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As a twentieth-century phenomenon, mass dictatorship developed its own modern socio-political engineering system, which sought to achieve the self-mobilisation of the masses for radical state projects. In this sense, it shares a similar mobilisation mechanism with its close cousin, mass democracy. Mass dictatorship requires the modern platform of the public sphere to spread its clarion call for the masses to overcome their collective crisis. Far from being a phenomenon that emerged from pre-modern despotic practices, mass dictatorship reflects the global proliferation of quintessential modernist assumptions about the transformability of the individual. Mass dictatorship therefore utilises the utmost modern practices to form totalitarian cohesion and to stage public spectacles in the search for extremist solutions to perceived social problems.

Global history suggests that mass dictatorship is far from a result of deviation or aberration from a purported ‘normal path’ of development but is in itself a transnational formation of modernity that emerged in response to the global processes that swept through the twentieth century. As Jie-Hyun Lim argued in his series introduction, ‘Mapping Mass Dictatorship: Towards a Transnational History of Twentieth-Century Dictatorship’, the near ubiquitous presence of mass dictatorship in so many parts of the globe and disparate historical circumstances argues against the Sonderweg dichotomy of a particular/pre-modern/abnormal dictatorship in the ‘Rest’ and a universal/modern/normal democracy in the ‘West’, while reducing fascism and the Holocaust to manifestations of essentialist characteristics that pervade the ‘Rest’.¹ Mass dictatorship is ultimately but one of many
manifestations of global modernity that stem from our fervent desires to construct a utopian social world. As such, one of the contributions of this series and this volume in particular is to highlight the linkages of colonial and post-colonial circumstances with mass dictatorships that share a radical trajectory in their common pursuit of modernity.

In this volume, the contributors examine the phenomenon of mass dictatorship along many different lines of inquiry. The first section attempts to theorise the specific structural mechanisms that enabled mass dictatorships. Jie-Hyun Lim and Roger Griffin map out a theoretical framework for grasping the relationship between mass dictatorship and modernity in both its colonial and fascist forms. On the broader arena of global modernity, the desire for colonising power and the corresponding fear of being colonised were unquestionably two powerful engines that drove twentieth-century mass dictatorships. While mass dictatorships on European soil were shaped by the push for imperialist expansion, non-European dictatorships were also driven by the desire to acquire colonial power and the fear of being colonised. As Jie-Hyun Lim emphasises, global perspectives on mass dictatorship as a transnational formation of modernity render the Holocaust, fascist atrocities, and post-colonial genocides visible as a composite whole within a single continuum that begins with the initial unleashing of colonial violence.

Hui-yu Caroline Ts’ai and Michael Schoenhals, on the other hand, provide us with distinctly ground-level views of how colonial Taiwan and the post-civil war People’s Republic of China deployed various modern practices of control and surveillance. Populations had to be disciplined, exhorted, and mobilised to transform individual subjects into a collective totality. The specific techniques that the two regimes pioneered allowed them to watch over and encourage the ‘voluntary’ compliance of their populations and, by extension, to regulate their individual behaviour. The expansion of the state apparatus to engulf the everyday emerges as a critical feature of mass dictatorship, and these views from non-European examples provide us with insights into the global scale of the technologies of domination that were so vital for manufacturing ‘consent’ and perpetuating authoritarian rule.

The second part of this volume explores the critical role of the public sphere in enabling colonial as well as totalitarian politics. The public sphere in the modern era, imagined or real, has been a space for obtaining and securing legitimacy ever since the idea of Öffentlichkeit became an integral part of modernity. Mass dictatorships attempted to shape public opinion and organise public spectacles to establish their
own *agora* for the development of powerful capillary organisations at the grass-roots level. Many of the chapters engage the problem of applying Habermasian conceptions of the public sphere to mass dictatorships. Habermas’s normative model of rational discussion is a controversial issue for historians who have cast doubt on the utility of the concept for historical analysis. Few historical periods seem to produce unfettered rational discussions, and those who are excluded from participating in the public sphere inevitably far outnumber those who are permitted entry. Nevertheless, a public sphere that claims to be the sole source of rationality and legitimacy certainly existed within mass dictatorships, and an examination of its conceptual terrain become paramount for understanding the violent excesses of the twentieth century.

The contributors to this volume alert us to the ways in which the public sphere can be transmuted to fit the particular needs of mass dictatorships. Paul Corner explores the inherent contradictions of applying Habermasian notions to fascism and argues for the presence of a choreographed and staged public sphere that is a central feature of all mass societies of the twentieth century. Kyu Hyun Kim extends the discussion of the public sphere into wartime Japan and suggests ways to reconceptualise the notion into another idiom to understand this critical period of Japanese history. Hiroko Mizuno shows how volunteer firemen in Austria formed their own public sphere in the nineteenth century to gain hegemony over their localities and how the structural constraints of this ‘non-political’ process ultimately aided the spread of National Socialism in the twentieth century. Hae-dong Yun and Michael Kim discuss further the limitations of the colonial public sphere in Korea under Japanese occupation. Through careful and in-depth examinations of colonial Korea, both authors highlight the appropriation of the colonial public sphere by colonial subjects and demonstrate its latent mass mobilisation potential. Often it was this space for appropriation between dictatorial regimes and the ordinary people where we witnessed the most interesting interactions within the public sphere. Ultimately, the public spheres of mass dictatorships became not only levers of political hegemony but also spaces for the (fictive) self-empowerment of the masses. This complexity requires careful elaboration through the kind of comparative analysis that the contributors of this volume provide across a wide gamut of historical circumstances.

The third part calls for a reconsideration of the totalitarian self as shaped and disfigured by state power and ideological practices. The chapters reveal an overdetermined characteristic of the ambivalent
modern self that ultimately eludes attempts to form a totalitarian whole. State-controlled in all aspects, the attempt to shape the totalitarian self inevitably leaves disruption in its wake. Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone provide a historiographic overview of the debates regarding subject formation within the Soviet Union to reveal a composite picture of Soviet subjectivity. Peter Lambert examines the question of elite agency to show that the crisis of subjectivity that accompanied the rise of National Socialism was classically modernist in its conception. Finally, Cheehyung Kim explains how an attempt to construct an infinite subject emerged from the North Korean regime’s attempt to merge society and subjectivity into a single seamless totality.

The volume as a whole deals with numerous case studies and provides diverse perspectives from its contributors. The mass dictatorship regimes analysed include Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, interwar Austria, Imperial Japan, colonial Korea, colonial Taiwan, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, and North Korea. The academic contributors to the volume were trained in seven different countries on three different continents: Asia, Europe, and North America. Their interplay of analytical ideas and transnational perspectives conjure forth new interpretations of key questions in the histories of colonialism, socialism, nationalism, and fascism. Just as the individual chapters address many different areas of global history, they also all share a common concern with exploring the theoretical basis and specific practices that enabled mass dictatorship to come to such prominence during the past century.

Jie-Hyun Lim begins this volume with his main thesis: that global perspectives on the transnational formation of modernity help us to see the grotesque violence in mass dictatorship, such as the Holocaust, within a wider historical continuum that begins with the first instances of colonial violence. The racial hierarchies and the willingness to inflict violence on segregated populations were governing practices that incubated on an institutional scale in the colonies. He emphasises that while mass dictatorships on European soil were shaped by imperial projects, non-European mass dictatorships were driven both by the desire for colonial power and the fear of being colonised. This explains why the ‘follow and catch up’ strategy was adopted not only by socialist regimes but also by post-colonial developmental dictatorships. These regimes proclaimed that their historical task was to follow and catch up with the Western colonial powers at all costs. Under these circumstances, those victimised by Western colonial genocides became themselves victimisers, perpetuating various post-colonial genocides on others.
Roger Griffin builds on the classic theory of totalitarianism proposed by Friedrich and Brzezinski and more recent work by Emilio Gentile to offer his take on the theoretical basis of mass dictatorship. Griffin distinguishes two types of mass dictatorship, the authoritarian one, which aims to contain the anarchic forces released by the rise of the masses and the impact of modernisation within a coercive regime masquerading as a modern populist state, and the more radically utopian totalitarian one, which pursues the transformation of the whole of society and the creation of a new man within an alternative modernity. Having underlined the different roles played by propaganda and coercion in the two types of regime, totalitarianism is then identified with the ambition of political forms of modernism to create a healthier, more meaningful society immunised against the chaos of liberal modernity. The totalitarian mass dictatorship in his view is hence equated with ‘the modernist state’.

Whereas Lim and Griffin offer us broad theoretical perspectives on the relationship between mass dictatorship and modernity, Hui-yu Caroline Ts’ai and Michael Schoenhals provide detailed empirical studies on the specific practices located at the heart of mass dictatorships. Hui-yu Caroline Ts’ai examines the 1925 Taipei police exhibition and its attempt at ‘policising the masses’ and ‘massifying the police’. Rather than rely solely on violent coercion, the colonial police hoped to achieve the ‘self-policing’ of the local Taiwanese population through the projection of a kaleidoscope of visual images. She shows through her textual analysis of the exhibition that there is only a thin line between governmentality and social engineering in the colonies. Japan’s colonial governmentality in Taiwan ultimately took the form of ‘social management’, which partly reflected Japan’s determination to bring Taiwan into line with its own conception of the ‘Asian modern’. Colonial policies in Taiwan, she suggests, had a major impact primarily because they appealed to both Japanese interests and Taiwanese concerns – in the name of ‘enlightenment’. Therefore it is this space of ‘everyday coloniality’ that deserves more analytical attention to understand the complex mechanisms that sustain colonial rule.

Michael Schoenhals posits the existence of a nexus of modernity and surveillance in the People’s Republic of China in the untidy post-civil war decade of the 1950s. He identifies the state’s interception and perus tration of ordinary people’s correspondence for the purpose of discovering what they were thinking as a central component of that nexus and illustrates this identification with contemporary data culled from recently declassified archival material. He argues that the creation of an
alternative modernity – labelled communism but defined by discipline and quantifiable order rather than simply by ‘freedom from want’ – was attempted by China’s then communist party leadership but ultimately abandoned in favour of the quiet consolidation of ‘really existing socialism’ with Chinese characteristics.

The second section aims to shed new light on the essential role of the public sphere in mass dictatorships. Paul Corner engages the discussions over the public sphere as envisaged by Habermas to argue that, while mass dictatorships – Italian fascism in particular – denied any democratic participation in the political process, the need for popular legitimation compelled dictatorships to invent a ‘fascist public sphere’. By denying any role to the individual when divorced from the collectivity and the state, and by refusing to recognise the existence of a private sphere, fascism incorporated everything into the public sphere. He highlights a seeming paradox in that the ‘people’ under fascism were more politically present than ever before and the town square formed the core of fascist rallies. It was precisely in the choreography and orchestration of ‘spontaneous enthusiasm’ that we can witness fascism’s political theatre. Corner reaffirms that the public displays under fascism are not a Habermasian public sphere. Instead he argues that such developments can be seen as representing what Habermas termed the ‘re-feudalisation’ of public life, where the people were present only as audience and consumers of public spectacles.

Kyu Hyun Kim examines the Japanese ‘national public sphere’ during the decade and a half between 1931 and 1945. His chapter draws upon the theoretical critics of Habermas and the works of contemporary thinkers such as Charles Taylor, as well as the scholarly literature on European histories of the 1930s, but is firmly grounded in recent Japanese-language scholarship and primary sources. While the 1930s were clearly a period of neither democracy nor liberalism, civil society in Japan, through its engagement with mass politics and culture, resisted being dominated by the state. Yet despite the persistence of the essential underpinnings of a democratic system, Japan continued on its path towards total war. In addressing the public sphere in this period, his chapter examines government-based source materials that serve to illustrate the nature of the ideological and discursive conflicts within the state, such as internal reviews and reports of the Imperial Rule Assistant Association, as well as a set of civilian journals, many of them difficult to classify easily as ‘left’ or ‘right’. Through his analysis, he discovers that wartime Japan did not in any way appear ‘special’ or ‘unique’ in terms of how the critical
functions of the public sphere became challenged and undermined by the increasing push towards authoritarianism. Ultimately, wartime Japan may have to be understood as a case where war mobilisation took place within a constitutional structure.

Hiroko Mizuno focuses on the 1860s and the many Volunteer Firemen Associations (Freiwillige Feuerwehr) that came to be established at the time in almost every local community in the Austrian monarchy. One of the most important missions of these associations was to protect their own home town as well as their properties from fire-related catastrophes. Varying in size and in formation, most of the associations consisted of male inhabitants who belonged to the middle class. The association of Hohenems, a town in the region of the Vorarlberg, was co-established by some Jewish burghers and may in this sense be understood as a symbol of the liberalism of the times. Financially supported by and cooperating with the town council, the Hohenems association won wide recognition for its voluntary activities and eventually dominated the local public sphere. Yet over time, the structural constraints of the relationship between the firemen and the local authorities led them towards greater accommodation with state power, until the associations became an integral part of the National Socialist system. This chapter considers the historical roles of the Volunteer Firemen Associations in the shaping of the Austrian liberal public sphere and highlights the areas where liberalism and fascism overlap.

Hae-dong Yun’s contribution to this volume discusses a long-running debate among mostly historians in Japan concerning the presence or absence of the public sphere in colonial Korea. Rather than accept the problematic assumptions behind a Habermasian public sphere, Yun offers the concept of ‘publicness’ as a suitable substitute for analysing the multiple dimensions of colonialism. A public sphere in the civic society sense could not and did not exist under colonialism, he argues. However, this does not mean that colonised subjects lacked a sense of publicness that ultimately served the interests of the colonial state as well as offered opportunities for Korean appropriations. Therefore, Yun explores alternative venues for discovering notions of ‘publicness’ in colonial Korea and highlights several neglected aspects of the period for further consideration.

Michael Kim expands upon Yun’s discussions to explicate the discursive mechanism of the colonial public sphere. The Japanese often explained that they could not implement certain policies in Korea because of the low mindo, or cultural and economic level, of the Korean population. This denigrating term then became internalised among Korean
participants in the colonial public sphere, and they often expressed views that the Korean public was backward and not able to fully express its collective political will. However, Korean pundits did not accept their fate quietly, and a critical public debate developed within the limits of the dominant colonial rationality, especially over the perceived failures of colonial policy. The discourse of *mindo* changed rapidly with the outbreak of World War II, as Koreans would later claim that their level of civilisation had finally become high enough to achieve equality with the Japanese. Political pressure for colonial reforms continued to build even at the height of World War II and assumed a different character under the particular circumstances of wartime mobilisation. Through an examination of the trajectory of *mindo*, we may gain insights into the ‘alternative rationalities’ of the colonial order that shaped the colonial public sphere.

Switching to the theme of totalitarian selfhood in the third section, Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone propose in their review essay to interrogate the notion of the modern self as a historical category and see how historians working within the Anglo-American tradition of historiography on Russia and the Soviet Union have used it as an entry point to reach a deeper understanding of that society and culture. Chatterjee and Petrone marry various, nuanced, and ultimately complementary models of the self to arrive at a composite picture of Soviet subjectivity. Only when notions of the individual are seen in dynamic interaction with the others in their particular collectives and with the wider public can one imagine Russian and Soviet experiences of selfhood. It is in this interaction that both Soviet selves and Soviet power were made.

Peter Lambert embarks on a more specific historiographical discussion to distil a sense of agency among the German ‘old elites’ of the Weimar Republic and the prelude to Hitler’s accession to the office of Chancellor. The old elites had survived Germany’s defeat in 1918, the revolution, and the birth of the democratic republic with their power, which was deeply rooted in the underlying structures of Germany, essentially intact. Given their undiminished commitment to authoritarianism, they wielded that power first to undermine democracy and then, fatefully, to hand Hitler the keys to office. He highlights the German historian Detlev Peukert’s contention that, far from being overburdened with pre-modern vestiges, the Weimar Republic had met the criteria of what he called ‘classical modernity’: advanced industrial capitalism, a welfare state, vast bureaucracy, faith in science as a ‘cure-all’, and mass-participatory politics. Embedded within that condition, however, was a ‘dark side’ of pathological potential, which was
unleashed as Germany entered a crisis of classical modernity. Other historians have since argued that the ‘old elites’ had no collective agency in producing the outcome of a Hitler-led government. Lambert, however, contends that the significance of the old elites is important for understanding the modernist dimensions of the crisis that led to the rise of fascism in Germany.

Finally Cheehyung Kim gives us a view of 1970s North Korea to witness the beginnings of a single-leader system accompanied by a single-ideology system based on chuch’e, the guiding rationality and paradigm attributed to Kim Il Sung. Chuch’e was tantamount to an ontological orientation of the subject and the nation, a totality within which that same subject became the actor. He explains that the nation in the North Korean context arose as a specific kind of totality, abstract and dependent on positivistic characteristics of society as autonomous. The cinema and paintings of this period point out both the objectivity and ambiguity of a reified social totality. In art, the social refuses to be categorised or, more specifically, totalised. Nonetheless, society indeed appears as a real ‘thing’ autonomous from the state. The impossibility of constructing an absolute subject, however, also affirms a lesser truth in that hegemonic totality is equally impossible. Cheehyung Kim posits that this impossibility is not a limitation but rather a moment of rupturing. The socialist art of North Korea from the 1970s was state-controlled in all aspects, but it nonetheless provides us with a glimpse of the infinite quality of the subject.

The contributors to this volume interrogate the myriad of ways in which radical attempts to achieve modernity are fraught with contradictions and unrealised promise. Rather than view the history of twentieth-century dictatorships as aberrations from a normative model, the contributions to this volume greatly expand our horizons to the immanent potential of modernity to follow multiple paths, some of which inevitably lead to a totalitarian direction. Instead of ‘us’ v. ‘them’, the aim of this volume is to see the potential for self-empowerment, violence, and everyday oppression within the collectivised attempts to realise our modernist utopian visions.

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