskva, EKSMO, 2007.
- [12] Rittersporn, G. T. 'The omnipresent conspiracy: On Soviet imagery of politics and Social relations in 1930s', In: Getty, J. A. and Manning, R.T. (eds). *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- [13] Schmitt, C. *The concept of the Political*. Rahway, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1977.
- [14] Stalin, I. V. *Sochineniia*. Tom 11. Moskva, OGIZ, 1949.
- [15] Stalin, I. V. *Sochineniia*. Tom. 14. Moskva: Pisatel', 1997.
- [16] Vert, N. Mironenko, S. V. *Istoria stalinskogo Gulaga. Massovye repressii v SSSR*. Tom 1. Moskva, Rossiiskaia politicheskaia entsiklopedia, 2004.