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Abstract

The aim of the research project is to generate a historically substantiated account of terrorism that is theoretically thorough and that goes beyond mere condemnation or justification. Taking its cues from various strands of continental philosophy, the project examines terrorism in the context of a more general economy of power and conceptualizes it as the correlative of transforming technologies of power. By thinking politically through the historical emergence of present politics, the thesis presents a “critical genealogy” of terrorism that is opposed to a search for origins but takes as its starting point terrorism's “historical present.” It thus avoids getting enmeshed in dominant accounts of terrorism.

The underlying assumption of the research project is that accounts of terrorism constitute snapshots of an economy of power, which produces the conditions under which the statement that someone is a terrorist can become true. An historically inflected understanding of terrorism thus presupposes giving up on the idea of truth and identity that can be found in an “original” form of terrorism.

The question guiding the investigation is: Put the case that terrorism does not exist, what history can be written on the basis of those practices that surround it? Neither “Terrorism” nor “the State” can function as points of departure. Instead, the project starts from the procedures that are arranged around terrorism and that enter into temporary and transitory constellations that constitute both terrorism and the state as mobile effects and correlations of operations of power that are at the same time coincidental and politically useful.