

Christopher Kaplonski

Facing the past: The legacy of violence in newly democratic regimes (Draft syllabus)

This course examines the ways in which societies in newly democratic regimes, such as in South America, South Africa and the post-socialist sphere, seek to come to terms with a legacy of political violence and human rights abuses. How have societies with significantly different political, cultural and economic pasts dealt with similar experiences of repression and the fall of authoritarian regimes? To what extent can we discern common mechanisms of human society and memory in these reactions to organized violence, and to what extent must we look to specific cultural or institutional factors within these societies or in the contemporary global environment?

The course begins with an overview of the processes of transition in South Africa, Argentina and the former East Germany, drawing upon a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. Other countries will also be considered throughout the course. This overview will include a few general considerations of the issue as well as the particulars of each specific case.

In discussing attempts to come to terms with the past, we will pay attention not only to formal mechanisms of coping, such as the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and policies of lustration in Eastern Europe, but also to the impact such issues have had on perceptions of the past more generally in these societies. For example, how have the different legacies of democratic West Germany and socialist East Germany influenced attitudes towards the Gauck Authority and the opening of the Stasi files? Has the TRC in South Africa been able to effect a fundamental change in race relations? And why have some societies – such as Mongolia, and until recently, Cambodia – chosen by and large to let sleeping dogs lie?

Looking at these issues in a transnational context allows us to highlight the parallels and divergences seen in the wake of different authoritarian regimes. How does the experience of repression – whether under military dictatorship, apartheid or Soviet-style socialism – affect the ways in which people think about, remember and contest the past? Moreover, how does the trend towards “coming to terms with the past” beginning in the 1990s reflect other global processes? Here we will take up in particular the issue of how reconciliation movements have been affected by the knowledge of similar problems in other places and the role of international organizations in shaping change?

Course requirements:

Facing the past is designed as an upper-level undergraduate course, which could also be taken by graduate students for credit. No prior knowledge of a particular geographical region is necessary. Although an interest in, and prior knowledge of, human rights issues would be of help, it is not required. It is expected, however, that you will have at least a general understanding of global politics and recent global trends.

Grading will be based on a number of short (4-5 pages) reaction / analysis papers on issues that will be discussed in class.

As part of this course, students will be expected also to write a 12 – 15 page research paper. The student will be expected to research and consider a case study with similarities to those covered in class, but not in which the past has yet been dealt with in a systematic

manner. Possible topics might include the Japanese army and “comfort women;” the US and European role in slavery and the slave trade; and the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

Suggested Readings

This course will draw its readings from a wide range of sources. We will be reading not only academic analyses, but also journalistic accounts of the events in question, which often cover aspects not discussed by academics. These secondary sources will be supplemented by primary sources where possible, including official reports and more personal accounts of terror and repression.

Background and collections:

Theodor Adorno, “What does coming to terms with the past mean?”

Giorgio Agamben, *State of exception*

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Alexandra Barahona De Brito, et al. (eds), *The politics of memory and democratization*

David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: terror and history in Pol Pot’s secret prison.*

Carle Hesse and Robert Post (eds), *Human rights in political transitions: Gettysburgh to Bosnia*

Michael Ignatieff, “Articles of faith”

Carl Jaspers, *The question of German guilt*

Martha Minow, *Between vengeance and forgiveness*

Sluka, Jeffrey, *Death squad: the anthropology of state terror*

Argentina:

Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A lexicon of terror: Argentina and the legacies of torture*

Carlos Santiago Nino, *Radical evil on trial*

Nunca mas

Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner without a name, cell without a number*

Luis Roniger and Mario Sznajder, “The politics of memory and oblivion in redemocratized Argentina and Uruguay”

Soviet bloc:

John Bornemann, *Settling accounts*

Timothy Garton Ash, *The file*

Veronique Garros, et al. (eds), *Intimacy and terror*

Chris Kaplonski, “Blame, guilt and avoidance”

Tina Rosenberg, *The haunted land*

South Africa:

Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa*

Robert Rotberg and Dennis Thompson (eds) *Truth vs. justice: the morality of truth commissions.*

Robert Thornton, “The shooting at Uitenhage, South Africa, 1965”

Desmond Tutu, *No future without forgiveness*

Richard Wilson, *The politics of truth and reconciliation in South Africa: legitimizing the post-apartheid state.*