



The History of Totalitarianism

Politics, Society and Culture

Programme Directors: Dr Judith Devlin [judith.devlin@ucd.ie] and Dr David Kerr [david.kerr@ucd.ie]

Introduction

This is a one-year taught Masters' programme combining a range of seminars offered by members of staff and a 15,000 word dissertation on an agreed topic. The course is designed for students who wish to deepen their understanding of historical developments in twentieth century Europe.



What will I study?

This MA will explore historical understandings of totalitarianism and the regimes which theoretically exemplified it in twentieth century Europe. What is meant by the term totalitarianism and how has it been reinterpreted by recent historical scholarship? How totalitarian were Fascist Italy, Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany or the Soviet bloc countries after 1945? How different were they from other forms of authoritarianism that emerged in the period?

The MA will examine developments under the surface of high politics, examining how citizens survived, experienced and understood these regimes, the negotiations between state and society which were involved. Key themes will include childhood and identity, conformity and belief, violence and terror, everyday life and self-understandings, sexuality and religion. The course will draw on a range of sources, including film, posters, iconography, as well as diaries, archival documents and the methodological problems involved in interpreting them.



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Behind the Iron Curtain: State, Self and Society – Dr Judith Devlin

This module will explore themes, debates and approaches that have emerged in the recent historiography of the Soviet Union and post-war Eastern Europe. Problems and themes to be explored will include such classical topics as cultural and social modernisation; violence and coercion; war and genocide; social and cultural change but also the Stalinist subject and identity-building, accommodation, resistance and belief; everyday life; mass culture and consumption; generational change and civic activism.

Particular emphasis will be placed on subjects and citizens, those who were the object of the great experiment that was the Russian and Stalin revolution. How did they experience everyday life and how did they understand the social upheavals they lived through? Is it enough to affirm that the state was all-powerful, that coercion and a consequent atomisation of society explain everything, and that private life, individualism or public participation disappeared? Does World War II rather than the legacy of Stalinism and ideology, provide the key to understanding the later Soviet system? How wide was the gulf between life in the Eastern bloc and that in the West? Finally, how and why did the system collapse?

Readings will be drawn primarily from the Soviet Union but material from Nazi Germany as well as post-war Eastern Europe will be included to enable the development of a comparative approach.

Totalitarianism: State, Culture and Identity – Dr David Kerr

The module will begin by surveying the evolution of the concept of totalitarianism, from contemporary understandings through cold-war analyses to its current use in historical scholarship. The specificity of totalitarian regimes has been held to lie in a particular relationship between state and society. The bulk of the module will be dedicated to examining this relationship through thematic seminars on aspects of the social and cultural history of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

Cultural representations of traumatic pasts - Dr Chiara Tedaldi (optional module)

This module will primarily focus on Spain and examine newspapers' engagement with the national past (the Civil War and II Republic). The perspective will be national (El Pais, El Mundo, ABC and La Razon), regional/non-independentist (Heraldo and Periodico de Aragon), independentist (Periodico de Catalunya, La Vanguardia, Avui).

It will include general remarks on other countries as a point of reference through which it will be possible to better understand the dynamics at play in the Spanish case. For instance, material taken from the German press (English versions of articles from Der Spiegel etc. that dealt with the Vertriebenen) and Italian newspapers' coverage of the debate on the Resistance/Italian victimhood, British/American press (to examine UK and US engagement with Holocaust commemoration).