SOC 162a: Intellectuals and Revolutionary Politics
Brandeis University

Spring 2012 (Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, 10-11 am)
Mandel G10

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Office hours: Tues., Thurs. 2-4 pm (look for link to sign-up sheet on Latte site)

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 Communist takeovers in Russia, China and Cuba and later dissident movements; the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the democratic revolutions of the 'Arab Spring.' 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:

- Al-I Ahmad, Jalal. Occidentosis: A Plague From the West
- 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 (20%); two take-home midterm exams (25% each); and a final research paper (30%). Here are the important dates:

- The first take home test will be distributed on March 1 and will be due in class on March 5;
- The second take home test will be distributed on April 19 and will be due in class on April 23;
- The final paper will be due at my office by 4 pm on May 9. Please bring a hard copy.

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 April 26. 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 turn in hard copies of your paper to my office; my printer will be very tired if it has to crank out e-mailed papers.)*

Please also note that the grade for class participation includes both 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 15 and 20 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.

Week of Jan 18  Why Intellectuals?

Wed: Introduction to class

Thurs: Václav Havel. R.I.P.

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

Remembrance from The Economist, December 2011. (L)

Tributes from dissidents worldwide. (L)

Week of Jan 23  Case Study: Václav Havel as Revolutionary Intellectual


Václav Havel. "Politics and Conscience"

Thurs: Havel's Impact on the Dissident movement in China

Essays by Liu Xiaobo; Charter '08 manifesto
Week of Jan 30: Intellectuals as Creators of Value

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


Week of Feb. 7: Alienation and the “Revaluation of All Values”

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


Thurs: Greenfeld, pp. 358-395
Marx, "The Communist Manifesto."

Week of Feb. 14: The Russian Intelligentsia


Week of Feb. 20: FEBRUARY VACATION
Week of Feb. 27 — The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia


Wed: Zamyatin, Evgenii. We. (Penguin Modern Classics, 1993).

Thurs: Putin’s Russia and Dissent

Essays by contemporary Russian dissidents

First take-home midterm distributed.

Week of March 5 — Purifying Violence

Mon: 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)

First take-home test due in class.


Week of March 12 — Frantz Fanon and anti-Colonial Revolt


Thurs: Film: The Battle of Algiers.

Week of March 19: Cuba: Che and his Dissidents

Wed: Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba” (L)


The Varela Project

Week of March 26 Modernization in Iran and its Discontents


Week of April 2 The Iranian Revolution

Mon: Nasr, Vali. The Shia Revival (Norton, 2006). Ch. 4. (L)


Essays by and about Akbar Ganji. (L)

APRIL 6-14: APRIL VACATION
Week of April 16: The Arab Spring: Egypt and Beyond

Mon: Overview of the Arab Spring

Essays on the Arab Spring

Wed: Egypt

Fouad Ajami, "In the Shape of the Ancestors," in The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey

Thurs: Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood


Essays on the Muslim Brotherhood today.

Second take-home midterm distributed.

Week of April 23: The Arab Spring: Secular Voices in Egypt

Mon: Sayyid Qutb, Egyptian Islamic Jihad and al-Qaeda

Lawrence Wright. The Looming Tower. Ch. 1. (L)

Second take-home midterm due in class.

Wed: Alaa Al Aswany and Secular Voices in Egypt

Wendell Steavenson, Writing the Revolution: Egypt’s leading novelist surveys the Arab uprising. The New Yorker, January 16, 2012.


APRIL 30: Concluding discussion