

Comparing Communism and Fascism: Totalitarianism and Political Religions

GVPT 459F
Spring 2015
Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu

This course will examine the main similarities and distinctions between communist and fascist radical ideologies, movements, and political systems. The course will highlight the centrality of ideology in totalitarian experiments and the relationship between ideology and terror as underpinnings of the ideocratic despotisms. Class discussions will focus on the main theories regarding the rise, structure, and functioning of the the Stalinist and Nazi dictatorships. We will explore the contemporary implications of totalitarianism. The main historical personalities (charismatic leaders) examined in this course will be Lenin, Stalin, Hitler. We will also discuss other cases such as Mussolini, Mao, Enver Hoxha, Ceausescu, Castro.

Lectures and readings will focus the relationship between the Russian revolutionary tradition and the Bolshevik political culture; the interpretation of communism and fascism as political religions (secular messianisms). We will explore the relationship between totalitarianism and evil.

Students are expected to choose a topic related to the readings and the syllabus and present it for class discussion. The paper will draw from both bot required and recommended readings, as well as other sources. This paper will be the basis for the final exam research paper (take home). There will be one mid-term exam (in class) and one quiz. There will be one film presentation folowed by a class discussion.

Readings

Required:

Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, paperback

George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution*, published by Howard Fertig ,
paperback

Robert Gellately, *Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler*, paperback

Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Stalin and Hitler*, paperback.

Recommended:

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
2. Francois Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*.
3. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*
- 4 Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*
6. Vassily Grossman, *Life and Fate*

Major Themes:

Weeks 1-3

A: Modernity and nihilism: varieties of political radicalism and messianism. The communist experiment and its relation to the socialist utopianism (Dostoyevsky). : The Bolshevik worldview and its implementation. Lenin's Manichean political philosophy (the binary logic: *kto-kogo*, who-whom). Lenin's communist dictatorship (revolutionary ideology, revolutionary praxis). The vanguard party and the mystique of the organization. Stalin's rise to power: the Bolshevik police state and the reshaping of society. Gellately Stalinism and its relationship to Leninism. Bolshevism and the intellectuals. The emergence of the Gulag and the „logic” of permanent purge. Bolshevism, internationalism, the Comintern, and the rise of National Socialism.

Readings:

Tismaneanu, Introduction, Chapter 1

Gellately Parts 1-3

Mosse, Chapter 1

Weeks 4-5

B: Totalitarianism: A novel form of government? Totalitarianism—a *Weltanschauungstaat* (a state based on a worldview). Hitler and National Socialism: the origins of the Nazi ideology (anti-Semitism, irrationalism, anti-liberalism, racism, integral nationalism, imperialism, anti-Marxism, anti-communism, anti-Christian). What are political religions? The secularization of the sacred and the rise of ideologically-driven mass movements.

Readings:

Gellately Parts 4-8
 Mosse, Chapters 2, 3,4
 Snyder, Chapter 1, 2,3

Suggested

Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy* (Harvard UP, 2006)
 John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (Knopf, 1997)

Weeks 6-7

The appeals of communism: Political religions and earthly salvation. Intellectuals and the revolutionary illusions. Communism, fascism, and the cult of violence. The appeals of fascism as a revolutionary movement. Party, ideology, and propaganda in Fascist and Communist experiments.

Snyder, Chapters 4, 5, 6
 Tismaneanu, Chapters 2,3
 Gellately

Week 8:

D: Radical nationalism and communist internationalism. Ideological polarization in the 20th century. The main features of Stalinism. Communism, Fascism, and the intellectuals.

Readings:

Tismaneanu, Chapters 4,5
 Mosse, Chapters 5 to 7

Week 9:

E: Comparing utopian-extremist dictatorships. The ideological ingredient and the search for the perfect society. The racial versus the social „perfect” community.

Readings:

Tismaneanu
 Snyder, chapter 6 to10
 Gellately
 Mosse

Suggested:

Eric Weitz, *Genocide: Utopias of Race and State* (Princeton UP, 2003)

Weeks 10-11

F: The role of the leader: comparing Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler. The role of the party: comparing the Bolshevik and the Nazi parties. The role of ideology: comparing Leninism and National Socialism. The role of the secret police. Totalitarian states and the economy: major distinctions between Stalinism and Nazism. Communism as heir to Enlightenment, Fascism as heir to counter-enlightenment. Radical evil versus the „banality of evil”. Hitler’s „willing executioners”, Stalin’s hangmen, and the mechanisms of complicity.

Readings

Gellately
 Snyder, Introduction, Chapter 11, Conclusion

Suggested

Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*
 Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*

Weeks 12-13

G. How do totalitarian regimes survive and how do they end? Arendt's theory revisited. De-Stalinization and the Soviet political culture. The corrosive role of Marxist revisionism. Marxism, Communism and the legacies of European humanism. Ur-Fascism (Umberto Eco). Bolshevism as a moral problem. Can we compare communism and fascism?

Readings:

Tismaneanu, Chapter 6 and Conclusions
Snyder (class discussion on the whole book)

Film presentations and discussions to be announced. Suggested films:
Mephisto (1981) by Istvan Szabo; *The Circus* (1936, Grigori Alexandrov);
Triumph of the Will (1934, Leni Riefenstahl); *Downfall*; *Repentance*
(Tenghiz Abuladze, 1987)