

Twentieth century  
european  
politicization in  
context in 'under a  
cruel star'



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Under a Cruel Star illustrates the sudden oppression of war, and what it is like to be a direct victim of an entire country. Heda Margolius Kovaly documents her experiences during the Holocaust. Focusing predominantly on how she survived one nightmare, just to walk into another: " You liberate yourself from direct oppression and you sink into something even worse" (Kovaly 29). She demonstrates how overwhelming the wave of hate and suspicion was that crashed over Europe during the twentieth century.

Kovaly was living in Prague when she was taken by the Nazis and brought to a concentration camp. She was taken with her parents and nephew, who either died in Lodz or Auschwitz. When her encampment was being marched to another, she knew it was her only chance to escape. The concentration camps were heavily guarded: " the whole camp is encircled by a second ring called the " big" or " outer ring of sentry posts," also with watchtowers every 150 meters" (Smith 363). Hopelessness was the only possible feeling to exist in these sorts of places. They were militarized death camps that politicized life on a severe level. The politicization of Europe gradually increased after World War One. Specifically, in Germany, because of the burden of blame placed on them for the war. This phase of weakness allowed for more military groups to establish a platform and rise to power. The general population was confused by the war's outcome and unsettled by the lack of control their government possessed. They began to seek out someone who could take control and return them to a place of power once again. This was a recurring theme throughout European history, especially after the World Wars. People wanted someone to tell them how to survive, and to return to a normal life again.

Adolf Hitler was the first to attempt a redemption of authority and respect for Germany. However, he took it to the extreme and utilized hate and fear to gain control over the country. After his reign, people continued to seek out someone with strong command experience. Another reason “ many of our people turned to Communism... [was] out of sheer despair over human nature which showed itself at its very worst after the war” (Kovaly 53). Anti-Semitism was still rampant throughout the country, and even continued to fester during Stalin’s reign as well. However, this time they also wanted someone who promised equality, and fair treatment. Even though that may sound like a utopia, and the polar opposite of Hitler, it was not.

Josef Stalin brought totalitarianism with those promises and delivered further torment. However, “ It is not hard for a totalitarian regime to keep people ignorant” (Kovaly 11), because of its all-encompassing dictatorship and censorship. Hitler had openly preyed upon the Jews, the Roma, the Poles, the disabled, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals. Basically, those who he considered to be different and not as superior as him. He was on a quest to purify the German race and make it Aryan, the master race. Stalin, on the other hand, conducted secret purges and arrests: “ By 1951, the atmosphere in Prague was almost as bad as it had been during the war” (Kovaly 101). He waged war on his own people, based on primarily uninformed suspicions that made him question the moves of everyone in his Party.

Both Hitler and Stalin built the foundations to their Party’s on lies. Hitler emphasized strength and power, in theory a return to being great. However, “ Racial and political prejudice blinded the Nazis to many opportunities”

(Paxton 370) and illustrated their ignorance of the world. They did not seem <https://assignbuster.com/twentieth-century-european-politicization-in-context-in-under-a-cruel-star/>

to want a genuine political platform, they really just wanted to commit mass murder and be able to get away with it. Stalin emphasized the power of the working class and what working together can accomplish. Ironically, Stalin had a “ destabilizing effect on the system he controlled” (Paxton 459) because he wanted to control every aspect of the Party. They began by inundating the populace with propaganda, to lay the foundation for their political platforms. Stalin utilized totalitarian propaganda, which featured indirect threats that made people nervous to act out because they could be surveilled and punished for their actions (Arendt). Then, when they are given positions of power, they change their intentions. Their true ideologies appear, and someone is always on the receiving end of their hate.

Kovaly’s memoir authentically depicts what it was like to suffer through two oppressive and violent tyrants. The twentieth century in Europe was a pivotal period of war and unrest, with no one truly knowing what to do next. It was a time for political experimentation, and for the idea of power to corrupt the masses. There was a buildup of tensions throughout the decades leading up to World War One and World War Two that made all of the hate explode at each other all at once.

### Bibliography

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