

Editorial

When “Stasi Konkret. Überwachung und Repression in der DDR” by Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk was published in the spring of 2013, it caused lively debates among GDR researchers. The book was covered widely by the media too. These debates did not come unexpected, even more as this well readable work addressed a wide readership and raised several fundamental research questions. Unfortunately, however, the public debate focussed almost exclusively on the number of confidential informants (IMs) Kowalczyk had reduced from 188 000 to 109 000. Ironically – as already Jens Giesecke has remarked in his review of Kowalczyk’s book – the sometime exaggerated reactions confirmed the primary criticism of previous IM research.¹

Kowalczyk is less interested in figures and statistics but in new perspectives of qualitative research on the history of the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS – Ministry of State Security) – also in view of the IMs. Accordingly, in “Stasi konkret” he concludes, mostly rightly so, that since 1990 the undifferentiated label “IM” had constructed a seemingly uniform kind of individuals, which was ahistorical and out of touch with reality. At the same time, by focusing on State Security’s IMs, the majority of those not belonging to this category were morally cleared of blame. Thus, Kowalczyk stated, it was important to view at each individual and not only at those limited segments which might be grasped by the category of the “IM”.² By way of historicizing IM research it would “be possible to locate the IM differently in terms of social history, i. e. not according to a label but in view of what each individual actually did, thus in a concretely biographical way”.³ Furthermore, this point of view allows for the urgently needed differentiated view of the IMs, or rather it necessarily includes such a view.⁴

Whereas unfortunately the broad public may be supposed to remember just the debate on the number of IMs, scientific reviews show that Kowalczyk’s suggestions are definitely welcome when it comes to further IM research and also to historicizing research on the MfS.⁵ In his book Kowalczyk does not present any

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- 1 See Jens Giesecke, review of: Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret. Überwachung und Repression in der DDR*, München 2013. In: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 5. 9. 2013, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2013-3-130>.
 - 2 See Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret. Überwachung und Repression in der DDR*, München 2013, p. 238.
 - 3 See *ibid.*, p. 214.
 - 4 There are definitely some approaches at viewing individual cases of IMs in a differentiated way, taking the biographical contexts of these individuals into consideration and also including other sources into the analysis. See a. o. Andreas Kötzing, „Keine einfachen Wahrheiten“. *Die Leipziger Dokumentarfilmwoche und der Fall IM „Walter“*. In: *Deutschland - Archiv online*, 45 (2012) 6.
 - 5 Apart from the review by Jens Giesecke see a. o. the reviews by Andreas Malycha (In: *sehpunkte*, 14 (2014) 2, 15. 2. 2014, www.sehpunkte.de/2014/02/23119.html and

scientific historicization of the MfS and its development, but by way of his research questions he provides appropriate stimulations. Kowalczyk speaks out in favour of demystifying State Security and its history, of de-demonising and historicizing it. The history of the MfS, he states, must on the one hand be written as part of the history of GDR society and on the other as a history of how state repression worked, instead of as a history of an institution.

For the time being – Kowalczyk says – the public has not only often “lost sight of the complexity of the SED dictatorship and GDR society” but has also constructed State Security “as the only core element of the dictatorship”.⁶ Concerning the public, this judgement may be correct, but this is not at all true for the meanwhile published research literature. There are indeed studies providing a complex view of GDR society or of selected sub-fields, thus also reflecting on State Security as an instrument of power of the GDR leadership.⁷ However, we must agree with his *general* demand for “locating the history of the MfS within the system of the SED dictatorship, historicising it and looking at it soberly”.⁸ We must also agree with his demand for “new approaches and perspectives [for] the research of the SED dictatorship and the society of the GDR, but also for future research on State Security”, for the purpose of dealing with “the many different fields of state and society as a whole”.⁹ In this context he advises methodical loans from NS research, among others.

Indeed, in the context of current research on NS there are debates which sometimes go even beyond the approach suggested by Kowalczyk. They make obvious how insufficient the contrasting of rule and society, of rulers and ruled is for a description of social and political reality in National Socialism. It is much more promising for research to understand all individuals and groups of individuals of a society generally as *actors* with their own motivations, initiatives and leeways to act. In this context, it is also about insights concerning their social interactions, and finally about a perception which makes the (different degree of) participation of the many in the regime the focus of considerations.¹⁰

Vera Lengsfeld (http://gedenkbibliothek.de/download/Vera_Lengsfeld_zu_-_Ilko-Sascha_Kowalczyk_Stasi_konkret_berwachung_und_Repression_in_der_DDR.pdf).

6 See Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret*, p. 359.

7 See, for example, Udo Grashoff, „In einem Anfall von Depression ...“. *Selbsttötungen in der DDR*, Berlin 2006.

8 See Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret*, p. 11.

9 See *ibid.* p. 18.

10 See, for example, Frank Bajohr/Michael Wildt, Einleitung. In: the same (Ed.), *Volks-gemeinschaft. Neuere Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a. M. 2009, p. 7–23; Michael Wildt, *Von Apparaten zu Akteuren. Zur Entwicklung der NS-Täterforschung*. In: Angelika Benz/Marija Vulesica (Ed.), *Bewachung und Ausführung. Alltag der Täter in nationalsozialistischen Lagern*, Berlin 2011, p. 11–22; Günther Heydemann/Jan Erik Schulte/Francesca Weil, Einleitung. In: the same (Ed.), *Sachsen und der Nationalsozialismus*, Göttingen 2014, p. 9–19, here in particular p. 15 f. There are and have been similar approaches by the research on the GDR.

Rightly so, Kowalczyk criticizes “that, concerning the whole problem of denunciation and treason among society, our scientific work has only started.” That is why, he states, it is urgently necessary to contextualise the activities of IMs with other kinds of treason.¹¹ Currently Anita Krätzner (supervised by Kowalczyk) is working on a project on “Denunziation. Alltag und Verrat in der DDR (Denunciation. Everyday Life and Treason in the GDR)” at the research department of BStU. Starting out from the assumption that for the time being the analysis of denunciation in the GDR has mostly been limited to the IMs, in the here presented volume Krätzner shows how new perspectives of the research on denunciation can be developed. She presents previously neglected ways of cooperation with State Security while viewing at the denouncing behaviour of all those involved.

Furthermore, in “Stasi konkret” Kowalczyk describes how the MfS cooperated with other institutions.¹² Such ways of cooperation are also analysed by some contributors to this volume. For example, the essay by Rainer Erices focuses on the close connection of district medical officers to state institutions and State Security. These officers were working at an interface between the Health Ministry and regional medical institutions, thus having far-reaching influence. By the example of these officers Erices illustrates how blurred the boundaries between official cooperation and acting as a spy were.

Also the contribution by Francesca Weil deals with events into which several state institutions, State Security among them, were involved. She focusses on the biography of Freiherr Adolf von Wirsing, Amtshauptmann (District Head) of Annaberg (1928–1945), who belonged to that elite of public officials considered as the representatives of authoritarian, traditional-nationalist thinking. During both German dictatorships Wirsing sent critical papers to state institutions. Thus at first sight he looks like a stubborn, mostly independent character who, if necessary, did not shy away from bearing the consequences of what he was doing.

The article by Renate Hürtgen is based on her monograph¹³ where, from a micro-historical point of view, she analyses the practice of rule when dealing with applications for emigration in the District of Halberstadt in the 1970s and 1980s. Here it is interesting, among others, that at district level (in contrast to the central level) State Security was the most influential actor when dealing with applications for emigration. Hürtgen illustrates in how far all other institutions included themselves into and subordinated to secret police structures, whereas SED authorities did mostly not interfere. Here the MfS played the dominating role, without losing its basic position of being a tool of the SED leadership.

Andreas Malycha in his contribution, on the other hand, describes how powerless State Security was given the economic crisis of the 1980s. Although inter-

11 See Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret*, p. 12.

12 See *ibid.*, p. 14.

13 Renate Hürtgen, *Ausreise per Antrag: Der lange Weg nach drüben. Eine Studie über Herrschaft und Alltag in der DDR-Provinz*, Göttingen 2014.

nal reports and information by the MfS more or less clearly addressed the actual economic situation in the GDR, State Security was not able to offer any conceptual or personal alternatives to the SED's economic course.

Concerning the paradigm change, another suggestion made by Kowalczyk in his book is to reach back to a comparative view at other Eastern Bloc states too. The contribution by Tytus Jaskułowski in this volume presents first of all an analysis of the conflictual relations between the Polish secret service and the GDR's State Security in the years 1974–1990, but his depiction inevitably includes a comparative view.¹⁴ In this context the Polish secret service – in contrast to what perhaps may be expected – does not at all appear as a weak or passive secret service if compared to a “strong” MfS. Rather, Jaskułowski describes both institutions as “antagonists” employing the same methods, tools and defensive mechanisms for their struggle.

Concerning the public mythologization of State Security, media staging plays an essential role. By the example of individual DEFA spy films from the 1960s, Andreas Kötzing in his contribution deals with how State Security was stylised as a seemingly “almighty” secret service. Topically, these films reproduce all those threat scenarios employed by SED propaganda to justify the building of the Wall. They construe State Security as a secret service which was at all times ready for the defence, not controlling the GDR's population but rather protecting it from imminent threats.

All contributions to this volume together illustrate the potential of a historicising kind of MfS research, questioning the significance of State Security within the context of the system of SED rule. The case examples focus on actors, social structures and interactions with other political institutions, thus allowing for a differentiated view at the actual power of the MfS.

Andreas Kötzing and Francesca Weil

¹⁴ See in detail Tytus Jaskułowski, *Przyjaźń, której nie było. Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego NRD wobec MSW 1974–1990*, Warszawa 2014.