This course will examine the role of intellectuals in modern politics, especially their relationship to nationalist and revolutionary movements. It will also explore such concepts as the sacralization of the profane, periphery and center, and alienation and ressentiment.

**Learning Goals**

Students will first consider the cultural foundations of modern politics. What role do ideas about legitimacy play in delineating the structure of societies? What is the relationship between culture and institutions? How do women and men -- especially those with a passion for justice -- cope with apparent discrepancies between the promise of a society and its reality? How might these discrepancies inspire feelings of estrangement, and how might fine arts and literature provide evidence of such disaffection? How might such anomie inspire intellectuals to create new political visions? How might elements of the existing society -- such as religious creeds or ethnic differences -- be incorporated into revolutionary visions?

Students will then have the opportunity to review case studies of major modern revolutions, including the nationalist revolts of Central Europe, Communist takeovers in Russia, China and Cuba and later dissident movements; and the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Students will have the chance to compare the relative significance of appeals to solidarity based on class, religion, ethnicity and national identity and will see the great diversity of the sources of rebellion in modern politics and the wide variety of revolutionary ideals.

**Books and other reading**

The following books will be available for purchase at the Bookstore:

- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*
- Greenfeld, Liah. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Genealogy of Morals*
- Zamyatin, Evgenii. *We*
Other materials in the syllabus will be placed on Latte (please note the “L” on the syllabus).

**Course Requirements & Grading**

The course is a combination of lectures and seminar discussions. The course ought to allow students to master the subject-matter through a combination of lectures, classroom discussion, in-class assignments, and research for a final paper.

The grade composition of the course is as follows: class participation and quizzes (10%); several reading quizzes (20%); a take-home midterm exam (30%); and a final research paper (40%). Here are the important dates:

- The take home midterm will be distributed on **Oct. 19th** and will be due in class on **Oct. 24**;

- The final paper will be due at my office by 4 pm on **Dec. 8th**. Please bring a hard copy: my printer will be very tired if it has to crank out e-mailed papers.

If you have a crush of work before the final paper you can speak to me about an extension but I must approve such an extension by Nov. 22nd. If you have not cleared an extension with me in advance I will deduct a ½ grade for each day the paper is late.

Please also note that the grade for class participation includes regular and timely attendance, as well as demonstrated preparation of the reading assignments. The grade for class participation does not simply rely on regular attendance. Students should also participate in class discussions regularly and demonstrate that they have understood the material and can analyze and apply what they've learned to the broad themes of the class.

**The Final Paper**

The course’s final paper ought to be between 10 and 15 pages. Students ought to examine the ideas of a revolutionary of intellectual bent (subject to the professor’s approval). The subject of the paper ought to be a woman or man who played a leading role in a socially transforming revolution, and who prepared to lead such a revolution by personally working out the ideological basis of the revolution she or he hoped would come to pass. For example, Vladimir Lenin, author of influential manifestos, would be a good subject to examine, while Joseph Stalin, primarily a man of action and organization, would not be as suitable a subject.

In examining the revolutionary’s thoughts and motivations, students will be asked to consider the social and cultural milieu in which the revolutionary lived. It will be especially useful to consider the social structure of the society and the intellectual’s relationship to its members. What is considered the primary source of political
legitimacy -- a transcendent God, a dynastic lineage, or the people of a nation? What is the revolutionary’s own experience with this “center” of society? Did personal experience change the revolutionary’s assessment of its worth? In what way did the revolutionary imagine the existing center of society should be transformed? What were the political consequences of attempting to fulfill this vision?

If you are a student who needs academic accommodations because of a documented disability, you should contact me, and present your letter of accommodation, as soon as possible. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Undergraduate Academic Affairs at 736-3470 (brodgers@brandeis.edu). Letters of accommodation should be presented at the start of the semester to ensure provision of accommodations. Accommodations cannot be granted retroactively.

Course of readings

Week One: Vaclav Havel: A Case Study

Mon., Aug. 29: Introduction to class

M. Welch, “Velvet President” (Reason, 2003). (L)

Wed, Aug. 31: Havel as playwright and thinker


Week Two: Intellectuals as Creators of Value

Mon, Sept. 5 LABOR DAY, NO CLASSES

Wed, Sept. 7

Shils, Edward. “Center and Periphery,” in Center and Periphery (Chicago, 1975) (L)

Thurs, Sept. 8


**Week Three: Alienation and the “Revaluation of All Values”**

Mon., Sept. 12:


Wed: Sept. 14:

Scheler, Max. Ressentiment (Marquette Studies in Philosophy, 1994) Chapter One. (L)

**Week Four: Germany and Ressentiment**

Mon, Sept. 19:

Greenfeld, "Germany" in Nationalism. pp. 293-314; 322-352.

Wed. Sept. 21:

Greenfeld, pp. 358-395

Marx, "The Communist Manifesto." (L)

**Week Five: The Destruction of the Habsburg Empire**

Mon: Sept. 26:


No class, Sept. 28 (Havel Day)
Week Six: The Creation of Russian Nationalism

Mon, Oct. 3. No class

Wed., Oct. 5


Week Seven: The Russian Intelligentsia

Mon. Oct. 10


Wed., Oct. 12. No class

Week Eight: The Russian Revolution

Mon., Oct. 17 No class.

Wed., Oct. 19:


Midterm distributed.

Week Nine: The Inescapable Revolution

Mon., Oct. 24: No class. Midterm due (on Latte)

Tues., Oct. 25

Zamyatin, Evgenii. We. (Penguin Modern Classics, 1993).
Wed., Oct. 26: Vladimir Putin's ideology (L)

Marlene Laruelle, “Russian Nationalism and Ukraine,” Current History, Vol. 113, No. 765. (L)

Week Ten: Nationalism and Marxism in the ex-Soviet Union and China

Mon, Oct. 31: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine


Wed, Nov. 2: Chinese Communism and Nationalism

Suisheng Zhao, "Xi Jinping's Maoist Revival." Journal of Democracy Volume 27, Number 3 (July 2016). (L)

Week Eleven: Purifying Violence and Decolonization

Mon, Nov. 7

Talmon, J.L: Part VIII: "From George Sorel to Benito Mussolini" (pp. 451-474) in Myth of the Nation and Vision of Revolution (Brunswick, N.J.; Transaction, 1991). (L)


Wed., Nov. 9


Week Twelve: Modernization in Iran and its Discontents

Mon., Nov. 14

Wed, Nov. 16


*Week Thirteen: The Iranian Revolution*

Mon., Nov. 21


Wed., Nov. 23: no class: Happy Thanksgiving!

*Week Fourteen: Dissidents today*

Mon, Nov. 28: Iran's Dissidents

Essays by and about Akbar Ganji. (L)

Wed. Nov. 30: Cuba and North Korea

Dec. 5 Concluding Discussion