



by Thomas Kunze, Thomas Vogel

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Oh my beloved leader! The Personality Cult in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Oh Du, geliebter Führer. Personenkult im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert

review

The editors of this absorbing book describe how personality cults have existed since the time of the Ancient Egyptians and predict that they will always be a part of human society as they respond to a fundamental human need. Human nature seems to crave cultic heroes, and this is perhaps especially so in the modern age of terrorism and uncertainty.

Each chapter of the book analyses a different type of personality cult. There are: great dictators (Hitler, Stalin and Mao Zedong); Communist imitators (the leaders of East Germany, Ceausescu, Hodja, Tito and the Kim dynasty in North Korea); populists (Kemal Atatürk, Evita, Castro, Chavez and Mandela); nationalists, careerists and religious leaders (Gaddafi, Ben Ali, Mubarak and Turkmenbashi); monarchs and a self-styled emperor (Kaiser Wilhelm II and Bokassa); and figures from parliamentary and constitutional monarchies (including the Duchess of Cambridge). Each chapter considers the reasons for the development of the particular cult, its manifestations and durability. The final section addresses the wider phenomenon, including the use of mass media, huge statues and artistic objects to perpetuate cultic status. Personality cults are used for diverse ends, including stabilising dubious regimes, establishing national identity

and whipping up popular support. In many cases they serve to disguise uncertainty about the political nature of a personality or regime. The authors describe how cultic despots such as Hitler demonstrate pathological narcissism. Such cults only last as long as the regimes they support, while more rational and modest leaders such as Tito and Bismarck continue to be revered after they are gone and others, like Atatürk, only acquire cult status after their time. The cults around Castro and Chavez flourished in response to their fierce opposition to US interference. Then there are those few genuinely loved and admired subjects of personality cults, such as Nelson Mandela and the Duchess of Cambridge. Cults which develop in democracies, such as that of the Duchess, are apparently based on a positive relationship between the rulers and the ruled.

This is a serious, jargon-free socio-political book which is logical, well-argued and easy to read. It would be accessible to any reader interested in understanding an important historical and topical phenomenon.

about the authors

Thomas Kunze was born in 1963 and studied history, German philology, and educational science. He has worked for the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation since 2002, as the representative in Moscow and as the head of the Europe/U.S. department at the foundation's headquarters in Berlin. Since 2010, he has also represented the foundation in the Middle East.

Thomas Vogel was born in 1963, and studied German philology, political science and journalism. He was a correspondent for Swiss television in Berlin from 2003 until 2009. He is now an editor at the political magazine *Rundschau des Schweizer Fernsehens*. His latest publication is *Von der Sowjetunion in die Unabhängigkeit* (also with Kunze, 2011).

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