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**The Discourse of Terrorism in Ecuador: León Febres-Cordero and Rafael  
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**The Discourse of Terrorism in Ecuador: León Febres-Cordero and  
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## **DEDICATORIA**

A la mayor constante en mi vida, mi mamá.

## **AGRADECIMIENTOS**

A mi familia por su infalible apoyo y motivación,

a mis amigos y amigas por ser un pilar en mi vida,

a mis profesores ser constante inspiración, especialmente a Tamara.

## **RESUMEN**

El discurso del terrorismo en Ecuador ha variado significativamente a lo largo de los distintos gobiernos, particularmente durante las administraciones de Febres-Cordero y Correa. El primero se ha referido a Alfaro Vive Carajo, un grupo subversivo en contra del neoliberalismo, como terrorista. Por otro lado, Correa ha acusado al gobierno de Febres-Cordero de terrorismo de Estado en el pasado, y se ha referido a manifestantes contrarios a su gobierno de la misma manera. Este trabajo argumenta que los cambios en la narrativa de terrorismo son un reflejo de las dinámicas nacionales de poder y grupos de interés. Explora el discurso de terrorismo durante las dos administraciones antes mencionadas y analiza los intereses políticos y económicos que afectan dichas interpretaciones, así como la construcción de memorias colectivas y las implicaciones de la arquitectura del discurso.

## **ABSTRACT**

The discourse of terrorism in Ecuador has significantly varied across different governments, particularly during Febres-Cordero and Correa's administration. The former referred to Alfaro Vive Carajo, a subversive group against neoliberalism, as terrorist. The latter, on the other hand, accused Febres-Cordero's government of state terrorism in the past and referred to protesters contrary to his regime in the same way. This paper argues that changes in the narrative of terrorism are a reflection of the national dynamics of power and interests of groups. It explores the discourse of terrorism during the two aforementioned administrations and analyzes the political and economic interests that affect such understandings, as well as the construction of collective memories and the implications of such discursive architecture.

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# **THE DISCOURSE OF TERRORISM IN ECUADOR: LEÓN FEBRES-CORDERO AND RAFAEL CORREA**

## **Introduction**

Despite its recurrent economic and political instability, Ecuador has been traditionally known as a peaceful state in Latin America, especially when comparing the country to its neighboring states, Peru and Colombia, which have suffered severe issues of guerrilla and drug trafficking to different degrees for more than fifty years. In addition, Ecuador was one of the first countries to achieve democracy by peaceful means. These are some of the reasons why Ecuador was, and still is, known as an “island of peace.” However, contrary to popular belief, extreme forms of violence like terrorism have also been part of Ecuadorian politics, always causing controversy.

Views of what constituted terrorism have widely varied over the past decades. The first time terrorism was addressed as a domestic matter in Ecuadorian politics was during León Febres-Cordero’s administration. Febres-Cordero pledged to combat terrorism as one of the main objectives for his administration in response to the emergence of Alfaro Vive Carajo, a subversive group that sought to take power through armed conflict. Two decades later, the word terrorism was in newspapers again as a group of 10 people were accused of terrorist acts against the state by Correa’s government. Correa’s administration not only considered terrorism a completely different issue than Febres-Cordero, but also made that government responsible of state terrorism and human rights violations during the 1980s.

Without a doubt, the discourse of terrorism in Ecuador has significantly changed over the past decades. While some might claim that this change responds to general trends

in the understanding of terrorism in the international system, this paper will argue that the aforementioned changes are a reflection of the national dynamics of power and interests of groups in the country, in the present and in the past. For this purpose, the paper will address the importance of discourse and language, point out the layers in the different understandings of terrorism both nationally and internationally, and examine terrorism both during Febres-Cordero and Correa's presidency. This paper will also analyze the political and economic interests that affect such understandings and the construction of collective memories about terrorism, as well as explore what the discursive architecture means for subsequent actions in Correa's administration.

### **The importance of discourse and language**

The discourse and language employed in Ecuadorian politics to refer to violent acts as terrorism are fundamental for understanding the underlying relations of power among different groups that trigger changes in the concept itself. Discourses not only reflect, but also shape relations of power that occur among actors that are not limited to governments, but also include civil society, individuals and other groups. It is therefore fundamental to understand what discourse is and how it operates.

For the purposes of this paper, discourse will be understood as ways of constructing realities. It is exercised as a social practice determining the way people think and communicate, operating through narratives that create truths "in the process of being born to its own gaze" (Foucault 1992, 30). Discourse is not uniform, but contains a multiplicity of discursive elements that both coexist and clash with each other to determine meanings that can take a variety of forms. Moreover, discourse is never static or complete. Since it is

rather in a process of constant (re)production and (re)construction, discourse changes depending on the situational features or settings in which it is used. This is why limiting the definition of terrorism to a certain number of features in the context of international politics proves to be impractical when analyzing the way in which the discourse of terrorism operates in Ecuador in the context of Febres-Cordero's and Correa's regimes. Each use of the word terrorism has a particular setting.

Power is undoubtedly articulated through discourses that, in each particular setting, have specific goals. Relations of power determine those particular configurations in which discourse operates. Relations of power are conditions for an object of discourse to emerge, for it to be possible "to say something of that" and for people to say different things about it (Foucault 1969, 63). These relations are not exclusively internal to discourse, and they are not only related to concepts or words. Rather they occur amid different agents of social control such as institutions, governments, economic and social processes, individuals, societal groups, etc. Discourse offers the limits for these relationships to become evident and the relationships shape the ways discourse operates. These agents of social control, however they materialize, are fundamental in making discourse dynamic and responsive to different meanings and circumstances. It is thus fundamental to identify them when analyzing the way discourse operates in the Ecuadorian context, taking into consideration that the government cannot be the only agent holding significant power over the construction of discursive meanings.

Discourse is not only in constant transformation but, most importantly, it also constructs realities or truths in multiple forms "of saying this of that". Truth is only produced "by virtue of multiple forms of constraint... [and] it induces regular effects of

power” (Foucault 1977, 131). Truth cannot exist without relations of power, and relations of power cannot exist without a constraint for truth. Richard Jackson explains, with the example of counterterrorism, that “the architects of discourse have particular goals of legitimizing and entrenching their specific approach ... while at the same time marginalizing and excluding alternative discourses” (2005, 153). The constant process of construction in which discourse is involved legitimizes its content and creates truths. Truth is a product of power, and as such, it can never stand separately from it. Certainly, each society has a regime of truth that is particular to every context. Different regimes of truth can coexist and predate one another in a specific setting of time and space.

It is, therefore, not possible to analyze discourse in dualist terms anymore. In other words, it becomes impossible to separate the realm of concepts from the realm of reality, to separate the mind from the world, and even less so, to talk about the existence of a positivist objective reality in which ontological issues are separated from epistemological and methodological ones. Patrick Jackson explains, “in the absence of a firm separation between the mind and the world, there would be no mind–world gap to bridge and, indeed, no ‘epistemology’ as such” (2011, 31). The ways in which we come to know the world are discourses and regimes of truth themselves. In this sense, discourse continues to play an active role in the construction of realities in the form of regimes of truth and knowledge, with these regimes also constructing such discourses.

The use of language plays a fundamental role in the construction of the discourse of terrorism and therefore, in the understanding and construction of what it is. Language is the tool with which discourses are shared and constructed but, at the same time, language is a system itself. Hall explains that language is a system that does not only transfer “thought or

meanings from one brain to another, but a system for organizing information and for releasing thoughts and responses in other organisms” (1976, 57). Consequently, all meanings are filtered through language, as a part of discourse.

### **Layers in the discourse of terrorism**

Terrorism is not only a global issue in terms of international security; it has also become an intensively debated academic topic. Attempts to narrow the definition of terrorism have resulted in the attribution of a number of essentializing characteristics to this phenomenon such as the ones Chaliarnd and Blin proposed: the use of violence, political objectives, and the intention of sowing fear in a target population (2007, 14). Another definition of terrorism that has made an important impact on the field is the one offered by the United States Department of State, in which terrorism is defined as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (U.S. Department of State 2004, xii). However, it is widely recognized that no one definition of terrorism has been universally accepted so far.

Since the field expanded as a consequence of 9/11, other topics within the field of terrorism gained importance, thus emerging what is known as critical terrorism studies (CTS). CTS have criticized “the predominance of ‘problem-solving’ approaches in the study of ‘terrorism’, which accounts for many of the observed methodological and conceptual shortcomings of ‘terrorism research’” (Gunning 2007, 363). One of the most recurrent topics emerging in this subfield is the discursive analysis of terrorism. However,

this kind of analysis has mainly focused on the United States (particularly in Bush's speech about the *war on terror*) and its action in places such as Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Regarding Latin America, Sullivan argues that cooperation between the United States and countries in the region has increased since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (2013, 7), but most of the literature nowadays is very descriptive and principally focuses on the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the National Liberation Army in Colombia and the Shinning Path in Peru. Even when it comes to literature in the early 1980s, Ecuador is one of the few countries never mentioned. For example in *Terrorism in Latin America*, Halperin argues that terrorism in Latin America is a consequence of a "vigorous reaction against stagnation and putrefaction" in the region, mentioning case studies such as Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (1976, 81). In this sense, CTS analyses have very little literature on Latin American and nothing noteworthy on Ecuador.

Ecuador, in contrast, was and still is widely known as an "island of peace". This expression has been mentioned regularly both by politicians such as Former President Osvaldo Hurtado and by academics such as Greg Grandin<sup>1</sup>, to refer to the political circumstances and military regimes common in Latin America during the 80s. Ecuador was the first country in the area to have achieved democracy through a civil-military agreement, a pacific transitional model that other countries adopted later.

However, at a national level, terrorism has been presented both as an imminent threat to state security by Febres-Cordero and Correa. This already shows a discursive

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Grandin highlights in his book *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* the fact that Ecuador, along with other countries such as Costa Rica and Mexico, were the few exceptions to the "state and elite-orchestrated preventative and punitive terror [that] was key to ushering in neoliberalism in Latin America" (2004,14).

breach in the perception of terrorism acts in Ecuador between the international and the national levels of analysis, and a significant shift in the understanding of terrorism in the past 30 years, especially considering Febres-Cordero's and Correa's administrations. In an international sense, Ecuador is highly regarded as one of the most peaceful countries in the region; while at a national level, terrorism has been discussed as an issue of constant disagreement. This is not to say that the international understanding of terrorism does not influence at all the perception of the concept in Ecuador, but it does problematize the ways in which terrorism is understood, proposing that other factors account for these changes.

It is necessary to explore the way in which the word terrorism has been used in Ecuador to explain how power relations have caused the historical inconsistency in its use. Every time terrorism is mentioned, whether it is by President Febres-Cordero, President Correa or the Department of State of the United States, an always-changing reality is being constructed with the tool that language provides. Having stated that the breaches between the understanding of terrorism in an international context and the Ecuadorian one are significantly broad, the task becomes "to distinguish among events, to differentiate the networks and levels to which they belong, and to reconstitute the lines along which they are connected and engender one another" (Foucault 1977, 114). To do so, I will explore the way in which the discourse of terrorism has operated in Ecuador, both in the 1980s during Febres-Cordero's administration and in the period starting in 2007 with Correa's Citizen Revolution.

### **Febres-Cordero's regime: 1984-1988**

*Pan, Techo y Empleo: Febres-Cordero*

Febres-Cordero's administration marked the first time terrorism took part in domestic politics in Ecuador. Febres-Cordero represented the archetype of a Latin American businessman who would later turn politician; someone who promoted neoliberalism in the country and, at the same time, used populist rhetoric to achieve popular support towards that goal. In 1984 he ran for president representing an alliance from all right-wing parties in the country called National Reconstruction Front and won the elections by less than 3% of the votes. Throughout his campaign, Febres-Cordero's rhetoric was based on promises to encourage foreign investment, to minimize the role of the state in economic matters, and to promote export-oriented growth (Conaghan, Malloy and Abugattas 1990, 11) However, these promises were often complemented with rhetoric against the outgoing president Osvaldo Hurtado, as Febres-Cordero blamed his policies as the causes of hunger and unemployment in the country.

Febres-Cordero began his administration with a "strong commitment to austerity and free market principles in economic policy" (Hey 1995, 72), which came into place with the implementation of a strong economic package launched by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Apart from the economic aspect of politics, Febres-Cordero committed his government to the fight against terrorism, drugs and drug trafficking and, in the social aspect, promised to defend the basic basket of consumption, combat inflation and promote public infrastructure to give Ecuadorians "bread, roof and employment" (Tamayo 2008, 10). Febres-Cordero enhanced his conservative perspective not only in the economy, but also in issues of security, which became particularly relevant with the emergence of Alfaro Vive Carajo.



*Alfaro Vive Carajo*

Alfaro Vive Carajo (AVC) was a political military organization that operated between 1983 and 1988 in Ecuador. It emerged from the coalition of a number of groups that had been working with the intention of organizing armed insurgency in Ecuador since the early 1980s (Terán 1994, 50). They named the organization Alfaro Vive Carajo (in English, “Alfaro Lives, Damn it!”) in honor of one of the former presidents of Ecuador, a radical liberal leader that headed a number of armed revolutions against the conservative governments of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until October 1983 that the Ecuadorian administration faced the possibility of guerrilla groups emerging in the country, but AVC had started developing long before that.

During the late 70s and early 80s, awareness of the struggle of Ecuadorian workers grew steadily. In 1978 Ecuador had just returned to democracy through peaceful means after two military dictatorships and leftist organizations took two paths to continue their fight: either by forming political parties or through uprising and insurrection (Rodriguez 2014, 27). Examples of the former are the Wide Left Front and Popular Democratic Movement. AVC is the main example of the latter. These groups were particularly motivated by the regional context in which numerous armed groups were seeking to take power through violence in countries.<sup>2</sup>

Ideologically, AVC emerged as a response to poverty, high concentration in land ownership, poor education, health and housing systems, an economy based on the export of primary agricultural products. They opted for the militant option because they believed they

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<sup>2</sup> Examples can be found in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru and others. The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua deserves particular attention since it was the second successful revolution in 1979, only after the Cuban Revolution in the 1950s.

did not have a place in the political sphere in Ecuador at the time. Elites dominated political parties from all ideological stances (particularly reflected in the Social Christian Party, Febres-Cordero's party) and public servants favored only the important and powerful economic groups. A privileged minority dominated all aspects of politics, and the masses had no voice in Ecuadorian politics, despite the peaceful return to democracy so praised at the international level.

Even though the years in which AVC was active coincided almost exactly with the government of Febres-Cordero, its formation began during the administration of Osvaldo Hurtado. Antonio Rodríguez Jaramillo, one of the leaders of AVC places the period of formation between 1982 and 1984 (2014, 38), particularly in response to the consequences of the attempts to lower the foreign debt. Throughout 1982, various groups against the role of the government in the aforementioned issues started exchanging ideas and experiences to coordinate actions towards the formation of AVC, while maintaining contact with other insurgent groups such as M-19<sup>3</sup>.

At the beginning of 1983, AVC militants concentrated on building a recognizable name within the Ecuadorian population. They did so through the spreading of graffiti throughout the entire national territory. Osvaldo Hurtado, the president at the time, took notice of the graffiti in the streets of the historic center of Quito and immediately called for an investigation in the Ministry of Defense (Rodríguez 2014, 25), but he never received a report on the topic and no evidence exists that such investigation was ever carried out.

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<sup>3</sup> M-19 stands for 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement, a Colombian guerrilla movement active from 1970 to 1990.

In February the same year AVC's First National Conference took place in Tonsupa, in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, an event that is widely regarded as the official starting point of the organization as the statutes were approved as well as future strategies. Participants of this conference included ex-militants of the Revolutionary Left Movement and the Revolutionary Christian Left Movement, as well as other clandestine and leftist groups that were proposing to take power through armed conflict (Tamayo 2008, 9). This determined the ideological stances of AVC as an independent organization from the traditional Marxist and communist groups. Another important element of the conference is the definition of the three instruments toward which AVC would work: (1) a political military organization with a party structure; (2) the Military Rural Front, a guerrilla; and (3) the Peoples Front (Rodríguez 2014, 26). AVC was a structured organization with the intention of causing guerrilla in the country. However, the level of hostilities in the following years never reached the level of an armed conflict as it did, for instance, in Colombia with FARC and ELN.

Two emblematic actions resulted from the decisions made at the First Conference. The first one was the takeover of the Supreme Board's headquarters to get the bust of Eloy Alfaro, an action that left graffiti on the walls of the institution (Rodriguez 2014, 133). The second was the assault on the Museum of Guayaquil to take the swords of Eloy Alfaro and Pedro Montero. These are the two actions for which AVC is remembered the most because of the symbolism that they implied regarding their ideological struggle and the figure of Alfaro in such struggle.

However, it was not until September of 1983 that AVC announced its existence publicly. AVC called for a press conference on September 22 1983 in Quito with important

journalists and newspapers. After that, AVC was involved in number of actions that were categorized as terrorism by the government of Febres-Cordero and as insurgency by AVC themselves, which are clearly outlined by dates in Rodriguez' book *Memoria de las Espadas*. These included assaults to several banks and other organizations, sieges of mass media organizations and headquarters of political parties to spread ideological messages in the country, kidnappings and attempts of kidnapping, as well as puffer bombs in important cities (Rodriguez 2014, 133-150). Even though some of these actions were carried out before Febres-Cordero came into power, it was this regime that set to work to stop this military political organization.

*Febres-Cordero's discourse of AVC as a terrorist organization*

Since the beginning of his presidency, Febres-Cordero had a strong approach against what his administration considered to be terrorism. During his first statement as the President of Ecuador, Febres-Cordero not only explained his economic plan to revitalize the country, but he also declared his commitment “to fighting all forms of terrorism and its zeal to eliminate the frat scourge of our time” (Krupa 2013, 179). The former President suggested that Ecuador was a convulsed country living the underdevelopment drama; he described an abandoned and despised society. In terms of terrorism, he described the issue as “the tremendous danger” (Diario el Comercio, August 12<sup>th</sup> 1984 in Tinel 2008, 175). This was, undoubtedly, a direct response to the emergence of AVC.

The moment President Febres-Cordero called AVC a terrorist group is particularly important for two reasons. The first one is that, at the time, AVC just publicly announced its existence less than one year before in September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1983 and had only performed

criminal offenses such as armed and non-armed robbery in some banks and museums in the country (Andrade, Milton et al. 2010). Even though the group would eventually radicalize and commit other crimes such as kidnappings, targeted murders, propaganda bombs and attempts to put puffer bombs in important places in Quito and Guayaquil (Andrade, Milton et al. 2010, 25), they could have been considered a criminal group with a leftist ideology at that point. However, Febres-Cordero had chosen to call them terrorists from the beginning to bring attention to their actions and legitimate governmental policies in the face of a crisis, even though Ecuador was considered one of the most peaceful countries in a region full of military dictatorships and developed guerrillas.

Second, at the time, the government had no official definition of terrorism, nor did everyone consider AVC a terrorist group. Arturo Jarrín, one of the most important leaders in AVC, said in an interview in 1984 that the accusations of terrorism were “not only false, but full of poison”; he argued that the group proposed a new approach of an anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialistic front to detain the imperialist and oligarchic offensive that Ecuador experienced at the time (AVC: Democracia Ecuatoriana en Armas 2006, 39). Likewise, Susana Cajas, another former militant of the organization explains her perspective on the issue in an interview with Albani:

There were people that said that we were an organization fighting for the interest of the people, and others said that we were criminals because that image did exist as a very strong message from the oligarchy and media. Reactions to our operations were mixed. There was a lot of hidden support, because the terror Febres-Cordero implemented in the country made people afraid of manifestation. I think there was much affection... (2009)

Likewise, Febres-Cordero's regime constructed its own narrative justifying the use of the word terrorism to refer to AVC. The following text that belongs to a defense argument for a trial regarding misuse of public funds in 1989 serves as an example:

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 1984, when I assumed Constitutional power amidst the very serious and diverse economic and social difficulties of the country, I found disturbing elements that, encouraged by indolence and tolerance, permitted terrorist groups that were military trained abroad to organize and realize an escalation of illicit and criminal acts that resulted in a wave of assaults on banks and commercial establishments and the profanation of sacred places such as 'Cima de la Libertad', the assault on Rastrillo... In the face of these events, those of us who had the duty of looking after the preservation of peace, public order and national security, threatened by national and international subversive groups, combined efforts to combat this destructive force menacing the foundations of society in Ecuador, which was not yet prepared to face this fight against terrorism" (Cited in Comisión de la Verdad 2010, 244)

Febres-Cordero's arguments, even if based on accepted facts, exaggerated the threat that AVC posed to the state. While AVC certainly carried out relevant criminal actions, they never enjoyed widespread public support at a level that would actually threaten the foundations of the Ecuadorean society. The aforementioned lack of definition on what constituted terrorist acts allowed for confusion between criminal acts and terrorism, and therefore, permitted the construction of a narrative in which a group that was involved in criminal acts could be considered terrorist. Nonetheless, the opinion on what should be considered terrorism or not in the country certainly was -and still is- not only divided, but also very polarized.

Undoubtedly, part of the reason why the President at the time chose to exaggerate the threat that AVC posed is because of the clash between both ideologies: AVC had an openly socialist ideology that contrasted with Febres-Cordero's ideals of free trade and neoliberalism. Most of the acts AVC had committed to the date of the Presidential

Inauguration had been significantly symbolic and, most of the time, expressed their opposition to Febres-Cordero. For instance, they took one of the most important radios in Guayaquil to express their support for the opposition candidate, Rodrigo Borja, with whom they would later reach a peace accord when he became president in 1989. Febres-Cordero's use of discourse intended to create an image of AVC as the common enemy that a unified Ecuador had to fight against: "This is the time of the homeland against the antihomeland" (El Comercio 1985, cited in Pozo 2007, 282). All this acts occurred while pursuing his very own economic and political interests, both nationally and internationally.

At an international level, the close relationship between Febres-Cordero's administration and the United States became evident. Ronald Reagan's administration expressed its support to the Ecuadorian government on its fight against terrorism. On March 25, 1988 the U.S. Department of State manifested: "your successful campaign against terrorism has kept Ecuador an island of peace in South America... We are proud we could be of assistance against subversion" (Cited in Krupa 2013, 169). Likewise, in the remarks at the welcoming ceremony for President Febres-Cordero, President Ronald Reagan expressed that the U.S. stands by him especially "when it comes to [his] determination to defeat the twin menace of international terrorism and narcotics trafficking" (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library 1986).

Both administrations were, without a doubt, very similar in terms of their economic standing and regarded Marxist organizations and countries as their antagonists. In the above-mentioned remarks, President Reagan also described Febres-Cordero's government as having an "uncompromising faith in political freedom [that] is consistent with your support of economic freedom" and applauded his economic and security efforts (Ronald

Reagan Presidential Library 1986). However, even though Ronald Reagan's administration publicly recognized Ecuador's efforts to combat terrorism, the United States never officially considered AVC a terrorist organization.<sup>4</sup>

In this sense, a parallelism occurs between the international understanding of terrorism proposed by the United States in the middle of the Cold War and what the Ecuadorian government considered to be a terrorist organization at the time. However, it is not the same concept. A lack of clarity in the Ecuadorian context and the fact that AVC did not actually engage in extremist violent actions until later in the 1980s would deny this possibility.

The degree of effectiveness in Febres-Cordero's discourse on terrorism was reflected in the fact that his government deployed "a repressive system that included the creation of death squads and torture and killings as methods of extermination" (Albani 2013). His administration constructed a discourse that materialized into systematic mechanisms to fight the created enemy. These processes have continued throughout the following years. An important moment in this regard occurred almost three decades later, when Correa came into power: now it was not the Marxist groups that were considered terrorists, but the neoliberal state.

### **Rafael Correa's regime: 2007-2017**

*The Citizen Revolution: Correa's Administration*

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<sup>4</sup> According to the U.S. Department of State. 2016. "Foreign Terrorist Organizations". U.S. Department of State. Last modified January 14th, 2016. Accessed May 8th, 2016. <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>



Between 1997 and 2005, instability was a common variable in Ecuadorian politics and its democracy was one of the weakest in the continent. Ecuador suffered from what Arturo Valenzuela calls the “presidents interrupted syndrome” (2004): three presidents were overthrown in Ecuador during this time (Abdalá Bucaram, Jamil Mahuad and Lucio Gutiérrez), the Congress was a weak institution, and massive protests against government policies and corruption were common and expected. In 2005, Correa, an economist and university professor, entered the political arena as an outsider after having served as the Minister of Finance in the previous administration for less than four months. He formed his own political party PAIS Alliance (*Alianza PAIS*) joining a series of leftist political movements that had participated in the coup against Gutiérrez.

Correa ran his campaign based on antagonist discourses against what he considered to be the elites of the Ecuadorian politics. Not only Correa had a clearly defined enemy in the political arena, but he also ran “against the system itself”. He aimed to sign an “executive decree mandating a nationwide vote on his proposal to hold elections for a constituent assembly that would write a new constitution” to redistribute power and put an end to *partidocracia*, the domination of traditional political parties (Conaghan and de la Torre 2008, 271). In terms of the economy, Correa argued for the dismantling of neoliberal policies, which he saw as the reasons behind Ecuador’s poverty and inequality.

Once he came into power in January 2007, he launched the Citizen Revolution that would implement 21<sup>st</sup>-century socialism in Ecuador and bring *buen vivir* (a Spanish concept that means good living) to the lives to the Ecuadorians. The dismantling of neoliberal policies also addressed social and political issues. In September 2006, Correa promised that during his presidency the crimes and attacks against human rights during Febres-Cordero’s

government would be investigated and punished (cited in El Universo 2008). For this, he launched a Truth Commission to seek truth and justice regarding human rights violations and crimes against humanity before 2008. These investigations involved terrorism as governmental actions and policies, particularly in the period between 1984-1988. However, the issue of terrorism during the past decade was not limited to the actions of past governments; it was also the source of heated debate in terms of the prosecution of a number of people who have been involved in politics of opposition to Correa's government.

#### *Truth Commission and Correa's Relationship with AVC*

Despite the fact that allegations of human rights violations have surrounded Febres-Cordero's presidency, no actions were taken by the Ecuadorean state until Correa's government. The Truth Commission was created in 2007, the first year of the Citizen Revolution, with the mandate to "investigate, clarify and prevent impunity regarding violent events and human rights violations that occurred between 1984 and 1988, and other periods" by the Executive Decree No. 305 (Presidencia de la República del Ecuador 2007). While the mandate given to the Truth Commission is extensive, it is possible to see that it specifically refers to the period between 1984-1988, which is a result of the widespread demands that had been made by those affected by state policies during that period and their families.

The Truth Commission operated until 2010, when it published a final report that consisted of five volumes. This final report responded to the mandate and referred to the specific cases of human rights violations, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions,

torture and crimes against humanity. Nonetheless, the report also fulfilled an additional function of developing a new narrative regarding terrorism in the country during the 1980s.

While between 1984 and 1988 “terrorism” was used to refer to AVC, with Correa’s Truth Commission the roles changed and this time terrorism was carried out by the neoliberal state. The rhetoric used in the Truth Commission refers to Febres-Cordero’s regime as responsible for state terrorism. An example of this is the following:

Febres-Cordero’s regime responded to AVC’s violent actions with a policy of state terrorism that went beyond any legal and constitutional framework, committing grave human rights violations that were not known in Ecuador up to this moment: tortures, extrajudicial executions or forced disappearances (Truth Commission 2010, 77)

This shows that the Truth Commission established an immediate connection between human rights violations and state terrorism, which deeply contrasts with the rhetoric used two decades before.

Moreover, an entire section in the executive report addresses the narrative used during Febres-Cordero’s government and contradicts the perspectives that characterize AVC as a terrorist group. In this sense, the Truth Commission argues that Febres-Cordero’s discourse was “accompanied by a series of actions that acted in co-operation with words” as the management of public funds privileged the “fight against terrorism”, which permitted the formation of a repressive state apparatus and institutions supporting violence (2010, 241). These circumstances permitted the development of what the Commission considered to be state terrorism.

The Truth Commission strongly argues that Febres-Cordero formulated the idea of terrorism as crime and included within this loosely defined concept different forms of

political opposition and social protest. The report emphasizes the fact that AVC never represented a real military threat to the state, as their activities were limited to political propaganda and assaults on banks (Truth Commission 2010, 243). It is important to highlight that the Commission is also reconstructing a narrative on what should not be considered terrorism in the same way Febres-Cordero constructed a discourse of what should be considered terrorism. When the Truth Commission, supposedly as a result of an independent investigation, acknowledged that at the time of Febres-Cordero available evidence was not enough to characterize AVC as a terrorist organization, they also minimized the actions and intentions of this political military organization: successful operations such as military training camps, kidnapping and attempts of kidnappings of a number of personalities and the failed attempt to overthrow the state through military action.

The fact that Correa's government was the first one in two decades to investigate allegations of human rights violations during Febres-Cordero's regime is not a coincidence. President Correa's government was, at that time, positioning itself as the one that would end the "long and dark neoliberal night". Correa was seeking to characterize his government as "not merely an epoch of change, but rather a change of epochs" (Correa 2007, cited in Escobar 2010, 5), thus making a radical differentiation from all the regimes that committed human rights violations and state terrorism, specifically referring to Febres-Cordero. Subsequent actions taken by Correa with regards to new social movements, proper of neoliberal regimes, would eventually downplay this discursive architecture.

In the same way that during Correa's administration, Febres-Cordero's regime changed from being the savior to being responsible for terrorist acts, the perception of AVC

also shifted. Susana Cajas, a former AVC member and current assemblywoman alternate, explains in an interview with Albani that AVC was a very democratic and sovereign organization that went ahead of its time in proposing what the Citizen Revolution is proposing today (2009). In this sense, a close link between Correa's and AVC ideologies, beyond mere discourse is evident. Like Susana Cajas, many of the former members of AVC are now part of Correa's government. One of the most notorious examples is Rosa Mireya Cárdenas, who was named Secretary of the Peoples, Social Movements and Participation in 2011, this being the first time that a militant of a subversive group has reached the highest levels of government (La República 2011). In general, many former AVC militants have allied themselves to the government's socialist ideology that not only condemns Febres-Cordero's actions, but also his political and economic stands.

#### *Other cases regarding terrorism during Correa's government*

AVC, León Febres-Cordero and the Truth Commission have not been the only instances in which terrorism has been mentioned in the past decade. People have been accused by the state of terrorism and later prosecuted for such actions in numerous cases. The way in which the word terrorism has been employed in this context somehow resembles the ways in which it was used in the 1980s.

At the beginning of his government, Correa built close relationships with social movements and particularly with indigenous movements that shared his ideology regarding the shortcomings of neoliberal policies. However, soon the distance between Correa and any group representing some form of opposition to his policies grew as disagreements started to emerge over how to achieve those goals. Consequently, during the first year of

his administration, the government arrested 45 activists and later kept 23 people in detention with charges of terrorism due to attempts of disrupting oil extraction in the Amazonian region (Becker 2011, 57). By 2015, 189 leaders of social movements had been accused of terrorism and many of them incarcerated, according to Delfín Tenesaca, president of ECUARUNARI<sup>5</sup> (cited in Ortiz 2015, 37). Persecution of social groups' leaders and activists was constant throughout Correa's regime.

Another moment in Ecuadorian politics in which terrorism has been at the heart of the controversy was also during President Correa's administration: the case of *los 10 de Luluncoto*. In March 2012, a group of ten students and young professionals met in the neighborhood of Luluncoto in the south of Quito and was detained as a result of an operation called "Red Sun". While the group argued that that they were meeting for a lecture on *sumak kawsay*, there are two interpretations collected during the judiciary process, the first from Attorney Diana Fernández and the second from Interior Minister José Serrano. The former argued that the government faced a crime against the state as the meeting had the objective of attacking state security and the latter claimed that these people were the heads of a subversive group that intended to destabilize democracy less than a week later (cited in Ávila Santamaría 2012, 28). It is therefore, possible to see how arguments regarding the facts from both parties are extremely contradictory.

The same occurs regarding the evidence presented in the case. While the prosecutor's office maintains that mobile phones, money, Che Guevara red t-shirts, protest music CDs, a folder of the Group of Popular Combatants and rubber boots are enough evidence, human rights organizations consider that such evidence does not prove in any

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<sup>5</sup> ECUARUNARI stands for Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimuy, which means Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality

way any sort of crime against the State (Ortega 2014). Despite this, the people involved were later condemned to one-year imprisonment for terrorism attempts.

A number of questions emerge regarding the legitimacy of this decision and the existence of terrorism within this case for various reasons. First, the investigation leading to Operation Red Sun did not follow due process according to the Criminal Prosecution Code (Ávila Santamaría 2012, 29). Second, beside the contradictory arguments, the moment the arrest warrant was issued is confusing. No flagrancy was evident at the moment of the arrest as the 10 people involved were having a meeting in an apartment and that, per se, does not constitute a crime.

Furthermore, in terms of the Ecuadorian laws and Constitution, the crime of terrorism was typified in the Penal Code of 1971 (Art. 147, 160-A, 164 and 165) valid at the time of all the abovementioned cases, but no definition was specified. This lack of clarity and specificity facilitates the manipulation and politicization of arrests regarding the crime of terrorism. It results evident, in this regard, that international understandings of terrorism still differ from Ecuadorian ones, especially in terms of the gravity of terrorism actions and the punishment they receive.

In addition to the questions regarding the legitimacy of these cases, the rhetoric used by the government and particularly by President Correa to refer to them reflected the enhanced perception of these people as enemies of the state and the regime. An example of this are the words of Correa referring to *10 de Luluncoto* in June 2016:

Criminalization of social protest? The 10 de Luluncoto were little angels praying the rosary at dawn and all this time were persecuted because Correa was surely afraid they would win the presidency. Who can believe such nonsense? (Cited in El Comercio 2016).

Likewise, leaders opposing Correa's mining law that were detained with charges of terrorism were called "childish", "nobodies" and "allies of the right" (Dosh and Kligerman 2009, 23). These kinds of allegations are common, not only for those accused of terrorism, but also to anyone that Correa's presupposes to be an enemy of his government. This evidences the construction of a discourse about an enemy that must be destroyed, and the force that comes with the word terrorism only serves to help this purpose.

During the 1990s, a period where mobilizations against neoliberal economic policies were common, social movements and activists never faced the charges of terrorism that they confronted in Correa's administration (Becker 2013, 57). According to Ortiz, the reason why cases like these have been classified as criminal or terrorist activity is that they intended to destabilize the Citizen Revolution (Ortiz 2015, 37), a project that is based on the projection of an enemy that must be destroyed, whether it is neoliberalism or political opposition in any form. This is especially interesting because Correa's regime has constructed a narrative in which neoliberal regimes are always the antagonists of the people, and therefore, it is possible to assume that this government, with its socialist ideology, should have been more friendly and sympathetic towards this kind of manifestation.

### **Political and economic interests in the construction of discourses and memory**

Understanding the construction of the discourse of terrorism as a dynamic and constant process, created through narratives not only regarding the word terrorism itself but also those surrounding it, analyzing the political and economic interests involved in these



narratives is important. According to Butler, construction should be understood “as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter” (1993, 9). This is what happened in both regimes as they attempted to determine what terrorism means, even if not always explicitly through law enforcement.

The narrative surrounding the cases analyzed throughout this paper has ensured the establishment of boundaries, fixity and surfaces of what ought to be understood as terrorism. In this sense, the choice of words accompanying the expression ‘terrorism’ is fundamental in the construction of these boundaries. An example of this is the relation between terrorism and criminal activity in both regimes. The fact that both Correa and Febres-Cordero have many times confused criminal offenses with terrorism and never drawn a clear distinction between the two has allowed for more flexible boundaries regarding understandings and interpretations of terrorism, both in the general national narrative and within judicial processes. This is exactly the opposite of the general trends at an international level, where countries such as the United States have put efforts into carefully defining terrorism in their legislation, thus narrowing the space for interpretation. In Ecuador, the Penal Code of 1971<sup>6</sup> did not define terrorism, yet it was typified and people were convicted -even if controversially- for it.

This flexibility in understanding terrorism responds to the political and economic agendas of particular regimes and its attempts to legitimize them. It is clear that both Febres-Cordero and Correa’s administrations had their own agendas that greatly contrasted one another. While Febres-Cordero promoted neoliberal policies, Correa pursued

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<sup>6</sup> The 1971 Penal Code was in place until the year 2014 and replaced with COIP, Organic Integral Penal Code. The latter mentions terrorism 25 times, yet it does not define it.

establishing 21<sup>st</sup>-century socialism. Both governments tried to establish vague boundaries in understanding terrorism that conformed to these interests. Undeniably, terrorism per se generally implies a condemnation of an enemy's acts. In this sense, the neoliberal government in the 80s found that enemy in an openly socialist organization that must be defeated. Likewise, President Correa constructed that enemy in previous neoliberal administrations and in social groups that opposed his policies. When forms of political and economic opposition are perceived as terrorist and therefore, as enemies, the state increasingly takes action to downplay these forces with more legitimacy. All policies and discourses justifying such actions necessarily imply a certain exercise of power that materializes the legitimation of such policies into people's conscience.

Another element to take into consideration is reiteration, which allows for the materialization of discourse. Reiteration, according to Butler, can happen in various contexts that can be but are not limited to institutions, authorities and norms (1993). In terms of Febres-Cordero, the constant reiteration of his views on AVC with the use of tools such as newspapers, radio and television later became institutionalized with systematic persecution.

This was even more evident in President Correa's government. His administration is widely known for its propaganda apparatus that includes weekly spaces for information known as *sabatinas*. Correa usually employs these spaces to share his perspectives about current issues in Ecuadorian politics, and these have usually included speeches against those who have been accused of terrorism. Mass media communication has only facilitated the spread of this information. However, while these elements allow for the rapid spread of state discourses, they also allow for opposing voices to have more notoriety. Repetition has

been widely successful for both regimes. This is why, to date, many groups still consider AVC to have been a terrorist organization even if they are not really aware of the activities they performed. The same happens with the case of 10 de Luluncoto and social activists against mining.

The construction of the discourse of terrorism does not operate in only present time, but also towards the past. In this sense, when regimes attempt to manipulate understandings of terrorism, they also appeal to the construction of a collective memory. In general, “announcing the creation of a truth commission has become a popular way for newly minted leaders to show their democratic bona fides and curry favor with the international community” (Tepperman 2002, 28). Correa’s Truth Commission is a great example of this process, especially when considering that, at the time of its creation, the Citizen Revolution was a newly established regime seeking to distance itself from neoliberalism.

The role of the Truth Commission in the construction of collective memory should be questioned as well. This is not to say that it should not be considered relevant or that it should be discarded for lack of objectivity. On the contrary, the Truth Commission has a fundamental role in problematizing the confusion between criminal activities and terrorism, for example. However, evidence suggests that the Truth Commission’s urge of de-constructing the previous discourse of terrorism not only led to the construction of the discourse of state terrorism but also responded to aforementioned political and economic interests.

Let’s not forget that the Truth Commission was a first step in the process of making justice for those affected by human rights violations. Nonetheless, since the 2010 report, of the 118 investigated cases, only 6 have started judicial processes (Comisión Inter-

Americana de Derechos Humanos 2015). Lack of interest on the part of the government to fulfill the objectives raised in 2007 shows that the need for justice and the construction of a new discourse of terrorism only responded to the quest for legitimacy and the construction of the enemy of neoliberalism. This has even resulted in demands from human rights organizations<sup>7</sup> against the State of Ecuador for in compliance with the Truth Commission report in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.

## **Conclusion**

Discourses are always changing processes of construction of realities between different agents. As such, the discourse of terrorism in Ecuador has undeniably been altered during the past decades as a response to national dynamics of power. While these dynamics of power are not restricted to the state (they also include societal groups, institutions, economic and social processes), regimes like Febres-Cordero's and Correa's have played particularly important roles in the construction of discourses on terrorism. These understandings of terrorism not only differ between regimes, but also at an international, regional and national level. An example of this is the fact that Ecuador has been widely considered an island of peace in Latin America, while issues of violence and terrorism have been source of national debate.

It is clear that changes in the discourse of terrorism are strictly related to the regime that is in charge of the government at the time. Febres-Cordero's discourse of terrorism was

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<sup>7</sup> These organizations include: Comité de Víctimas y Familiares de Delitos de Lesa Humanidad y Graves Violaciones de Derechos Humanos del Ecuador / Mesa Nacional de Víctimas de Graves Violaciones de Derechos Humanos y Delitos de Lesa Humanidad Ocurridos en Ecuador 1983-2008 / Fundación Regional de Asesoría en Derechos Humanos – INREDH / Fundación para el Debido Proceso / Universidad San Francisco de Quito

directed to the criminal activities of AVC while Correa no longer regarded AVC militants as terrorists, but rather as victims of state terrorism under Febres-Cordero's administration. For the latter, activists from opposition participating in social protests, especially in relation to mining, were also considered terrorists. Both of these administrations have defined ideologies (neoliberalism and socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century respectively) and have attempted to distance themselves from ideologies on the other side of the political spectrum.

Considering that the word terrorism undeniably carries a negative connotation, the discourse of terrorism has served to delegitimize those opposed to these regimes thus fostering legitimacy for themselves. In this sense, Febres-Cordero's strong commitment to neoliberalism was enforced by the delegitimization of AVC, an openly socialist group. Likewise, Correa's socialism was enhanced by the image of neoliberalism as an enemy that must be destroyed, pointing out state terrorism in the 1980s neoliberal regimes and terrorism in opposition groups. However, this strategy failed to be effective because Correa's administration decided to target other enemies of the state when implementing neoliberal-like strategies of oil extraction. Discourses have also been normalized and naturalized through repetition. The lack of definition of terrorism has also contributed for such variability in its discourse, allowing for confusion between criminal activities and terrorism.

The construction of the discourse of terrorism operates in past and present times. In this sense, the construction of memory is the construction of discourses oriented towards the past, responding to the aforementioned purposes and interests. The Truth Commission only reflected the state's perspective and did not allow for different perspectives to converge. This, among lack of further compliance in terms of its objectives, is the reason

why the Truth Commission is believed to be a tool of the state for the construction of a particular version of memory.

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