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“An ‘Excess of Liberation’?: Terror and the Demonization of Women’s Political Activity in 1970s West Germany”

By Alan Rosenfeld

Their actions do not comply with the traditional image of that gender that is known in English as “the fair sex,” the beautiful, the respectable....For the former chief of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Günther Nollau, there is “something irrational in the entire manner.” Perhaps Nollau means it is an “excess of liberation.” That may well be. Side- and after-effects of emancipation also turn up, at any rate, in traditional, common criminality, where women more and more frequently carry out men’s work.

– “Women in the Underground: Something Irrational.” In: *Der Spiegel*, 8 August 1977.

Women and Terror

Many Western European societies experienced the decade of the 1970s as an “era of terror,” and the Federal Republic of Germany was hardly an exception.¹ Noted scholar of terrorism Walter Laqueur has also argued that the nature of terrorism in the 1970s featured a disturbing uptick in “brutalization and dehumanization in the choice of targets.”² The CIA tracked an astonishing 571% surge in the number of global terror attacks between the years 1970 and 1978, while the hijacking of passenger planes dramatically expanded the operational inventory of militant sub-state actors.³ During this period, it was Western Europe rather than the Middle East that figured as the most besieged region in the world in terms of acts of terrorism.⁴ The government and residents of West Germany grappled with a vigorous strain of domestic terrorism

¹ For one example of this “era of terror” rhetoric, see Jürgen Offenbach: “Frauen als Furien des Terrors.” In: *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 09.07.1976.

² Walter Laqueur: *No End to War. Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Continuum 2004, p. 24.

³ Gérard Chaliand/Arnaud Blin: “The ‘Golden Age’ of Terrorism.” In: Gérard Chaliand/Arnaud Blin (eds.): *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2007, pp. 175–196.

The CIA figure can be found in Gérard Chaliand/Arnaud Blin: “From 1968 to Radical Islam.” In: Gérard Chaliand/Arnaud Blin (eds.): *The History of Terrorism from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*. Berkeley: University of California Press 2007, pp. 221-254, here p. 244.

⁴ Peter Chalk: *West European Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism. The Evolving Dynamic*. New York: St. Martin’s Press 1996, p. 173.

as well as highly visible terrorist actions carried out by foreign groups operating within the Federal Republic or targeting West German entities abroad.

In West Germany's case, public attention focused decidedly on women's participation in terrorist groups, as reactions to political violence became entangled with (male) anxieties over the women's liberation project. The country's mass media, as Charity Scribner has noted, "primed the public sphere for a convergence between... the liberated woman and the terrorist."⁵ The emergence of the figure of the female terrorist in the Federal Republic was also depicted as part of a *global* phenomenon, with commentators identifying Leila Khaled of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Bernadine Dohrn of the Weather Underground, and Fusako Shigenobu of the Japanese Red Army as exemplars from other regions of the world.⁶ Women's involvement in terrorism was presented as a (particularly menacing) facet of a general rise in women's criminality across the globe, which had prompted a 1972 United Nations symposium on the theme of "women's delinquency."⁷ Commentators linked this rush of misconduct to the collapse of traditional gender roles that had allegedly been accelerated, if not precipitated, by second-wave feminism. The West German dialogue with terrorism in the 1970s thus became enveloped within an even larger, yet often dormant, discourse on the transformation of gender relations and a perceived loss of phallographic power.

Since the West German state had defined women in terms of their roles as wives and mothers in the early postwar period, one should not be surprised to learn that conservative voices came to see the politicization of women (in ways that transcended these traditional roles) as a threat to the sanctity and sustainability of the German family. The work of Robert Moeller has traced the emergence of a shared consensus between West Germany's conservative and liberal political parties in the 1950s concerning the inviolability of the heteronormative nuclear family, "safe from state intervention," as the primary building block for the postwar social order.⁸ K.M.N. Carpenter has demonstrated the ways in which this interparty agreement allowed for the emergence of an extensive network of convalescent homes catering specifically to

⁵ Charity Scribner: *After the Red Army Faction. Gender, Culture, and Militancy*. New York: Columbia University Press 2015, p. 4.

⁶ *Der Baader-Meinbof Report. Dokumente, Analysen, Zusammenhänge*. Mainz: Hase and Koehler 1972, p. 14; "Ausbruch in Berlin. 'Das ist eine Riesensache.'" In: *Der Spiegel*, 12.07.1976, p. 21; and "Frauen im Untergrund. 'Etwas Irrationales.'" In: *Der Spiegel*, 08.08.1977, p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸ Robert Moeller: *Protecting Motherhood. Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1993, p. 5.

mothers in the 1950s, as the state was compelled to allocate resources to support struggling West German families while buttressing traditional gender roles.⁹ In this sense, the Federal Republic's leaders sought to distinguish their country from its Nazi predecessor and its socialist neighbor to the east, two governments that ostensibly treated the family as an institution that existed to serve the needs of the state. However, West German legislation created to safeguard the family simultaneously instituted a pronatalist agenda and reified the patriarchal order.¹⁰ Although the traditional family protected by the state was a central feature of the postwar national consciousness—and one that held significant Cold War implications—it is important to recognize it as a rhetorical construct rather than a uniform reality. In fact, owing mostly to the devastation of the Second World War, female heads-of-household were quite common in West Germany, and the decade of the 1950s actually saw a rise in female wage work despite the protective legislation.¹¹

Following the social and sexual conservatism of the Konrad Adenauer era (1949-1963), West Germans experienced the next fifteen years as a period in which patriarchy and the privileged position of the heteronormative nuclear family were seemingly under attack. There were an assortment of social transformations that served as potential harbingers for the degeneration of the traditional German family as a social unit: (1) a rise in rates of unmarried cohabitation and divorce, (2) the liberalization of anti-homosexual legislation and the growth of a gay rights movement, (3) a boom in pornography and a commodification of sex accompanied by plummeting birthrates that saw West Germany ranked dead last globally,¹² and (4) the development of a flourishing women's liberation movement that featured the formation of a "female-centered public countersphere."¹³ Public opinion polls were sometimes able to West Germans' perceptions of these changes. For example, while a national survey conducted in 1967 found that 44% of respondents felt that men possessed an advantage in professional opportunities, this figure had escalated sharply to 64% in 1972.¹⁴ Rather than interpreting this as evidence of a sharp downturn in

⁹ K.M.N. Carpenter: "For Mothers Only: Mothers' Convalescent Homes and Modernizing Maternal Ideology in 1950s West Germany." In: *Journal of Social History* 34,4 (2001), pp. 865-893.

¹⁰ Robert Moeller: "Reconstructing the Family in Reconstruction Germany. Women and Social Policy in the Federal Republic, 1949-1955." In: *Feminist Studies* 15, 1 (1989), pp. 137-169, here p. 139.

¹¹ Moeller: "Reconstructing the Family," pp. 140, 159.

¹² "Die Kinder wollen keine Kinder mehr." In: *Der Spiegel*, 24.03.1975, p. 39.

¹³ Dagmar Herzog: *Sex after Fascism. Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006, p. 226.

¹⁴ "Men Advantaged." In: Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (ed.), Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach: *The Germans. Public Opinion Polls, 1967-1980*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981, p. 169.

gender equality during this period, we should understand these poll results as an indication of a major shift in consciousness in which men and women were becoming increasingly aware of the gender inequalities that characterized their society.

At the same time, the progress of feminism was accompanied by an equally pronounced cultural backlash against the women's liberation project. Dagmar Herzog has argued convincingly that this antifeminist sentiment tells us at least as much about West German men as it does about liberated West German women during this period. Specifically, she reasons that, "Men's insecurities about their own attractiveness or potency and concerns about the loss of their formerly unquestioned dominance manifested themselves in a vituperative rage at feminism."¹⁵ When seen from this perspective, we can recognize women's involvement in terrorist violence as a development that provided a convenient pretext for the public expression of latent male anxieties about loss of privilege, disguised as a critique of feminism. It was as if the masculine voice of the mass media bellowed, "You see! *This* is what happens when women's liberation is taken too far!"

Women's participation in terrorist violence appears to maintain a profound proclivity for producing cultural anxiety. In her examination of female suicide terrorism (FST), Lindsey O'Rourke has argued that part of the efficacy of this tactic stems from the higher level of publicity that FST generates in "provoking a sense of outrage and bewilderment" through the shattering of the cultural stereotypes of women as innately peaceful and nurturing.¹⁶ Indeed, women's involvement in political violence in 1970s West Germany had precisely this disruptive effect, despite the absence of FST. It generated what Patricia Melzer has termed, "moments of destabilization of gender conventions" through the conspicuous "invasion" of three intersecting realms typically gendered as masculine: politics, violence, and criminality.¹⁷ Although the majority of West Germans arrested for leftwing extremist crimes were men,¹⁸ commentators in the Federal Republic focused their attention on the women of the movement, feeling a need to identify a cause for their involvement beyond the political goals their organizations hoped to achieve. Women's liberation quickly

¹⁵ Herzog: *Sex after Fascism*, p. 234.

¹⁶ Lindsey O'Rourke: "What's Special about Female Suicide Terrorism?" In: *Security Studies* 18,4 (2009), pp. 681-718, here p. 692.

¹⁷ Patricia Melzer: "Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Feminist Responses to Media Representations of Women Terrorists during the 'German Autumn' of 1977." In: *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 11,1 (2009), pp. 35-62, here p. 36.

¹⁸ Gerhard Schmidtchen: "Terroristische Karrieren. Soziologische Analyse anhand von Fahndungsunterlagen und Prozeßakten." In: Herbert Jäger/Gerhard Schmidtchen/Lieselotte Süllwold (eds.): *Analysen zum Terrorismus. Lebenslaufanalyse*, vol. 2. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1981, pp. 13-77, here p. 23.

emerged as the favored scapegoat, with publications vilifying female guerrillas as “anarchist Amazons,” “female supermen,” and “phallic men.”¹⁹ Of course, gendered media coverage of this nature only served to reinscribe men’s dominant political position by dismissing female political motivation as ancillary to their violent actions.²⁰ Instead, the mass media attributed women’s involvement in the guerrilla movement to romantic relationships, a perversion of gender relations, and excessive women’s liberation.²¹

The Troubled Partnership between Terrorism and Mass Media

G rard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin identify July 1968 in particular as a transformational moment in the evolution of modern terrorism, when the hijacking of El Al Flight 426 enroute to Rome by the PFLP ushered in a new period of “publicity terrorism” that arguably reached its crescendo with the attacks of September 11, 2001.²² The core strategy of publicity terrorism involves the separation of propagandistic and operational success, to the extent that media attention becomes an end-goal in and of itself. Hostage-takings and plane hijackings, which were often coupled with demands for states to release imprisoned comrades, were particularly effective in this regard as they produced gripping dramas that captured public (and media) attention over a prolonged period of time. The El Al incident was followed by the PFLP’s Dawson’s Field hijackings of September 1970, at which point the group managed to commandeer four of its five targeted aircraft, landing three of them on the same airstrip in a remote region of Jordan. The fact that the PFLP had simultaneously seized American, British, Israeli, and Swiss aircraft—although the El Al hijackers were quickly overpowered—earned the group headlines across the globe, while inculcating an “irrational sense of insecurity” in international travelers.²³

Publicity terrorism’s functional simplicity and low operational costs, especially when viewed in comparison to the level of media attention that the approach generated, quickly spawned imitations. The Japanese Red Army, whose leaders maintained close

¹⁹ Dick Schubert: “Die Frauen waren die Seele der Gruppe.” In: *Christ und Welt*, 23.06.1972; “Frauen im Untergrund,” p. 22; and Dorothea Hauser: *Baader und Herold. Beschreibung eines Kampfes*. Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag 1997, p. 16.

²⁰ Tunde Agara: “Gendering Terrorism: Women, Gender, Terrorism and Suicide Bombers.” In: *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, 6 (2015), pp. 115–125, here p. 118.

²¹ For one example of each approach, see “Zeuge der Anklage.” In: *Der Spiegel*, 13.12.1971, p. 66; “Leibdiener der Terroristin’: So sties Gerhard M ller zur Bande.” In: *Bild am Sonntag*, 18.06.1972; and Schubert: “Frauen waren die Seele.”

²² Chaliand/ Blin: “1968 to Radical Islam,” p. 226.

²³ Chaliand and Blin view this element as the defining element of terrorism. See Chaliand/ Blin: “‘Golden Age’ of Terrorism,” p. 181.

ties to the PFLP, carried out a domestic airplane hijacking in March 1970, followed by the Lod Airport (Tel Aviv) shootings of May 1972, which resulted in the death of twenty-six people, most of whom were Puerto Rican pilgrims visiting Christian holy sites. The taking of Israel athletes as hostages at the 1972 Summer Olympiad by the Fatah-aligned group Black September, in what would become known as the Munich Massacre, is another prime example of the momentum-gathering strategy of publicity terrorism. Even though the attack did not achieve the stated objective of forcing prisoner releases in Israel and West Germany and even though all eight Palestinian assailants were either killed or arrested in a failed hostage liberation attempt carried out by untrained local police, a subsequent Black September communiqué celebrated the operation as “100 percent successful from a purely propagandistic point of view.”²⁴ It was the 1977 PFLP hijacking of a Lufthansa flight, however, carried out in support of jailed members of the Red Army Faction (*Rote Armee Fraktion* or RAF) that would bear larger implications for the trajectory of German history, for reasons discussed below.

The various German-based organizations, whose members trained and collaborated with the PFLP and Fatah, implemented a similar form of publicity terrorism. Leaders of the RAF, which was the most prominent of several militant leftwing groups operating inside of the Federal Republic, dubbed their approach “armed propaganda,” thus succinctly encapsulating the dual-pronged but interlaced components of violence and communication.²⁵ Although these West German groups embraced the Latin American-inspired image of the urban guerrilla while rejecting the “terrorist” moniker, the RAF openly advocated for the implementation of “revolutionary terror” in one of its earliest communiqués, “On the Armed Struggle in Western Europe.”²⁶ For critical journalist and RAF co-founder Ulrike Meinhof, the establishment of an urban guerrilla movement in West Germany facilitated the transition from passive protest to resistance, i.e., to actively ensure that what one opposes in society “no longer happens.”²⁷

²⁴ Andreas Elter: *Propaganda der Tat. Die RAF und die Medien*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2008, pp. 134-135.

²⁵ Kollektiv RAF: “Das Konzept Stadtguerilla.” In: *Rote Armee Fraktion. Texte und Materialien der RAF*. Berlin ID Verlag 1997, pp. 27–48, here p. 44.

²⁶ Kollektiv RAF: “Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa.” In: *Texte und Materialien*, pp. 49–111, here p. 79.

²⁷ Ulrike Meinhof, as quoted in Peter Brückner: *Ulrike Meinhof und die deutsche Verhältnisse*. Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach 1995, p. 150. See also Sarah Colvin: *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism. Language, Violence, and Identity*. Rochester: Camden House 2009; and Karin Bauer: “From Protest to Resistance: Ulrike Meinhof and the Transatlantic Movement of Ideas.” In: Belinda Davis/Wilfried Mausbach/Martin Klimke/Carla MacDougall (eds.): *Changing the World, Changing Oneself. Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s*. New York: Berghahn Books 2012, pp. 171–188.

West Germany's urban guerrilla groups maintained a conflictingly adversarial yet symbiotic relationship with the mainstream media. Although the RAF went so far as to bomb the Hamburg headquarters of the conservative Axel Springer media conglomerate in May 1972, the guerrillas relied on the conventional media as the willing amplifier of their ideological message. In fact, widely circulated news magazines such as *Der Spiegel* and *Stern* routinely re-published urban guerrilla communiqués, interviews, and letters of responsibility, oftentimes in their entirety.²⁸ Terrorism is, at its core, a “communicative strategy,”²⁹ and the assistance of large commercial presses allowed the militants to reach multiple audiences concurrently, including other group members, prospective recruits, sympathizers, state authorities, and the public at large.³⁰ Mainstream media was thus a willing accomplice in the inculcation of fear in the West German populace. While the media did not initiate any terror attacks, its detailed and at times sensationalized coverage of those events helped exacerbate the very terror scare it condemned, providing urban guerrillas with an inflated sense of their own importance.

The strategy of the West German terrorist groups of the 1970s is crisply captured in the well-known adage, “any publicity is good publicity.” Dieter Kunzelmann, who founded the country's first urban guerrilla group, Tupamaros West Berlin, acknowledged this quite clearly in his 1998 memoirs, writing:

*The Springer press took the slightest leftwing activity as cause for lurid press coverage and agitation....[My experiences] taught me how one can use the media, so that despite the negatively covered press coverage, one can spread and popularize precisely the ideas [the newspapers] want to suppress or conceal.*³¹

Attracting the gaze of the media quickly evolved into an end-goal for German guerrilla groups as well as a deceiving barometer for the measurement of their success. Although repeated terror scares helped move inventory off the newsstands, the result of this tense interdependence was what Karin Bauer has termed a “mass-mediated

²⁸ Examples include “‘Wir schießen, wenn man auf uns schießt.’ ‘Rote Armee Fraktion über den Baader-Meinhof Gruppe.’” In *Der Spiegel*, 26.04.1971, pp.32-34; “‘Die revolutionäre Linke ist kriminell.’ Horst Mahler aus den Untersuchungshaft für den *Spiegel*.” In: *Der Spiegel*, 25.01.1972, pp. 30-31; and “‘Entweder Mensch oder Schwein.’ Der letzte Brief von Holger Meins (an Grashof 31. Oktober 1974).” In: *Der Spiegel*, 18.11.1974, p. 30.

²⁹ Elter: *Propaganda der Tat*, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

³¹ Dieter Kunzelmann: *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand! Bilder aus meinem Leben*. Berlin: Transit 1998, p. 49.

theater of cruelty,” in which sensationalized coverage of urban guerrilla actions and state counterterror measures erased any prospect of a silencing of terror.³²

Published opinion, as contained in the pages of the mainstream press, must not be conflated with public opinion.³³ However, media conglomerates strongly shape public opinion through their selection, narration, and contextualization of events and topics that they deem relevant. For instance, responses that coalesced into a 1972 Allensbacher Institute national survey that revealed that 64% of the public found West Germany’s police presence to be insufficient while only 4% found it excessive were conditioned by the frenzied media coverage of the RAF’s May 1972 bomb campaign in which the group had targeted six German cities within a two-week timespan.³⁴ Furthermore, the mainstream media inevitably—and often quite intentionally—privileges certain voices while silencing others, favoring the perspectives of prominent, educated, native-born, and—in 1970s West Germany—overwhelmingly male segments of the populace. Seen in this context, the guerrillas’ “armed propaganda” provided a way to subvert those hierarchies and obtain a coveted platform from which to speak. But the price they paid for a place at that podium was heavy.

Although terrorist groups were largely able to control *when* they received media coverage through the timing of their attacks, they had very little say over *how* those events were covered or what types of splinter discourses they engendered. The RAF’s May 1972 bomb offensive, for example, sparked a flood of false bomb threats, which developed into a massive public relations disaster for the group. The federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia alone received between thirty and eighty false bomb threats per day in the wake of the RAF’s campaign.³⁵ Thirty-five bomb threats were phoned into Frankfurt police in a forty-eight hour period that followed the RAF’s bombing of American military headquarters in that city.³⁶ Since the realization of media attention was itself an end-goal and since the media’s reportage of bomb threats intensified the climate of public fear, one might think that urban guerrillas would have welcomed such a development. However, the RAF realized that the success of its program of “revolutionary terror” was predicated on the viability of group’s claim to represent the

³² Bauer: “From Protest to Resistance,” p. 184.

³³ Hanno Balz: “Der ‘Sympathisanten’-Diskurs im Deutschen Herbst.” In: Klaus Weinbauer/Jörg Requate/Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.): *Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik. Medien, Staat und Subkulturen in den 1970er Jahren*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 2006, pp. 320–350, here 321.

³⁴ “Policemen Wanted.” In Noelle-Neumann, *The Germans*, p. 336.

³⁵ “Täglich bis 80 anonyme Bombendrohungen. Hilf mit Herz und Hand.” In: *Die Welt*, 02.06.1972.

³⁶ “Frankfurt am Main: Terror per Telefon: Ein Nervenkrieg heizt am Main die Bombangst an.” In: *Die Welt*, 19.05.1972.

West German masses in a struggle against state power. RAF leadership clarified this distinction in one of its early treatises:

*The revolutionary terror is directed exclusively against exponents of the system of exploitation and against functionaries of the apparatus of oppression, against the civilian and military leaders and central figures of the counterrevolution.*³⁷

However, the proliferation of false bomb threats against a range of targets that included department stores, post offices, high schools, and churches broadened the imagined operational field of the conflict and left the entire citizenry on edge, regardless of one's relationship to the "apparatus of oppression."³⁸ In this context, West Germans were far more likely to view violent non-state actors as their adversaries and the state's police forces as their protectors. In an effort to reverse this perception, the RAF released a statement claiming that the police had created a massive bomb scare in the city of Stuttgart as an elaborate hoax, "just as the Nazis had set the Reichstag on fire."³⁹

What is more important for the purposes of this study is that the public discussion of terrorist violence became intimately enmeshed in a complicated web of discourses on broader social issues.⁴⁰ Discussions of counterterror approaches, for example, inevitably harkened back to the rise of the Nazi Party during the late Weimar period, thereby entering the realm of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past). Similarly, concerns with so-called terrorist sympathizers prompted vigorous debates over the relationship between the lethal guerrilla violence of the 1970s and the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (extra-parliamentary opposition, or APO) movement of the previous decade. Still other entanglements centered on the topic of capital punishment, with the RAF's brand of "revolutionary terror" –mediated through the mainstream press and broadcast networks– shifted public opinion to favor the reinstatement of the death penalty. Indeed, in the wake of the RAF's kidnapping and eventual murder of Daimler-Benz magnate Hanns-Martin Schleyer, one national

³⁷ Kollektiv RAF: "Über den bewaffneten Kampf," 90.

³⁸ Examples of these false bomb threats can be found in "Erpressungsversuche der RAF zum Nachteil der Wirtschaft" and "Erpressungen z.n. Kaufhof und Bundesbahn, die mit RAF unterzeichnet sind." In: Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter cited as BArch) B106/111039, Nr. 625050, Band 33; "Die Rote Armee Fraktion' bekennt sich zu Attentat." In: *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 16.05.1972; and "Flut von Bombendrohungen nach dem Attentat auf das Springer-Haus." In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23.05.1972.

³⁹ "Brief von der Roten Armee Fraktion an den *Stern*, 29 May 1972." In: BArch B362/3253, Nr. 5335.

⁴⁰ Particularly useful in this regard is the work of Balz: "Der 'Sympathisanten'-Diskurs," pp. 320–350.

survey found that a full two-thirds of the West German populace supported capital punishment.⁴¹

Terrorists as Gendered Deviants

Women's participation in the new leftwing terrorism of the 1970s received close media scrutiny from the outset, opening up space for a reevaluation of the women's liberation movement and the expression of a staunch antifeminist outlook across the political spectrum. The RAF's 1972 bomb campaign prompted a shift in the published discourse, characterized by a pronounced entanglement between terrorism and feminism. Having taken over as president of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution just two months earlier, Günther Nollau publicly identified an "excess of women's liberation" as the cause of rising lawlessness afflicting the country. Although Nollau uttered that comment in response to the recent bomb attacks, it is likely that contemporaries interpreted it as a statement of women's increased participation in political activity in general, including the numerous non-violent initiatives of the day that were challenging the phallographic political order. The conservative newspaper *Christ und Welt* (*Christ and World*) quickly seized on Nollau's controversial thesis as a centerpiece for a story on female guerrillas entitled, "The Women Were the Soul of the Group."⁴² Nollau's remarks maintained a remarkable shelf life and were later revisited by the liberal magazine *Der Spiegel* in its coverage of leftwing terrorism in 1976 and again in 1977.⁴³ In the latter case, *Der Spiegel* went so far as to conclude that Nollau's theory "may well be" correct.⁴⁴

Not only did the mainstream press gender female urban guerrillas in strikingly unfavorable terms, but they also pathologized these women as abnormal, domineering, manly, homosexual, and unmotherly. The mass media constructed a 1970s version of the narrative of the "fallen woman," whose recurring elements included rebellion against a bourgeois upbringing, involvement in feminist and/or antiauthoritarian political networks, divorce, and, finally, the abandonment of maternal duties. The newspaper *Bild*, for example, ran a piece on Ulrike Meinhof

⁴¹ "Kopf ab für Terroristen?" In: *Quick*, 22-28.09.1977.

⁴² "Die Frauen waren die Seele der Gruppe." In: *Christ und Welt*, 23.06.1972.

⁴³ "Ausbruch in Berlin," pp. 18-27; and "Frauen im Untergrund," p. 22-33.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.

following her 1972 arrest that included a 1963 photograph of a domestic Meinhof at home with her twin daughters, adding the following commentary: “She left these children in order to pursue political delusions that led her single-mindedly into the underground and terrorism.”⁴⁵ The implication was that Meinhof was not just a terrorist who happened to be female, but rather a “failed” woman and mother who had made the conscious decision to shirk her maternal duties in favor of a selfish hunt for political adventure. Female guerrillas were thus demonized and stigmatized as “inherently (gender) deviant” in their rejection of motherhood.⁴⁶ However, through a study of letter correspondences that Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin engaged in during their time in prison, Patricia Melzer has discovered convincing evidence that these two aspiring revolutionaries remained deeply interested in the welfare of their children even while incarcerated.⁴⁷ Any consideration of the internal conflict these women faced lost out to reductionist depictions of a betrayal of motherhood in the mainstream media, thus preserving the narrative fidelity of the fallen woman story by meeting the dominant “values and beliefs of the audience.”⁴⁸ This flawed presentation of urban guerrilla women thus reflects—so Melzer—a “cultural inability to approach the phenomenon of female terrorists outside the context of mothers-gone-bad.”⁴⁹ In fact, had commentators been able to seriously consider the likelihood of this internal conflict, they might have been able to reimagine the actions of Meinhof and Ensslin as the ultimate *sacrifice*, namely the surrendering of their most precious relationships in order to commit themselves completely to the global antiimperialist resistance.

The perpetuation of the narrative fidelity of these tales also hinged upon a series of glaring rhetorical omissions. Although many male members of guerrilla groups—including RAF co-founder Andreas Baader—had lost contact with their children, a corresponding examination of failed guerrilla *fathers* never materialized. Similarly, while the mass media highlighted anecdotes of gender inversion or homosexual tendencies among guerrilla group members, they generally looked past examples of long-term heterosexual partnerships and marriages between leftwing extremists that survived the descent into the political underground.⁵⁰ A third omission comes in the form of a

⁴⁵ “Das war einmal Ulrike Meinhof.” In: *Bild*, 09.06.1972.

⁴⁶ Patricia Melzer: “Shape of a Young Girl,” p. 36.

⁴⁷ Patricia Melzer: “Maternal Ethics and Political Violence: The ‘Betrayal’ of Motherhood among the Women of the RAF and June 2 Movement.” In: *Seminar* 47,2 (2011), pp. 81–102.

⁴⁸ For more on the importance of narrative fidelity in relation to depictions of female terrorism, see Agara: “Gendering Terrorism,” p. 117.

⁴⁹ Patricia Melzer: “Maternal Ethics,” p. 99.

⁵⁰ Alan Rosenfeld: “‘Anarchist Amazons’: The Gendering of Radicalism in 1970s West Germany.” In: *Contemporary European History* 19, 4 (2010), pp. 351–374, here p. 363.

concerted focus on women from bourgeois backgrounds with strong intellectual pedigrees while largely ignoring the participation of less-educated, working-class women in leftwing extremism. The press overlooked the personal history of Inge Viett of the June 2 Movement, for example, since her humble background did not conform to the preferred narrative of rebellious bourgeois mothers. Viett had been raised in a rural orphanage in Schleswig-Holstein after her mother abandoned her towards the end of the Second World War. Far removed from bastions of privilege, Viett spent her adolescence working as a domestic servant trainee and stripper in Hamburg before becoming immersed in radical politics.⁵¹ Omitting these counternarratives, (male) journalists engaged in the process of what Luce Irigaray has termed the marking of women “phalically, by their husbands, fathers, [and] procures.”⁵² In this case, there was a pronounced media tendency to label female guerrillas according to their fathers’ professions, whether it be “preacher’s daughter” Gudrun Ensslin, “army major’s daughter” Carmen Roll, “pharmacist’s daughter” Ina Siepmann, or “millionaire’s daughter” Angela Luther.⁵³ (Conversely, male guerrillas were never labeled in this manner.) The mass media’s imposition of these gendered frames of reference on their coverage of leftwing violence thus perpetuated the “exploitation of women through a definition of power of the masculine type.”⁵⁴

At the same time that the West German press demonized women’s political activism, the masculine gaze of the media produced an image of the female German terrorist as a figure of *alluring* deviance. *Bild-Zeitung*, for example, reveled in RAF core member Gudrun Ensslin’s prior appearance in an erotic film, running a front-page story in January 1972 on RAF inner-group dynamics that included topless photos of Ensslin under the headline, “Which role did the preacher’s daughter Ensslin play?”⁵⁵ *Bild* followed this up with another set of half-nude shots of Ensslin after her June 1972 arrest.⁵⁶ The magnetic sexual appeal of the female terrorist was by no means a uniquely German occurrence, with the British *Daily Mail* describing Ulrike Meinhof as an “attractive woman” who had transformed into a firebrand idealist.⁵⁷ When twenty-one year-old American MP Larry Young was questioned in the investigation of the

⁵¹ Inge Viett: *Nie war ich furchtloser. Biographie*. Reinbek: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag 1999, p. 66.

⁵² Luce Irigaray: *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. From the French by Catherine Porter. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1985, p. 31.

⁵³ “Die Pfarrerstochter aus Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt.” In *Express*, 02.06.1972; “Das ruinierte Leben der Ingrid Siepmann.” In: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14.11.1977; and “Angela Luther: Die Terroristin aus Elbenchausee.” In: *Bild*, 01.03.1975.

⁵⁴ Irigaray: *The Sex*, p. 83.

⁵⁵ “Welche Rolle spielte Pfarrer’s Tochter Ensslin?” In: *Bild*, 23.01.1972.

⁵⁶ “Die Pistole in den schwarzen Jacke – Das war das Ende.” In: *Bild*, 08.06.1972.

⁵⁷ James Thurman: “The Little Innocent Who Grew Up into a Woman of Terror.” In: *Daily Mail*, 10.05.1976.

RAF's May 1972 bombing of the Officer's Club at the U.S. Fifth Infantry Headquarters in Frankfurt, he couldn't resist expressing his attraction to suspected bomb planter Irmgard Möller:

The girl had a face that one would describe as more beautiful than average. Her entire appearance was well kept and I had the impression that she came from a "good" family... What really caught my eye was that the girl was just right. In other words, she was sexy.⁵⁸

It would therefore be inaccurate to confine our analysis to a discussion of pathology. Rather, it is clear that the gendering of terrorism in 1970s West Germany involved a simultaneous demonization and adoration of the figure of the female terrorist, even if the latter was less evident.

Although male participation in terrorist acts was never depicted as a manifestation of the perversion of gender roles or an excess of men's liberation, representations of guerrilla men in the mass media were clearly gendered. Indeed, journalistic constructions of terrorist women and men were always relational and typically presented in zero-sum terms. The presence of over-emancipated women suggested that their male counterparts lacked the ability to assert their "natural" male dominance. Terrorist men were therefore alternately constructed as hysterical, effeminate, and impotent. An inversion of the conventional gendered hierarchy was evident in *Bild's* coverage of the arrest of RAF member Gerhard Müller with Ulrike Meinhof, with the former presented as a "body servant" and the latter as the couple's "breadwinner and leader, friend and mother." Although the article also made allusions to a romantic relationship between the pair, by adding that such relations "ran counter to [Müller's] nature," *Bild* also implied that Müller was bisexually inclined, a possibility that was solidified through the subsequent statement that the subject had been previously convicted for violation of Paragraph 175, the portion of the West German law code that criminalized homosexual acts.⁵⁹ A similar reversal of gender roles can be found in reporting on imprisoned guerrillas. A June 1972 *Bild* article asserted that a hysterical Andreas Baader "whined and cussed" in his cell while his mood cycled between "depression and euphoria." This was juxtaposed—in the same piece—with the behavior of his industrious female counterpart, Gudrun Ensslin, who read an

⁵⁸ "Bundeskriminalamt, Vernehmung von Larry Young, 13. Juli 1973." In: BArch B362/3096, "Sprengstoffanschlag auf das US Army Hauptquartier in Frankfurt/Main am 11. Mai 1972."

⁵⁹ "Leibdiener der Terroristin."

assortment of books and knitted a sweater while residing at the Frankfurt women's prison.⁶⁰ Although Baader's actual interactions with female comrades were often marked by menacing displays of misogyny,⁶¹ contemporary publications softened Baader's image by presenting him as "very feminine looking" and "terribly vain."⁶² For the narrative fidelity of these tales to be effective, the empowerment of female terrorists needed to come at the expense of their male counterparts. Indeed, the notion that terrorist violence resulted from an erosion of male authority resonated across West German society in the 1970s.

Conclusion

The acts of terrorist violence carried out by the RAF, June 2 Movement, and other leftwing extremist groups shattered the myth of a genderless state by exposing its inherently masculine nature. Dominique Grisard calls attention to the fact that our knowledge of terrorism is itself a gendered object produced by nexuses of state power and viewed through the masculine gaze of the mainstream media.⁶³ She correctly identifies prisons, courts, and legislative bodies as "gendering devices that produce and exaggerate gender differences."⁶⁴ It is also crucial to recognize that these institutions operate in the public imaginary as inherently masculine entities; however, the gendering of the actual apparatuses of state power is rarely stated in explicit terms. Calling attention to the masculine nature of state institutions in the 1970s would have threatened to undermine the rhetoric of gender equality that had defined West German society since the end of the Nazi era, albeit while operating in a tense balance with protective legislation that demarcated women's bodies and roles in a disempowering manner.

The disproportionate level of media attention bestowed upon the figure of the female terrorist was part of a larger crisis of emasculation that pervaded West German society in the 1970s. In crucial moments of crisis, anxieties over the state's inability or refusal to suppress terrorist violence were even expressed through overt references to an

⁶⁰ "Während Baader weinte und fluchte, strickte die Ensslin Pullover." In: *Bild*, 07.06.1972.

⁶¹ Colvin: *Meinbof*, p. 213.

⁶² "Bundeskriminalamt: Wiege des Bösen." In *Der Spiegel*, 07.08.1972, p. 34; and "Die Geschichte eines jungen Mannes, der immer alles falsch gemacht hat. Andreas Baader—Verpfuscht in alle Ewigkeit." In: *Bild Zeitung*, 05.06.1972.

⁶³ Dominique Grisard: "History of Knowledge, Terrorism, and Gender." In: *Historical Social Research* 39,3 (2014), pp. 82–99, here p. 82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

impaired male phallus. In the wake of the RAF's 1972 bomb campaign, for example, the rightwing *National-Zeitung* lamented that police forces had been "castrated... their effectiveness paralyzed" by leftwing extremism and the perceived failure of the state to deploy its masculine might.⁶⁵ A discourse of limpness paralleled the metaphor of castration, with Chancellor Willy Brandt publicly informing the nation that, "The free democracy that [they] built up from the rubble of dictatorship and war must not be misconstrued as a *Schlappstaat* (limp state)."⁶⁶ Writing for *Die Zeit*, Theo Sommer, who would later serve as that publication's editor-in-chief (1973–92) and publisher (1992–2000), penned an editorial piece entitled, "Not a State of Limp Dicks," in which he attempted to carve out a reasonable middle ground for the Federal Republic in between that of a "Gestapo state" and an utter pushover.⁶⁷ If the RAF's kidnapping and murder of leading industrialist and Daimler-Benz executive Hanns-Martin Schleyer in the fall of 1977 constituted the "symbolic castration of the ruling classes," the Federal Republic's deployment of its new GSG 9 counterterror commando force in a successful liberation of passengers aboard a hijacked Lufthansa flight re-routed to Somalia in October 1977 heralded the figurative reconstruction of the impaired German phallus.⁶⁸ In many ways the emergence of "militant democracy" on the tarmac in Somalia provided a tangible expression of the early postwar preference for a male state dedicated to the protection of German women and families.⁶⁹ In the end, the mass media's seeming obsession with the specter of terror and the sensationalized portrayals of gender relations within urban guerrilla organizations reveal more about social anxieties in general than they do about the behaviors and lifestyles of the relatively insignificant number of German men and women who engaged in acts of terrorist violence. The development of a discourse of an alleged "excess of women's liberation" in regards to leftwing extremism was, at its core, an attempt to come to grips with the notion of politicized women operating beyond the control of patriarchy. Fears of terror attacks became intertwined with (male) fears of a loss of masculine privilege and authority—a condition that was projected onto state institutions. Seen from this vantage point, not only did the success of the GSG 9's mission in Mogadishu exhibit what then-Chancellor Helmut Schmidt described as a

⁶⁵ "Wer sind die nächsten Opfer des roten Bomben-Terrors?" In: *National-Zeitung*, 02.06.1972.

⁶⁶ Willy Brandt: "Appell des Bundeskanzlers, 4 Februar 1972." In: "Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung Bulletin," 08.02.1972.

⁶⁷ Theo Sommer: "Kein Staat der Schlappschwänze." In: *Die Zeit*, 09.06.1972.

⁶⁸ Grisard: "Knowledge, Terrorism, and Gender," p. 90.

⁶⁹ Alan Rosenfeld: "Militant Democracy: The Legacy of West Germany's War on Terror in the 1970s." In: *The European Legacy* 19, 5 (2014) pp. 568-589.

“humanization of politics,” but also it provided a comforting demonstration of German virility in the midst of a crisis of emasculation.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt: “Abgabe der Erklärung der Bundesregierung.” In: *Verhandlungen des Bundestages* (VIII.) Deutscher Bundestag, 53. Sitzung, 28.10.1977.