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 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 followed by a class discussion.

Readings

Required:
Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History*, paperback

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

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


Recommended:

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
3. Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*
4. Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*
6. Vassily Grossman, *Life and Fate*

Major Themes:

**Weeks 1-3**


Readings:
Tismaneanu, Introduction, Chapter 1
Gellatelly Parts 1-3
Mosse, Chapter 1

**Weeks 4-5**

Readings:

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

Suggested  

**Weeks 6-7**


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

**Week 8:**


Readings:
Week 9:

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

Readings:

Tismaneanu
Snyder, chapter 6 to 10
Gellately
Mosse

Suggested:

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

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)