

Review Forum for the Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century Series

Organizers: Critical Global Studies Institute (CGSI, Seoul),
Centro per lo Studio dei Regimi Totalitari del XX secolo
(CiSReTo, Siena), Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung (ZZF,
Potsdam) Review Forum for the *Mass Dictatorship in the
Twentieth Century Series*.

Date and Venue: June 15-17 2016, Zentrum für Zeithistorische
Forschung, Potsdam

All conferences should begin with walking together: The collective movement aligns us and prepares us for collaboration and discussion. If, as Nietzsche has it, all truly great thoughts are conceived by walking, then thinking together should be prepared for by communal perambulation. We walk down Friedrich-Ebert Strasse towards the conference venue. Buildings of every age - from baroque centenarians to teenagers in concrete - line the street, bearing material witness to history as an “ever-present past.”¹ I’m here to study a strange tribe called historians, their customs and ideas.²

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Engaging with Mass Dictatorships

Jie-Hyun Lim, the initiator of the project and the man who coined the term Mass Dictatorship, welcomes us and immediately makes the meeting very personal by highlighting the link between memory and historical research: He describes historical scholarship as dealing equally with archival material and personal recollections. This position forces the historian to be extremely self-reflective in her/his work, and to try and reach out and understand other positions, especially those of the “ordinary people” (a term, which, though I appreciate the sentiment behind it, always baffles me somewhat - who were these “ordinary people” that appear to make up most of what one might call the fabric of history?).

One of the first subjects under debate is the term Mass Dictatorships itself and how it has been to “work with”. **Eve Rosenhaft** raises the issue of a possible conflict between historical research and collective memory: When we engage as scholars with positive or popular aspects of Mass Dictatorships, we sometimes become targets of criticism or even allegations that we are ourselves accomplices after the fact. Following up, **Peter Lambert** argues that although one might risk criticism for even engaging with Nazism, it is important to work seriously with the dark or difficult parts of history and not only brush them away as well over with. An interest in or a wish to understand something better is not equal to promoting that thing. It is the

job of the brave historian to risk at peep at what might prove to be the puss beneath the glamour or, even worse, the human aspects of historical "villains."

Paul Corner adds that there certainly seems to exist such a gap between archival and collective memory in Italy, while **Antonio Costa Pinto** accentuates that the research terminology used often says more about present than it does about the past. So is "mass" a tainted term? How are we to recognize the masses not as political rhetoric – "the proletariat" – but as real people? Here the discussion becomes somewhat chaotic; no-one moves forward to establish order, I can't help thinking that a talking stick reminiscent of those traditionally used by native North Americans might come in handy. (As it turns out, it might not be such a bad pedagogical strategy to let everyone blow off a little steam here at the very beginning of the conference, to ensure more moderate and mature discussions later on.)

During the delicious lunch break, many of us move to catch a bit of gloriously hot midday sun in the university yard, which houses, apart from a museum, a playground and green area full of children and washing. The atmosphere is one of combined home and workplace; not academia far removed from worldly affairs, but right in the middle of it, catering not only to the intellectual but also to the social and material needs of the knowledge workers.

The Role of the Historian

One of the most interesting discussion for me, was to do with the role of the historian. **Alf Lüdtke** eloquently describes historians as interveners in the sedimentation of memory culture. This conjures up a wonderful image of women and men in tweeds and waders, continuously whirling up new and uncomfortable or just unseen truths, keeping history from fossilizing completely. **Jie-Hyun Lim** fondly dubs the historian a *memory activist*, but laments the way she/he loses track of even the best defined research terms once they travel into the tumultuous world of popular media.

Michael Schoenhals draws attention to the fact that Mass Dictatorship is not only a term for historians, but that the practices associated with it still live on, even if the label itself is now out of fashion. **Jane Burbank** agrees and points out the danger of democracy turning into Mass Dictatorship, with ancient Rome as the prime example. **Jie-Hyun Lim** feeds into the conversation by highlighting Mass Dictatorship's links to a state of emergency. It becomes clear to me that what I am witnessing is a form of termite academia³ -researchers pooling together and making a big brain. It's great! It's academia at its best – sharing and creating an intellectual whole, which is larger and more complex than its separate components.

Another thing that becomes clear: It is not until **Konrad Jarausch** criticises the term Mass Dictatorship for being too static, that I realise what we are really here for; to review the most recent publications of a project that has been going on for the past ten years.⁴

One research difficulty that is confronted is the tendency to separate people in Mass Dictatorships into victims and perpetrators, but as **Eve Rosenhaft** says, how do we know if they had a choice, much less whether that choice was a reflected or an un-reflected one? Following up this argument, **Konrad Jarausch** emphasises that just as regimes use people, so people use regimes as well; to get away from home, to boost their image, or to acquire different kinds of capital. **Jie-Hyun Lim** delights everyone with an enlightening anecdote about how he used to attend anti-communist rallies in South Korea to scout for pretty girls: Seen from the outside, the rallies looked like hard core ideological displays - a uniform mass of people, everyone shouting and raising their fists, but within this mass a variety social dynamics were at play. I note this down as a thing to remember when doing historical research; not to confuse form with content. People always have, for better or for worse, several conscious and unconscious motives and motivations for their actions.

The afternoon is somewhat deflated; the fizz has gone off the discussion. **Karen Petrone** mentions the importance of cross-utilising perspectives of gender, race, sexuality and class, as one person can belong to many categories. She also points to woman mobilisation during wars as an example of how cultural capital rather than, or as well as, ideological conviction can be a motivating factor. **Barbara Walker** agrees that more attention should be paid to this aspect of war-studies; overlooked facts, such as that 60-70% of early programmers were women, could help influence our conception of computer science as a primarily male subject today.

Terms and How We Use Them

This discussion departs from a hierarchy; sources first, terms later. Research terms should not be visualised as drawers for storing things in, but rather as plates, on which you can place several different events and look at them together. Essentially, how we use terms affects how we do research. In this context, **Daniel Hedinger** finds Mass Dictatorship a useful concept; not only is it a new term in historical research, furthermore it is global from the beginning, and not bound by any special geographical-historical context.

Despite the feeling akin to jet-lagged time-travel that any prolonged participation in a history conference produces, these historians tend to talk a lot about the present. **Jie-Hyun Lim** puts this concern with a contemporary perspective on history

very neatly when he says that historians are not responsible for what happened, but for how it is remembered.

Conference Report by Astrid Møller-Olsen, Lund University

Conference Overview

Session 1: "Overview: A Short History of Mass Dictatorship."

Moderated by Chris Lorenz (Ruhr University, Bochum).

Presentation by Jie-Hyun Lim (Sogang Univ., Seoul).

Session 2: "Project, Modernity, Imagination." Moderated by

Kathrin Kollmeier (zzf). Presentations by Konrad Jarausch (Univ. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) & Michael Schoenhals (Lund Univ.).

Session 3: "Self-Mobilization, Self-Energization, Appropriation."

Moderated by Thomas Lindenberger (zzf). Presentations by Alf Luedtke (Erfurt Univ.) & Eve Rosenhaft (Univ. of Liverpool).

Session 4: "Mobilization, Total War, Gender Politics."

Moderated by Thomas Schaarschmidt (zzf). Presentations by Karen Petrone (Univ. of Kentucky) & Eunshil Kim (Ewha Womans Univ., Seoul).

Session 5: "Militarization, Terror, Colonial Violence." Moderated

by Michael Wildt (Humboldt University). Presentations by Antonio Costa Pinto (Univ. of Lisbon) & Daniel Hedinger (Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich).

Session 6: “Myth, Memory, Coming to Terms with Past.”

Moderated by Frank Hadler (GWZO at Leipzig Univ.).

Presentations by Peter Lambert (Aberystwyth University) & Barbara Walker (University of Nevada, Reno).

Session 7: “Afterwards - the Future of Mass Dictatorship?”

Moderated by Jane Burbank (NYU/Wiko zum Berlin).

Presentation by Paul Corner (Univ. of Siena).

Mass Dictatorship in the Twentieth Century series

Kim, M. (Ed), Schoenhals, M. (Ed) (2013): *Mass Dictatorship and Modernity*.

Lim, J. (Ed), Petrone, K. (Ed) (2010): *Gender Politics and Mass Dictatorship*.

Lim, J. (Ed), Walker, B. (Ed), Lambert, P. (Ed) (2013): *Mass Dictatorship and Memory as Ever Present Past*.

Lüdtke, A. (Ed) (2016): *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship*.

Schoenhals, M. (Ed), Sarsenov, K. (Ed) (2013): *Imagining Mass Dictatorships*.