

Editorial

The articles of the current key subject “Actors of Dictatorship. Regional Case Studies on NS and SED Rule” focus on three guiding concepts: Rule, actors, and region. These categories serve as starting points and research-perspectives for the choice of essays both on the history of NS and SED rule. Due to the restricted number of examples it is not possible, such as in the sense of a sectoral micro comparison, to work out the interactions of actors, state, society and regions in the two German dictatorships of the 20th century. Nevertheless, the range of contributions opens up a variety of differentiated approaches for a later comparison of the roles played by actors of dictatorial rule in the two systems.

In this context, the aspect of rule opens up two dimensions of analysis. On the one hand the structural dimension, in the sense of developed formal structures such as institutions and organisations, on the other the action-theoretical dimension of individuals acting as “bearers of the system” within and outside these institutions and organisations. Their sociability and interaction practices were crucial for the implementation and range of dictatorial “rule” over the realms of politics and society in the two German dictatorships. Whereas in this edition structural framework conditions rather serve as situative contexts for the definition of individual and collective acting, the actors themselves are the subject the studies focus on.

In this context, the concept of “actor” is understood as a “soft” category, as its definition is debated. However, due to its topical connection to the aspects of acting and power it has often found its way into historical studies and then serves as the epistemic starting point for a personal approach at the history of NS and SED rule. Understood as a conceptual makeshift solution for viewing at the roles of quite different individuals and groups of function bearers – who partly cannot be subsumed under the analytical concepts of the classical historical research on elites – with their respective social backgrounds, interests, goals and leeways to act, this category has a function of a bridge for the integration of different analytical research questions. This perspective proves its capability particularly for the observation of the interfaces of central interest in political rule and its actual, social-political realisation by individual, collective and corporative social actors.

The keyword of “social political practice” brings us to the third guiding concept, that of the region. Here, the regional-historical approach is explicitly not meant in the sense of local history or traditional regional history, which are epistemically little helpful for the analysis of centrally organised dictatorships. Rather – both for reasons of an economic research and in congruence with more recent regional research – region is understood as a clearly defined field of analysis, by way of which dense descriptions of previously unresearched topical fields at the micro- and the macro level within manageable spaces. In the ideal case, the analyses and interpretations are supposed to allow for a classification of “region” as a medium and political-social action field, thus allowing for state-

ments and insights on general and typical features of the two dictatorships. Here, the criteria of this category, which is indeed a fluid one, are consciously taken in a variety of ways. The perspectives presented by the contributions cover a wide area, from the level of the villages and small towns of East Frisia via the big city of Berlin as far as to the greater region of Saxony which was divided into districts in 1952.

The regional approach in an analysis of the social-political preconditions and framework conditions of the practised rule of a dictatorship has been firmly established as an important branch of research of German historiography. In the early 1980s, the “Bavaria Project” of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History) provided the crucial stimulus for this approach in the field of NS research. Meanwhile, the variety of regional- and local-historical publications on National Socialism can hardly be assessed.

Now it is possible to make a similar statement for GDR research which, somewhat later, benefitted much from these analytical preliminary works. Whereas in the first decade after reunification and the thus connected opening of the previously inaccessible East German archives at first the central institutions particularly of the SED and the Ministry of State Security (MfS) were in the focus of historiographical work, since the end of the 1990s and by studies such as on “Diktaturdurchsetzung in Sachsen (Enforcing Dictatorship in Saxony)” by Rainer Behring and Mike Schmeitzner, on the phenomenon of “Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn (Rule and Independent Mindedness)” by Thomas Lindenberger, as well as on a comparison of the two “Diktaturen in Deutschland (Dictatorships in Germany)” by Günther Heydemann and Heinrich Oberreuter also the regions and thus micro-historical analyses of rule in the GDR have become a focus of interest.

With the modern research on dictatorships, apart from spatial differentiation the responsible actors of the minor levels of the hierarchies of the German dictatorships have increasingly become subject of growing interest. In the context of the research on National Socialism the research on NS perpetrators, which is flourishing since the 1990s, is paradigmatic. Christopher Browning’s analyses of the members of a reserve police battalion (“Ordinary Men”, 1993 in German: “Ganz normale Männer”), or Michael Wildt’s collective biography “Generation des Unbedingten (Generation of the Absolute)”, which deals with the staff at the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, have provided stimulating new approaches in this context which in the past few years have been further pursued and developed in a variety of ways.

Meanwhile also the research on the GDR has produced a number of studies focussing on different loyal bearers and groups of bearers of the GDR regime both from a collective-biographical and a praxeological point of view. Here, as exemplary examples of the variety of publications since the year 2000, we may refer to the comprehensive monograph “Die hauptamtlichen Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit (The Regular Staff of State Security)” by Jens Giesecke on the lifeworld of staff members of the Ministry of State Security, or to Mario Nie-

mann's "Die Sekretäre der SED Bezirksleitungen 1952–1989 (The Secretaries of SED District Offices)", where the collective-biographical approach and questions on the implementation of rule by responsible SED actors at the regional level are purposefully crossed over.

Indeed this cursory overview could even be continued. But already these few hints make obvious that a historiography dealing with the categories of the actor and the region may provide stimulating interpretations and food for thought to leave the contrasting of the paradigms of "rule" and "society" behind and this way arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the two German dictatorships of the 20th century. The current edition collects quite different starting points for meeting this topical focal point, which will now be chronologically presented, at first by two contributions on the history of National Socialism and by three examples on the history of the GDR.

In her opening contribution, by the example of the East Frisian District of Leer in North-Western Germany, *Kathrin Stern* sketches the significance of rural teachers for National Socialist mobilisation. By way of a detailed micro-study she discusses their activities as "local opinion leaders" beyond their functions at school, in particular as the heads of local choirs and the NSDAP's local divisions, such as the Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt (NSV) and the Winterhilfswerk des deutschen Volkes (WHW). Her depiction demonstrates that the social action practices of rural teachers played an important role for opening the minds of the village populations towards the National Socialist ideology and that not at least the actors were so readily willing to act this way because after 1933 their status within the social structure of the villages had been significantly revaluated by their recognition as "educators of the entire people" by the official propaganda.

Anja Hildebrandt's contribution focusses both on a different region and a different group of people. By the example of the biography of an NSDAP member of the city council, Karl Kasper, the author presents a typical representative of the local functional elite of the National Socialists of Berlin. Kasper was one of the so called "Alte Kämpfer (veterans)", that is that group of early NS members who had been active with the NS movement already before 1933. By including both collective-biographical and network-analytical considerations, Hildebrandt demonstrates how Kasper succeeded with functioning both as a "link" for the NSDAP between the fields of Party, population, administration and business and, by being close to the "centre of power" in Berlin, with pursuing his own professional career beyond his function in the Party. Hildebrandt works out this specific feature of "multiple careers" at the interfaces of local Party, business and administrative structures as a privilege of many NS functionaries in Berlin.

To start the second part, presenting studies on the history of the GDR, *Kathy Hannemann* in her contribution focuses on plant directors and directors of "nationally owned" chemical plants in the District of Halle. While including the regional specifics of the "Central German Chemical Triangle", the author demonstrates how these "industrial managers" were not only under constant

pressure to meet the demands of the “plans” but were also provided with opportunities to influence which should not be underestimated. By the example of distributing residential space and deciding about locations for new residential buildings, Hannemann demonstrates their ambivalent action practices between fulfilling their function as important pillars of the SED’s plan-economic system on the one hand and a stubborn behaviour on the other, based on a specific regional consciousness.

Tilmann Siebeneichner in his contribution deals with the specific military-political formations of the “Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse (Paramilitary Groups of the Working Class)”, with a particular eye on the District of Halle. By way of an analysis of these “fighters”, who have previously been perceived only as representatives of the repressive institutions of the rulers, in the context of the work lifeworld of the GDR over all periods of GDR history up to the year 1989, Siebeneichner presents detailed local analyses of these Groups, thus particularly reflecting the “inner contradictions of state socialist rule”. While doing so, the author consistently sketches how the Groups changed from formerly being legitimation-creating representatives of “proletarian power” to becoming “symbols of the refusal to accept power”, thus illustrating the end of the Socialist project.

In the last contribution of the here presented edition, *Tilman Pohlmann* discusses the First District Secretaries of the SED in Saxony. His study focusses on the social profile of these functionaries, who played a key role in the region, as well as on the respectively different political influences and experiences they were subject to in the period before the end of World War II. By way of a collective-biographical approach, the author pursues the interactions of the cross-individual biographic socialisation of the actors and the Party’s staff-political measures to secure its power in Saxony, and he draws the conclusion that the particular constellation of “communities of political experiences” after 1945 was quite a crucial factor for the stability of SED personal rule far into the 1970s.

Apart from the key subject, the current edition contains a contribution by the Dresden political scientist Lothar Fritze, who discusses the specific means of shaping the consciousness in ideology-guided dictatorships.

Tilman Pohlmann