Beyond the History of Martyrdom

The idea of ‘mass dictatorship’ originated in my encounter with the history politics of coming to terms with the past in South Korea and Poland. In the midst of radical democratic transformations sweeping through these two societies upon the end of the Cold War, I have lived a complicated present history as a participatory observer wandering over the transnational space between Korea and Poland. In the last two decades, these two post-totalitarian democracies have shared a history of martyrdom supported by twin pillars of memory: of tragic victimhood and of heroic resistance.\(^1\) Any challenge to this dominant memory in the post-totalitarian era would have been dismissed as politically ‘incorrect’ in both countries. But a history of martyrdom, however popular, was only made possible by ironing crooked histories and memories, converting them into a neatly lined History. Plural memories betray and rupture such a linear History. As Vaclav Havel constantly stressed, the line did not run clearly between victimisers and victims. Rather, it ran through each individual. Not everyone was an accomplice but everyone was in some measure co-responsible for what had been done.\(^2\) Adam Michnik’s stance, represented by his slogan of ‘amnesty yes, amnesia no’, seems implicitly to allude to this complexity of coming to terms with the past in post-totalitarian Poland.\(^3\) As the \textit{lustracja} controversy shows, coming to terms with the past of communist dictatorship is too complex to accommodate the popular history of martyrdom.

In Korea, the memory war over the past of Park Chŏng-Hee’s development dictatorship spawned a new problem set in relation to establishing ‘what happened in and to the dictatorship’. The socially widespread nostalgia for Park’s era has been extremely embarrassing to left-wing intellectuals, for whom the phenomenon was wholly unexpected in the context of a now democratised Korea. The Korean version of memory war and the \textit{lustracja} controversy has revolved around ‘how to read this perplexing nostalgia’. In my essay on ‘Reading the code of everyday fascism’ which triggered a sharp controversy over the legacy of developmental dictatorship, I raised questions concerning the fascist \textit{habitus} and \textit{mentalité}, and how they have been accommodated in the everyday life of many a Korean since the dictatorship era. Dictatorship as a political regime is long gone, but fascist \textit{habitus} still reigns in everyday practices and influences

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\item Adam Michnik, “rozmowa z Vaclavem Havelem”, \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza} (30 November 1991).
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people’s way of thinking. So this nascent political democracy is haunted by the legacy of dictatorship. In a subsequent essay on ‘Fascist’s war of position and dictatorship of consent’, I proposed a transnational history of dictatorship. By reflecting on the history of coming to terms with the past in post-war Germany, Italy and Poland, I tried to suggest that the popular nostalgia for the era of dictatorship is not a Korean peculiarity. Neither is trying to explain that nostalgia by reducing it to a by-product of one’s political opponents’ propaganda a unique response. Even though memories are often framed according to its precepts, the conspiratorial propaganda theory cannot explain under what circumstances, why and how popular memories are susceptible to this propaganda.

What is most intriguing in the transnational history of dictatorship is the contrast in the political constellations involved in coming to terms with past. A strange convergence of anti-Communist Korean right wingers and old fashioned Polish communists is discernable. They have misused and abused popular nostalgia to excuse the developmental dictatorship and communist regime respectively. Conversely, my essays on ‘everyday fascism’ and ‘fascist’s war of position’ have met with vehement opposition from the Korean left-wing intellectual establishment, just as Havel’s and Michnik’s stance against the lustracja provoked angry responses from the anti-communist Right in the Czech Republic and Poland. That bizarre discursive companionship of the political rival camps in a transnational space freed me from demonological discourses, be they right- or left-wing. It put a question mark behind the usefulness of both the totalitarian and Marxist paradigms, obsessed as they are with a simplistic dualism which posits a few vicious perpetrators (the dictator and his cronies) and many innocent victims (the people). The Manichean presentism of the Cold War blinded both camps to the diverse forms of popular support for the dictatorships to which they were politically opposed. A historicisation freed from ideological obsessions casts serious doubt on that moralist and cliché-ridden Cold War saga of the history of martyrdom. ‘Mass dictatorship’ is a term designed in the lights of this transnational reflection in the post-Cold War era.

Mass Dictatorship in Post-Colonial Perspectives

‘Mass dictatorship’ as a working hypothesis starts from a simple question: what is the difference between pre-modern despotism and modern dictatorship? My tentative answer is that despotism does not need massive backing from below, but modern dictatorship presupposes mass support. The term ‘mass dictatorship’ implies the attempted mobilisation of the masses by dictatorships, and that these

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4 Jie-Hyun Lim, “Reading the Code of Everyday Fascism (Korean)”, Contemporary Criticism 8 (Fall, 1999); “Fascist’s War of Position and Dictatorship of Consent (Korean)”, Contemporary Criticism 12 (Fall, 2000).

5 For lustracja controversies in Poland and Korea, see Piotr Grzelak, Wojna o lustrację (Warszawa: Trio, 2005); “Appendice”, in Jie-Hyun Lim and Yong-Woo Kim (eds.), Mass Dictatorship II: Political Religion and Hegemony (Korean) (Seoul: Chaiksesang, 2005), pp. 401-596.

frequently secured voluntary mass participation and support. Once masses had appeared on the historical scene, voices of ordinary people could no longer be silenced or disregarded by any regime, whether democratic or dictatorial. Rather, the socio-political engineering of the modern state system demanded the recruitment and mobilisation of the masses for the nation-state project, and indeed commanded their enthusiasm and voluntary participation. Two World War experiences demonstrated the vital importance to the total war system of the voluntary mobilisation and participation of the masses. That helps explain why a modern state system whose defining features included ‘universal suffrage/plebiscite as a popular endorsement’, ‘compulsory education/nationalisation of the masses’, ‘universal conscription/national appellation’ and ‘social welfare/social bribery’, was adopted not only by democracies but also by dictatorships. Mass dictatorship is dictatorship appropriating modern statecraft, and thus its study needs to be situated in a broader transnational context of political modernity understood in relation to territoriality, sovereignty, population and so on. It is at this moment that ‘dictatorship from above’ transforms itself into ‘dictatorship from below’.

Thus, mass dictatorship is far from being an inevitable product of deviation or aberration from a normal path to modernity, or of the dominance of pre-industrial, pre-capitalist and pre-bourgeois authoritarian and feudal traditions. Mass dictatorship argues against the Sonderweg thesis which seeks to set Nazism, and perhaps other manifestations of fascism, apart from parliamentary democracies of the ‘West’ because of the bourgeoisie’s alleged lack of ‘emancipatory will’ and ‘sense of citizenship’. The dichotomy of a particular/abnormal path in the ‘Rest’— quintessentially represented by Germany—and a universal/normal path in the ‘West’ presupposes a hierarchical order of comparison in which the ‘West’ occupies the position of universality. In this dichotomy, the history of the ‘West’ becomes the hegemonic mirror in which histories of the ‘Rest’ reflect themselves. In this way the comparison of aberrant dictatorship and normative democracy strengthens a Western/European claim to exceptionalism, according to which democracy, equality, freedom, human rights, rationalism, science and industrialism promulgated by the European Enlightenment are phenomena unique to the ‘West’. The normative presupposition inherent in the Sonderweg thesis implies Eurocentrism, suggesting that the ‘West’ has achieved

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7 It is noteworthy too that Francoism is often defined as ‘despotismo moderno’ (modern despotism) because it constitutes an alliance of conservatives and the military without mass involvement. Modern despotism of this kind differs from mass dictatorship in that it does not rely on the mobilisation of the masses or on intervention in their private lives. See Salvador Giner, “Political Economy, Legitimacy and the State in Southern Europe”, in Ray Hudson and Jim Lewis (eds.), Uneven Developments in Southern Europe (London: Methuen, 1985).

the maturation of the unique historical conditions necessary for democracy and human rights. In the ‘Rest’, by contrast, these remained un- or underdeveloped. In fact, this sort of Eurocentrism is profoundly misleading, encouraging us to believe that fascism and the Holocaust can be reduced to manifestations of peculiarities of the pre-modern ‘Rest’. The argument serves as the historical alibi of the modernist ‘West’, which is thus exempted from association with a barbarism defined ab initio as pre-modern. That is precisely why mass dictatorship should be mapped onto the transnational history of modernity.

Eurocentrism is reinforced by the clichéd, geographically positivistic concept of East and West, and of Asia and Europe. But neither Europe nor Asia is a positivistic concept. Neither is geographically fixed. The ‘strategic location’ of each is always in flux in historical discourse. Both are relational concepts that have their own significance only when they are co-figured in the discursive context of the ‘problem space’. The ‘problem space’ of mass dictatorship enables us to see the twentieth-century dictatorship not as the end-point of a particular path of the pre-modern, but as one of the normal paths of the modern, and ultimately to displace ‘East’ and ‘West’ as usable categories. The strategic location of interwar Germany, Italy and Russia as the ‘problem space’ of mass dictatorship is equivalent to a semi-periphery or to the ‘East in the West’. It is intriguing to remember that Konrad Adenauer, a German politician from the western Rhineland, muttered ‘Asia’ every time his train crossed the Elbe into Prussia. In short, those countries which experienced mass dictatorship occupied the position of East in an ‘imaginative geography’. In so far as each nation state is essentialised as the basic analytical unit, the hierarchical order of Asia/Europe and East/West remains intact in a comparative framework. A shift from the ‘reified geography’ of the dichotomy of East and West to the ‘problem space’ of the co-figuration of East and West would make it possible to see both mass dictatorship and mass democracy as products of processes of transculturation inherent in modernity. The East/West divide does not make any substantial difference since each of its sides belongs to the same ‘problem space’ of modernity.

9 It should be noted that Germany had to refer to France as its own putative ‘West’ because it was situated in the ‘East’ from France’s perspective. The co-figuration of French ‘civilisation’ and German ‘culture’ in Norbert Elias’s analysis shows this succinctly. See Nagao Nishikawa, *Zouho Kokkyou no Koekata* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2001), Ch. 6.


12 Daniel Schoenpflug’s attempt to comprehend François Furet’s and Ernst Nolte’s comparative history of totalitarian movements within the framework of ‘histoire croisée’ is suggestive, but its limits are clear. To say nothing of ‘linear causality’ and ‘potential oversimplifications’ in Nolte’s thesis on ‘Bolshevik’s challenge and Nazi’s response’, Furet seemed to stop at the point of making the analogies between French Jacobins of 1793 and Russian Bolsheviks of 1917. Despite Furet’s and Nolte’s alleged contribution to the ‘histoire croisée’ of the totalitarian movements, its scale of comparison remains confined to Europe. See Daniel Schoenpflug, “Histories croisées: François Furet, Ernst Nolte and a Comparative History of Totalitarian Movements”, *European History Quarterly* 37 / 2 (2007), pp. 265-90.
It is through a transnational history of mass dictatorship that one can put the dictatorship of the ‘East’ and democracy of the ‘West’ together on the global horizon of modernity. Both democracy and dictatorship are located not in some pre-existing spaces but in the ‘problem space’ of constant becoming. Once conscripted to modernity’s project, people were coercively obliged to render themselves simultaneously as objects and agents of the modernity. The historical singularity either of a dictatorship or of a democracy can be analysed from global perspectives on the formation of the modern nation-state. Each kind of formation of the nation-state is a result of negotiations among various conscripts of modernity. Viewed from global perspectives, traditionalism as the ideological proponent of mass dictatorship appears not as a product of the pre-modern but as a variant of modernist discourse. Traditionalism is different from traditional paradigms for the very reason that it constitutes traditionalistic counter-movements against the dominant trend of the West. More sophisticated discourses of ‘alternative modernity’, ‘retroactive modernity’, ‘modernism against the modernity’, ‘capitalism without capitalism’ and so on were also rampant in the metaphorical language of mass dictatorship. They reflect a consciousness that ‘oscillated furiously between recognising the peril of being overcome by modernity and the impossible imperative of overcoming it’ in the latecomers’ society.15

Zygmunt Bauman’s warning that Holocaust-style genocide should be recognised as a logical outcome of the civilising tendency to subordinate the use of violence to a rational calculus echoes through the transnational perspective. He is suspicious of any attempt to attribute the Nazi atrocities either to certain peculiar convolutions of German history or to the moral indifference and latent anti-Semitism of ordinary Germans. To him, the German Sonderweg thesis seems to exonerate the modernity and ‘West’ from the potentiality of the genocide. This is where transnational perspectives meet post-colonial perspectives in understanding mass dictatorship. To say that ‘the transnational meets the post-colonial’ is not to imply a linear continuity between German colonialism in South-West Africa and the Holocaust. Holocaust should not be reduced to another peculiarity of the German colonialism. Rather, the Holocaust should be seen in the context of the continuity of ‘Western’ colonialism, as Hannah Arendt suggested when she articulated the concept of ‘administered mass killing’

(Verwaltungsmassenmord) in respect of the British colonial experience. In other words, the German colonialists’ genocide as the breaking of a taboo in the Herero and Nama wars in 1904-07 can be better explained from the transnational perspectives of Euro-colonialism than by recourse to German peculiarities deriving from the circumstance of a latecomer’s colonialism. More broadly, one cannot miss the history of a primitive accumulation, full of conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder and all forms of violence in the making of the modern nation-state. The emergence of capitalism and democracy in the ‘Western’ nation-state should be viewed as having taken place, in Marx’s terms, ‘under circumstances of ruthless terrorism’.

In fact, the Nazi utopia of a racially purified German empire was mimicry of Western colonialism, ‘turning imperialism on its head and treating Europeans as Africans.’ Nazi Germans must have felt a kind of ‘white men’s burden’ inside Europe as they regarded Slavic people as ‘white negroes’ and Slavic land as ‘Asia’. Hitler did not stick to a reified geography. He stated explicitly that ‘the border between Europe and Asia is not the Urals but the place where the settlements of Germanic type of people stop and pure Slavdom begins’. And ‘the Slavs would provide the German equivalent of the conquered native populations of India and Africa in the British empire’. Among Germans in the occupied ‘East’, it was not difficult to find a sense of cultural superiority similar to that associated with a colonial mission. Indeed, ‘Western’ colonialism provided an important historical precedent for the Nazi’s genocidal thinking. A certain historical connection between colonial genocide and Nazi’s crime is undeniable. Genocide of the native Americans in the frontiers, British colonial genocide in India and Africa, Stalinist mass murder of the Kulaks and the Holocaust all belong to the same category of the ‘categorical murder’ spurred by the essentialist tendency to categorise others on the basis of race, ethnicity, class and so on.

From the viewpoint of ‘colonialism within’, this colonial legacy was bequeathed to colonial subjects who were to be reborn as modern subjects of the independent nation-state in the post-colonial era. The post-colonial type of mass dictatorship, such as the developmental dictatorship in South Korea, provides a vivid example. The interaction of colonisers and the colonised is a key to understanding mass dictatorship in the post-colonial era.

Mixed Twins: Mass Dictatorship and Mass Democracy

Postcolonial, and perhaps also the poststructuralist perspectives on the

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transnational history of mass dictatorship demand a reformulation of the question: what is the difference between mass dictatorship and mass democracy? The answer is not that simple. What if majoritarian democracy in the modern nation-state is based on the categorisation of minorities as ‘Others’ in terms of nation, class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on? What if the majority tyrannise minorities? Is that democracy or is it dictatorship? Arguably, the cliché that dictatorship was imposed by a wilful minority upon a confused majority cannot withstand historical scrutiny. A history of modern colonies reveals that, in certain contexts, settler democracies have been more murderous than authoritarian colonial governments. It is also intriguing that ‘regimes newly embarked upon democratisation are more likely to commit murderous ethnic cleansings than are stable authoritarian regimes’. And much later, the Hutus’ slogan of ‘majoritarian democracy’ in Rwanda expressed their conviction that ‘whoever rules in the name of the “majority people” is ontologically democratic’. It opened the road to the massacre of Tutsis. The characterisation of American democracy as a ‘tyranny through masses’ (Alexis Tocqueville) and the identification of ‘totalitarian democracy’ among French Jacobins (J. L. Talmon), insinuate the ‘mass dictatorship’ in more telling ways than does Mao Zedong’s declaration that ‘dictatorship is dictatorship by the masses’. If mass democracy means rule by the ordinary people, mass dictatorship presupposes the transformation of the chaotic crowd of ordinary people into a disciplined uniform mass, a collective characterised by its homogenous identity, unitary will and common goal. However, a disciplined uniformity and homogenous collectivity of the masses is imaginary. In so far as the imaginary homogenous collectivity is perceived among the masses, it remains effective. That collectivity resides not in the ‘Real’ but in ‘perceived reality’. Ordinary people’s reception of and responses to mass dictatorship are bound up with a transformation not only of objective, but also of perceived reality. Very often, it is not the reality itself, but the interpreted reality that shapes the thoughts and practice of the many in their everyday lives. As an imaginary reality, the general will (or people’s will, or nation’s will) affords a link between mass democracy and mass dictatorship indicating their shared objective: to nationalise masses. This analysis finds its most eccentric expression in Simon Tormey’s statement that ‘liberal democracy is the most refined version of totalitarianism’. Synchronic comparisons aside, a diachronic comparison of pre- and post-war Japan shows that post-war democracy and the welfare state in Japan stood in the line of continuity with the systematic social integration and consolidation which had marked the era of mass dictatorship. The upshot is not that mass

25 Ibid., p. 4.
26 Ibid., pp. 430-4.
27 The security regime in post 9/11 America is not a result of Bush’s stupidity but an invention of the masses and by the masses, though perhaps not for the masses.
29 Toshio Nagano, “Japanese Total War System”, in Mass Dictatorship I: Between Coercion and Consent(Korean), pp. 517-32; Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann and Ryūichi Narita
dictatorship is democratic, but that mass democracy is no less risky than mass dictatorship.

The blurring of demarcations between dictatorship and democracy in a transnational history of mass dictatorship leads us to rethink domination, violence, coercion and other means of repression. The superior efficiency of Britain’s total war system by comparison with Germany’s suggests that domination is most effective when people do not realise that they are being dominated. The feeling of being dominated may discourage and dampen the enthusiasm of those who might otherwise support a regime. The most virulent and penetrating forms of domination were therefore be found in those systems where the appearance of freedom and rationality were greatest. The slow but relentless build-up of pressure on the individual to conform is much more efficient and cost-effective than any means of terror. Presumably any regime’s most favoured mode of ruling/subjection is the ‘internal coercion’ produced by structuring thought and feeling.

The success of a mass dictatorship would depend on its ability to involve people in the ritual of legitimacy and make them surrender their own identity and subjectivity in favour of conformity to the model of a subject manufactured by the regime. A modern subject, whether in dictatorial or in democratic regimes, has been exposed to the ‘controlled and guided massification’ in which a notionally inalienable right of individual freedom proves to be legitimately alienable after all. It is not a coincidence that both Italian Fascism and Stalinism very loudly proclaimed their intention to create the ‘new man’, ‘homo fascistus’ and ‘homo sovieticus’ respectively, through an anthropological revolution. Neither of these regimes reached perfection, but both had been driven by an unstinting effort to perform that revolution.

Once launched, however, the anthropological revolution shifted from revolutionary mass movements to institutionalised mass politics. If the consent of high Stalinism was fed by the fever of anthropological revolution, post-Stalinist regimes depended on shared guilt or public complicity for mass consent. As a dissident witness, Vaclav Havel adumbrated the peculiar mass psychology of public complicity or shared guilt in his thesis positing ‘post-totalitarianism’ as a kind of compromised dictatorship. In time, the large scale of public complicity was bound to create conformity, especially in and after the era of de-Stalinisation. When the post-Stalinist regime abandoned the totalitarian anthropological revolutionary effort to create a ‘new man’, it lost the ambition to dominate private lives and tolerated people’s cynicism despite the official media’s deploving people’s passivity and indifference. Generally speaking, East

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(eds.), Total War and Modernization (Ithaca: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1998).

30 See Stefan Berger, “Total War System in Germany and Britain”, in Mass Dictatorship I: Between Coercion and Consensus (Korean), pp. 149-74.


European people in the post-1956 era just adapted themselves to the system without volunteering enthusiasm for the state project, and the regime was obliged to rest content with such merely passive consent. Compromised in their everyday lives, ordinary people fell into various depoliticised ‘niches’ where ‘they could feel themselves’. The result was a ‘niche society’ (Nischengesellschaft). The heritage of Marxist ideas was reduced to a handful of empty and decontextualised slogans and people’s passive consent to this fossilised Marxism was compensated for by material rewards. According to Andrzej Walicki, the de-Stalinisation of 1956 marked a turning point from totalitarianism to authoritarianism.

A re-engagement with Antonio Gramsci can complement this analysis, since his conceptualisation of hegemony helps us to problematise the self- or voluntary mobilisation of the masses. Contrary to a common belief that his concept of hegemony is confined to an analysis of liberal democratic regimes, Antonio Gramsci explicitly wrote that fascism represents a ‘war of position’. His intuition was that fascism was entrenched solidly at a grassroots level. Gramsci’s grave concern about fascist hegemony chimes with Mussolini’s keen interest in ‘general economic mobilisation of citizens as means and agents of production, real conscription, a real civic and economic recruitment of all Italians’. Under the scrutiny of the concept of hegemony, the organisation of consent cannot be equated simply with the process of moulding public opinion. Popular consent was not just imposed by the state terror and all-pervasive propaganda. It was important to inspire self-motivation among the masses. That explains Mussolini’s burning concern with building ‘a capillary network of associations with vast powers of social and cultural persuasion’. The Japanese ‘moral suasion mobilisation campaign (1929-30)’ was second to none in its pursuit of total social control through moral suasion (kyōka). With its later development into the kōminjoka (nationalisation) campaign, Japanese imperialism undertook the ambitious task of nationalising colonial subjects of Koreans and Taiwanese, making them into Japanese citizens. The project of nationalising masses in the developmental dictatorship in the post-colonial Korea and Taiwan can be located in a line of continuity of the Japanese imperial kōminjoka policy. What one cannot fail to note in mass dictatorship is an experiment in plebiscitary democracy which served to legitimise the regime. Hegemony, in Gramscian terms, paves the way to the ‘dictatorship of consent’.


40 The term ‘consensus dictatorship’ is found in Martin Sabrow, “Dictatorship as Discourse: Cultural Perspectives on SED Legitimacy”, in Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), Dictatorship as Experience:
Mass dictatorship is not only a ‘hard’ power utterly dominating the political sphere, but also a ‘soft’ power, retuning civil society to its own normative key. Fascist hegemony, entrenched in the grassroots, often attempts to penetrate into the private sphere of individuals. As shown in its pursuit of anthropological revolution, it strives to maximise the hegemonic effect by infiltrating the praxis of everyday life and thus moulding people’s mind. Along with Gramsci’s interpretation, Louis Althusser’s concept of ‘appellation’ and Michel Foucault’s analysis of the modern subject as tailor-made can be very suggestive for an understanding of the fascist habitus and the internalisation of coercion. Like all other modern regimes, mass dictatorship struggles to legitimise its political application to multiple arrays of medical, legal, administrative and juridical instruments. What distinguishes mass dictatorship from mass democracy is the extreme way in which the former achieves paroxysmal perpetration. Mass dictatorship shares similar mechanisms for constructing the image of a people of unitary will and action with other forms of the modern nation-state. It made the non-conforming insiders into ‘Others’, and then hegemonically appropriated the rest of the population in the name of ‘the nation’s will’. The Nazis’ slogans of the Volksgemeinschaft and Volksgenossen are good examples, symbolic of the organic integration which transcended class and political divisions achieved by making ‘Others’ through anti-Semitism, anti-Bolshevism and anti-Westernism outwardly, and by inventing a new ethnic unity of the Arian race inwardly.

State racism is an effective means of creating ‘biologised’ internal or international enemies, against whom society must defend itself. Nazi culture as a contemporary allegory of intolerance, existential extremity and radical evil was in a sense the tragic culmination of enlightened science and rationality. Again Michel Foucault’s concept of a ‘bio-power’ based on the triangular relationship between bio-politics, population and race is evocative of that. If disciplinary society constructs a capillary network of apparatuses to produce and regulate customs, habits, habitus and practices, bio-power regulates social life from its interior. Power can achieve effective command over the entire life of the population at the birth of bio-power. One cannot say whether mass dictatorship did attain bio-power to perfection, but it might have harnessed the productive dimension of bio-power for the modern disciplinary state. Evidently mass dictatorship did not fulfil the anthropological revolutionary ambition of creating a network...
new man, but it never abandoned the modernist dream of the ‘society of control’. The fascist aesthetics of the beautiful male body may be one indicator of the dimension of bio-politics in mass dictatorship, as furnishing a bridge between the public and private sphere. And what the history of sexuality shows is that the masses’ mentalities and behaviour hinged on the means of controlling passions and ideals of human beauty, love, friendship and sexual habitus. In fact mass dictatorship regimes deployed the bio-politics of sexuality not less than mass democracy.45

People’s Sovereignty and Political Religion

Mass dictatorship as a working hypothesis pays due attention to the intellectual history of popular sovereignty. Carl Schmitt’s advocacy of Nazism as ‘an anti-liberal but not necessarily anti-democratic’ regime represented the climax of a ‘new politics’ based on the idea of popular sovereignty.46 In other words, mass dictatorship is congruent with the change from liberalism to democracy, and then from parliamentary democracy to ‘decisionist’ or plebiscitary democracy. Popular sovereignty transformed populations from passive subjects into active citizens and thus paved the way for participatory dictatorship. Once the ‘general will’ is hoaxed into becoming the will of the nation, nation as the ‘constituent power’ is not subject to a constitution. Instead, it is the nation that now has the legislative power to make constitutions. This reveals the secret of ‘sovereign dictatorship’: its justification by the logical chain of representation with ‘the people representing the multitude, the nation representing the people, and the state representing the nation.’ In this way, the multitude is transformed into an ordered totality.47 The sovereign dictatorship can enjoy unlimited constitutional legitimacy in so far as the people’s will as the constituent power support that dictatorship. In his address to the National Convention (1793), Barère could justify Jacobin dictatorship on the ground that the nation was exercising dictatorship over itself. By the same logic, ‘the might of the dictatorship of the masses knows no bounds’ in Maoist China.48 Seen in this light, George Mosse’s eccentric assumption that Robespierre would have felt at home in the Nazi’s mass rally is not groundless at all.49 The Nazi Volksgemeinschaft was not a bizarre pre-modern political concept but a meta-modern political order in which people regarded themselves as the real political sovereign. In Eugene Weber’s expression, Nazism looked ‘much like the Jacobinism of our time’.50

47 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 87, 134. It is very intriguing that Hardt’s and Negri’s sharp criticism of the ‘sovereign machine’ and Schmitt’s ardent advocacy of ‘sovereign dictatorship’ stand on the same historical ground of the formation of the modern sovereign state.
48 See Michael Schoenhals, “Sex in Big-Character Posters from China’s Cultural Revolution: Gendering the Class Enemy” in this volume.
49 George L. Mosse, The Fascist Revolution, p. 76.
The idea of sovereign dictatorship also provides a conceptual clue to understanding the ironic conundrum of an affinity between the rightist dictatorship/fascism and the allegedly leftist dictatorship/Stalinism. The cliché that ‘the two extremes meet’ explains nothing. However, Hardt and Negri’s suggestion that ‘the abstract machine of national sovereignty is at the heart of both’ does seem to have a point.\footnote{Hardt and Negri, \textit{Empire}, p. 112.} Even for the Left, national community meant a working people’s unity forged against the people’s enemy. As the nationalist discourse in People’s Poland and North Korea vividly demonstrates, the socialist ideal of the ethical and political unity of society unintentionally reinforced the primordialist concept of the nation, that is, a way of seeing it as an organic community and even a family community.\footnote{See Jie-Hyun Lim, “The Nationalist Message in Socialist Code: on Court Historiography in People’s Poland and North Korea”, in Solvi Sognier (ed.), \textit{Making Sense of Global History} (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001).} As a response to the ‘West’, the nationalist discourse of mass dictatorship inclined towards Occidentalism. What is most remarkable in this regard is the awkward convergence of fascism and socialism in an anti-Western modernisation project. The dichotomy of the ‘bourgeois nation’ and the ‘proletarian nation’, shared by Italian fascists and post-war Third World Marxists of the ‘dependency theory’, implied a shift from class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat to national struggle between rich nation and poor nation. Both fascism and Stalinism laid stress on a developmental strategy designed to catch up with and overtake advanced capitalism at all cost, and justified that strategy by invoking the nation’s will.\footnote{Jie-Hyun Lim, “Befreiung oder Modernisierung? Sozialismus als ein Weg der antwortlichen Modernisierung in unterentwickelten Laendern”, \textit{Beitraege zur Geschichte der Arbeiter-bewegung}, 43/2 (2001), pp. 5-23; “An Awkward Conversion? Fascism and Socialism as the Anti-Western Modernization Project”, paper delivered at the 5th International Conference \textit{Mass Dictatorship}, Hanyang University, Seoul, 25-28 June 2007.}

Once situated within a broader socio-cultural history, popular sovereignty ideologically supports ‘the nationalisation of the masses’.\footnote{George L. Mosse, \textit{The Nationalization of the Masses} (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975).} This kind of massification corresponds to ‘equalisation’ and ‘homogenisation’ in the realm of perceived reality.\footnote{Salvador Giner, \textit{Mass Society} (New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 127.} The nationalised masses as a tailor-made totality, assisted by fascist spectacles, deny the liberal image of an autonomous modern subject. The proponents of that transformation asserted that the disenchanted modern subject should be tailored to the demands of the nation-state, which they again justified in reference to a nation’s will. But ideological justification is not enough to make people internalise norms and disciplines in everyday life. Popular sovereignty is too abstract to discipline people through bio-power. Beyond the abstract level, what is complementarily needed for the emotional reproduction of a tailor-made subject is anthropo-cultural re-enchantment. It is political religion that satisfied the demand for re-enchantment. It did so by conferring a sacred status on earthly entities like nation, state, class, history and race, and by rendering them into absolute principles of collective identity. Incorporated into a code of ethical and social commandments, political religion functions to bind the
individual to the sacralised secular entity. If most people embodied the fascist message via fascist aesthetics, it was mostly nationalism that re-enchanted people by transforming politics into a political religion.

The nationalist narrative of a collective life flowing from the immemorial past into an infinite future could turn the mortal life of the individual into the eternal life of the collective, and thus fill the vacuum caused by the extinction of the mythic along with the religious community. But political religion is not peculiar to mass dictatorship. Rather it was a legacy of the French Enlightenment left both to the mass dictatorship and to mass democracy. Theoretically, modern political messianism should be traced back to Rousseau who insisted on the necessity of ‘civil religion’ and national festivals that would infuse the people with a feeling of moral unity and absolute love of the fatherland. It was the American Revolution of 1776 and French Revolution of 1789 that provided the nationalist affirmation of secular religion, and an apocalyptic vision of national regeneration through politics. Political religion can be found in mass democracy no less than in mass dictatorship. In George Bush’s address on the day he announced victory in 2003, American troops stopped being terrestrial combatants and became missionaries. They were no longer simply killing enemies: they were casting out demons in Iraq. From the viewpoint of a transnational history of mass dictatorship, Gentile’s binary of ‘democratic civil religion’ and ‘totalitarian political religion’ seems to miss the point. They are two sides of the same coin of socio-political engineering in the modern nation-state.

A seemingly one-sided emphasis on consent or consensus may give the impression that mass dictatorship causes one to avert one’s eyes from the evident terror. That is not the case. The explication of consensus and hegemonic effects in mass dictatorship never denies violence, terror, repression and coercion. Rather, mass dictatorship questions the very distinction between coercion and consent by asking why a large part of the population ignores or even endorses the horrors of extreme coercion employed by repressive regimes such as the Nazis. The upshot is that terror was an indispensable means of creating consent, appealing not only to fear but also to a feeling of relief among ‘national comrades’. Terror was used highly selectively and was initially aimed at ‘enemies of the people’. Mass dictatorship deployed massive terror in a radicalised version of a strategy of negative integration, provoking violence against ‘Others’ in order to homogenise a mass into ‘our national community’. Terror and coercion created chaos and fear among outcasts, but it never involved danger to faithful insiders. It was not the terror itself, but the fear of being outcast that was the greater threat to the greater number. That explains why ordinary people readily became active perpetrators, or were passive bystanders, and why even extreme terror could count on consent from below. Thus,

59 See Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), Dictatorship as Experience; Robert Gellately, Backing Hitler:
coercion and consent should be seen not as polar opposites, but as intimately interwoven integral parts of mass dictatorship. Mass dictatorship was indeed Janus-faced: ‘Jekyll to insiders and Hyde to outcasts’.

**Agency in the Everyday Life**

Mass dictatorship may look like a behemoth - a perfect, tightly-sutured political machine, which does not allow even a tiny space for dissent and resistance. This is partly due to Foucault’s account of power and modernity, on which the mass dictatorship leans methodologically. Because of its focus on the microphysics of power to show how power actually functions at the level of the everyday life, Foucault’s explanation tends to ‘reduce the functioning of a whole society to a single, dominant type of procedure’, in this case the panoptical or the disciplinary. Behind the dominant panoptical procedures, however, there exist practices disseminated through unofficial realms. These minor practices have remained ‘unprivileged by history’, but formed tactical ‘anti-disciplines’ which served to undermine strategies of official power. Thanks to the silent and unacknowledged forms of resistance which ‘break through the grid of the established order and accepted disciplines’, mass dictatorship ceases to be a perfect, tightly-sutured machine. Together, the Foucauldian genealogy of disciplines and Certeau’s meandering anti-disciplines make up the topography of mass dictatorship and mass democracy. The crooked lines of history from below, oscillating between optimism and pessimism, are in themselves causes for reflection on the coexistence of disciplines and anti-disciplines.

A question of terminology arises too. In the ‘Western’ intellectual tradition, the term of the ‘masses’ is pregnant with the political implication that masses would be passive objects of manipulation. But that political implication is only partially merited. As the American socialist magazine of ‘The Masses’ (1911-1917) suggests, masses were regarded by some liberal lefts as the true agents of societal transformation. To bourgeois and aristocratic circles, however, masses appeared merely as the common herd, characterised by irrationality, disorderliness and poverty. But the bourgeois establishment’s contempt, which found its classic expression in Gustave LeBon’s writings, denotes fear of the chaotic masses’ rebellion. It was Jose Ortega y Gasset who straightforwardly confessed that fear of the new situation where masses rule and decide. In the twentieth century, masses stopped being passive subjects and began to challenge for power as active agents. The bourgeoisie’s very fear of the masses is in fact indicative of their agential power. The appearance of words denoting ‘masses’ in East Asian languages-Daejung (Korean), Dazhong (Chinese), Taishu (Japan)- confirms a recognition of the agency of the masses, however some exceptional usages.


Jose Ortega y Gasset, La rebellion de las masas, translated by Young-Jo Hwangbo (Seoul: Yoksabipyöngsa, 2005).
Often combined with the adjective of ‘working’, masses in the East Asian usage of ‘working masses’ (勞動大衆) connoted historical actors. Because masses are recognised as agents in the East Asian usage, the mass dictatorship approach waives the top-down structuralist approach.

‘Historical actors are back on stage’ in mass-dictatorship discourses. Resting on the ‘empirical turn’ in particular, or on an ‘investigative turn’ more broadly, the concept of mass dictatorship calls attention to ‘the patchwork of practices and orientations which people co-produce and which they themselves live with and operate in’. Human agents are not predestined politically. Finding themselves between self-empowerment and self-mobilisation, they meander through historical moments. Thus explanation needs to be multilinear rather than unilinear, pluralist rather than dualist, ambiguous rather than unambiguous. The room for manoeuvre open to each single human agent is a niche from which mass dictatorship, and perhaps also mass democracy can be deconstructed. So dualistic terms of ‘coercion and consent’ and ‘resistance and collaboration’ are deconstructed and pluralised. Every single agent-to say nothing of the masses-resists compartmentalisation and is constituent of heterogeneous entities. Agency cannot be contained en masse within the tightly woven social and cultural matrix. Selfhood is inescapably dual, comprising both object and subject in the relations between the self and the world. In this dual relationship, the more the mobilisation system develops, the wider the range of kinds of non-conformist behaviour among the mobilised becomes. Resistance arises at the very moment when the regime might appear to have erected a total system of domination. For many people, participation in a self-mobilising regime means subjection to the structure and an opportunity to appropriate the structured outer world in their own ways.

The dialectic of ‘internalising the external’ and ‘externalising the internal’ can be caught by every single human agent. What one can find in modes of life among the masses in the mass dictatorship regime are contradictions or dissimilarities in people’s practices or mode of conduct. In lieu of the term ‘self-mobilising’, Alf Lüdtke suggests the expression of ‘self-energising’. It captures these contradictory practices of subjection and appropriation in everyday lives. Self-contradictions in the masses’ modes of everyday life cast doubt on the binaries of consent and coercion, desire and repression, and self-mobilisation and forced mobilisation. These are not irreconcilable opposites, but in a sense aspects of the same process. The question is not of a choice- ‘either control or consensus producing longevity (of the mass dictatorship regime)’. Instead, we need to consider ‘control and consensus (or, perhaps better, compliance)-a combination providing ambivalent reactions to the regime’. This insight leads us

66 Paul Corner, “Self-Mobilisation in Mass Dictatorships-the Italian Example”, paper delivered at
to postulate that the experience of consent and coercion itself is a multi-layered, spanning internalised coercion, forced consent, passive conformity, consensus, self-mobilisation, forced participation and so on. Subjection was not one-way street either. Very often, people pretended to be servile to the regime in order to find a way of appropriating the outer world for their benefit. Ultimately, then, the tasks awaiting historians of mass dictatorship include the deconstruction and pluralisation of terms such as ‘consent’, ‘coercion’, ‘conformity’, ‘adaptation’, ‘resistance’, ‘opposition’, ‘mobilisation’ and so on. Similarly, ‘resistance’ can be pluralised, allowing us to distinguish between into ‘Resistenz’ (‘structural resistance’, a term used to define the defence of identities and social practices threatened by a regime) and ‘Widerstand’ (organised resistance-Resistance with a capital ‘R’), ‘ideologically driven resistance’ and ‘existentialist resistance’, ‘resistance subject to hegemony’ and ‘domination pregnant with resistance’.

Agents are not allowed a free ride. Coming to terms with the dictatorial past demands ‘thick description’ of yesterday’s consent and coercion and today’s nostalgia for and against as a multi-layered experience in everyday lives. Historical actors should pay for their agency when they cease to be passive objects. Given its stress on agency, mass dictatorship does not exonerate the ordinary people from historical responsibility and juridical culpability. The dictum of ‘structure does not kill but individuals do’ points to the culpability of historical actors. The mass dictatorship hypothesis challenges the moralist dualism which insists on there being a few bad perpetrators and many innocent victims since that dualism facilitates the displacement of the historical responsibility of ‘ordinary’ people by shifting culpability away from them. When Raul Hilberg asked the question of ‘wouldn’t you be happier if I had been able to show you that all perpetrators were crazy’, he seemed to imply his own answer, namely that history brings no comfort. Indeed mass killers were not crazy perpetrators but everyday human beings-normal people. The moral comfort that the image of crazy perpetrators brings to us result not only in self-exculpation but also in moral disarmament. As Bauman put it, ‘the most frightening news brought about the Holocaust and by what we learned of its perpetrators was not the likelihood that “this” could be done to us, but the idea that we could do it’.


69 This task will prove more than unusually complex because it will involve crossing the line between perceived reality and objective reality.


71 Most recently war criminals in the former Yugoslavia confirm this once again. See Slavenka Drakulić, They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War criminals on trial in the Hague (London: Abacus, 2004).

72 Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, p. 152.
words, ‘placed in comparable situations and similar social constituencies, you or I might also commit murderous ethnic cleansing’.  

In light of this moral reflection, agents come to possess the reflexive dimension of the self. The reflexive self opens up the possibility for the historical actors to stand outside the order of external determinations, though ‘in a manner limited by their inherence in that order’.  

In relation to mass dictatorship, these historical actors as reflexive selves will frustrate the regime’s ambition to nationalise the masses, and change the uniform mass of a unitary will into the multitude ‘to communicate and act in common while remaining internally different’, and transform themselves from the tailor-made subjects of a single identity to the autonomous individuals of innumerable differences. And finally they will rupture and punch through the seemingly tightly sutured political machine, that is, mass dictatorship. Despite fascism’s having lost a ‘war of manoeuvre’, it is still scoring victories in a ‘war of position’. Umberto Eco’s warning about ‘fuzzy totalitarianism and endless fascism’, and Felix Guattari’s caution against ‘recurrent fascism’ imply that ‘a war of position’ against fascism is still in progress.  

What makes fascism dangerous is ‘its molecular or micropolitical power’ which spreads like a cancer. Freed from the Manichean moralism which posits few bad victimisers and many innocent victims, the historicism of mass dictatorship turns itself into a reflexive presentism on this front.

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74 Jerrold Seigel, “Problematising the Self”, p. 289.  