Introduction: “An Excess of Women’s Emancipation”

Gender, Political Violence, and Feminist Politics

Must “every citizen” reckon that one of these days “he’ll be confronted with violent death in the shape of a young girl?”

★ Die Welt, 1977

Violence can be defined *a minima* as the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes. [. . .] It denatures, wrecks, and massacres that which it assaults. Violence does not transform what it assaults; rather, it takes away its form and meaning. It makes it nothing other than a sign of its own rage. [. . .] From elsewhere or beyond, violence brandishes another form, if not another meaning.

★ Jean-Luc Nancy, 2005

Introduction

On May 14, 1970, Andreas Baader, incarcerated in Berlin, Tegel, for arson, was granted permission to meet with the well-known journalist Ulrike Meinhof. The meeting was to take place in the research facilities of the German Central Institute for Social Issues. The reason given for the unusual request was to discuss their collaborative project, a book on youth at risk. Instead, Meinhof’s visit with Baader was part of a plan devised by several women (and one man), including Baader’s lover, Gudrun Ensslin, to break him out of prison. The freeing of Baader and Meinhof’s subsequent flight underground is generally thought of as the “founding moment” of the left-wing terrorist group Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion, or RAF). Within a day, Berlin’s police initiated the largest manhunt since 1945, with Ulrike Meinhof’s picture plastered throughout the city on wanted posters. The fact that Baader’s escape involved five women and one man (who, as was learned later, was hired
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from outside the group’s political circles to lend some gendered authority to the armed action) stunned the West German public and would haunt its imagination concerning left-wing terrorism for years to come.

Seven years later, on July 30, 1977, the CEO of one of West Germany’s largest banks, Jürgen Ponto, was shot in his home in Oberursel during an attempted kidnapping by the RAF. The murder was to be the prelude to the “German Autumn” of that year—an escalation of the conflict between the RAF and the German state. Public outrage over the event focused in particular on the role a young woman played in gaining access to the house: as a friend of the family, she brought flowers when ringing the doorbell. Responses to the violent political act framed it as a gendered deceit. In media coverage of the event, Susanne Albrecht—and by extension all the RAF’s “terrorist girls” (Der Spiegel)—embodied “violent death in the shape of a young girl” (Welt). Secret Service Chief Günther Nollau observed that women’s participation in left-wing terrorism felt “somehow irrational” and summed up the official response with the conclusion that female terrorists must be the result of an “excess of women’s liberation.” What is striking about these narratives is the central role that gender plays in defining the magnitude of the RAF terrorists’ breach of the social contract through their violent political actions.

Public shock at women’s participation in such violence is based on the equation of purposeful and systematic violence with masculinity. Women’s participation in militant political groups in the 1970s and 1980s was not in accord with prevalent perceptions of women as peaceful and nurturing. Indeed, these women understood their actions as a means of liberation from restrictive gender norms. They present a cultural paradox—violent death in the shape of a young girl—raising critical questions about the gendered dimensions of political violence: How do masculinity and femininity operate as cultural parameters for political action? How does gender as an analytical variable contribute to our understanding of terrorism? Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction engages with these questions by examining, through the specific case of left-wing West German female terrorists, how gender shapes our perception of women’s political choices and of political violence more generally. The discursive convergences and divergences of mainstream gender ideologies, feminist theories of political violence, and the political decisions of women in the
RAF and other terrorist groups, while specific to the RAF and German history, in fact imply a necessity to rethink assumptions about women’s and feminist politics.

In addition to the RAF, other armed underground groups sought confrontations with the state, such as the Movement 2nd June (Bewegung 2. Juni). These groups included a striking number of female members: at times more than 50 percent of West German terrorists were women, many of whom took leadership roles and made strategic decisions. Seven years into the RAF’s declared war against the West German state, public and official responses to the Ponto murder convey a pattern of gendered assumptions regarding women participating in militant actions: mainstream media as well as the state and its investigative units—law enforcement—oscillated between trivializing the “terrorist girls” and demonizing them as “wild furies.” Said to have generated the directive within law enforcement of “shoot the women first,” women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June were constructed by officials and media reports alike as particularly violent and dangerous. As the years of conflict between the RAF and the state progressed, so did speculations about the reasons for the increased participation of women in armed groups. The two most popular were, first, that terrorism was motivated by sexual devotion to fellow revolutionaries (this also included deviant sexual preferences such as homosexuality) and, second, that it was a result of women’s emancipation, furthered by the growing women’s liberation movement. Clearly, female terrorists, so the reasoning went, were acting against their natural disposition, ergo, feminism, which agitates against traditional gender roles, produces female terrorists.

Feminist activists were quick to pick up on the sexist framing of female terrorists’ actions and voiced their opposition in feminist journals and other movement publications. They found themselves caught in the dilemma of condemning violent politics, which they viewed as being inspired by patriarchal and overtly masculinized revolutionary politics, yet feeling obligated to voice solidarity with the female terrorists imprisoned or wanted by the police in what they saw as a sexualized hunt against “excessively emancipated” women. The autonomous women’s movement unambiguously condemned the conceptual link between women’s liberation and violent politics, pointing to the newly formu-
lated nonviolent feminist politics that dominated the women’s movement in the 1970s.7 RAF and Movement 2nd June women arrested and/or on trial rarely commented on the Feminismusverdacht (charge/accusation of feminism)8 the state harbored against them and continued to focus instead on speaking about their political actions outside of a gendered framework. Their understanding of their own involvement did not correspond with prevalent perceptions (both mainstream and feminist) of women’s political participation. Some of them perceived themselves as feminists and saw their participation in the armed struggle as a logical extension of their liberation as women, while many others thought of revolutionary movements as superseding feminist aspirations of equality. This troubling position of leftist female terrorists rarely finds representation in Western scholars’ accounts of women’s activism—let alone of activism that is defined as feminist. So what are we to do with these conflicting understandings of women as political agents? And what is the place of terrorist women in a cultural memory of feminist activism? And finally, these women raise the question, “Can political violence be feminist?”9

The RAF symbolized a time of acute crisis for the young, post–World War II Federal Republic as traumatic events profoundly shaped the political climate in the 1970s. The Ponto shooting in 1977 was part of a series of events that led to the escalation of the conflict between the RAF and the West German state that began in 1970 and would continue into the 1990s. This conflict resulted in the state instituting increased security measures and laws restricting political formations, such as the 1976 passing of §129 in the criminal code, which went beyond targeting terrorist activities to criminalize any associations with potentially terrorist activists and dramatically expanded the police’s reach into activist circles.10 Media outlets created a forum for confrontations between a militant leftist activist culture and a mainstream German public discourse on political violence, with the inflammatory tabloid Bild, put out by the conservative Springer publication house, representing the most reactionary voice in the debate. The nation’s self-interrogation into the meaning and processes of their post–World War II democracy was in part forced by the terrorism that became synonymous with the name of the RAF.11
The RAF, with its radical Marxist framework and critique of the FRG as a “fascist” state, has continued to spark political controversies up to the present day. Like other left-radical groups in West Germany, such as the Movement 2nd June, the RAF was formed in the beginning period of a growing political mobilization of the radical Left after the waning of the SDS. The RAF bombed U.S. military facilities, kidnapped and assassinated influential businessmen and state representatives, robbed banks, and worked with Palestinian terrorists. When the Movement 2nd June dissolved in 1980, the remaining members joined the RAF. Politicizing their cause further with prison hunger strikes, the RAF maintained a consistent political presence in West German public debates until the group renounced its “armed struggle” in 1992 and officially disbanded in 1998.

The violence committed by the group and its mobilization of a small number of young people’s political rage throughout the twenty-eight years of the RAF’s existence still haunts policy makers and activists alike. Since their entrance onto the public scene, the historical and cultural meaning of the RAF has remained a subject of public debate, as the role of the state in the events is being reexamined, victims’ families speak out, and former RAF members go public with narratives of their experiences. Art exhibits, feature and documentary films, literary works, academic conferences and scholarship, as well as mainstream publications continue to redefine the impact of the RAF on German society and political culture today.

Gender clearly shaped early public debate about the RAF, a focus that until recently has been absent in the scholarship on West German terrorism. In recent years, an increased attention to gendered aspects of the debate is reflected in selected scholarship on the RAF. This study contributes to the emerging feminist discourse on the West German terrorism debate by providing a gendered analysis of the RAF and the Movement 2nd June that makes concrete some of their actions’ implications for feminist political thought as well as for mainstream gender ideology. This approach in turn enables a more complete understanding of German political and social history, and of the construction of terrorism as an act whose gendered meaning is mediated to the public through mass media.
Reading and Writing Women’s Political Violence

This book adds to the current debate on West German terrorism in a significant way by utilizing original sources and by introducing original theoretical considerations. Tracing the concept of violence as it circulated through and connected the New Left (and its armed groups), the autonomous women’s movement, and the Third World revolutionary movement is one example of such an original consideration, as is my gendered analysis of the RAF hunger strikes and the significance of a gendered focus on the body for a political reading. The sources and methods of analysis I utilize in the book are diverse; the book’s methodology is informed by cultural studies (textual analysis and contextual framing of a phenomenon) as well as history (archival research on a specific period). The trajectory of the book is to investigate discursive convergences and divergences of important debates and the implications they contain, not to (re)create some definite historical or theoretical truth about the RAF and Movement 2nd June. The original sources I bring to the debate confirm this trajectory, such as the integration of a series of conversations with former members of the RAF and Movement 2nd June. The interviews do not constitute a representative sample—methodologically, the information provided by the three women with whom I spoke functions in my study similarly to expert knowledge and is not understood to represent a generalized female RAF and Movement 2nd June member’s point of view. Instead, similar to the autobiographies I interpret, their narratives form distinct texts within a process of memorializing and historicizing the RAF and Movement 2nd June. While they constitute a very particular (and clearly limited) historical text in that they speak of personalized memories retrospectively, they provide a context for understanding the printed material that discusses their experiences and actions. They also form an important interjection informing an often heated public discourse on gender and political violence. These personal accounts are one of a variety of primary sources that create overlapping and contradicting strands of discourses on gender and violence in (West) Germany.

Primary print sources consist of archival material that includes both mainstream media coverage of major national publications, such as Der Spiegel, and so-called grey literature: movement publications, event
flyers/calls for action, prisoners’ trial statements, etc. In particular, the response of feminist groups and the debates that took place in the feminist political subcultures at the time, which were ignored by mainstream media and largely by researchers to date, add a new dimension to the historical understanding of the autonomous women's movement in West Germany, and its relationship to political violence. Maybe more importantly, these varied debates that become visible in small feminist publications complicate the notion of a universal feminist subjectivity by making visible the historical specificity of women’s activism.\textsuperscript{19}

In addition, original sources such as private documents and letters, when placed in relation to the published autobiographies of former female terrorists, make visible the complicated relationship women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June had to feminist politics. Current scholarship usually posits that women in left-radical groups distanced themselves politically from the autonomous women's movement and thus from the question of feminist politics. To dismiss the connection between left-radical women and feminist activists/politics because their ties were not formally organized means to discount gender as an organizing force \textit{beyond} consciously politicizing it. Instead, my analysis of memoirs and unpublished letters shows that armed women at times engaged intensely with feminist issues and politics and suggests that there existed a mutual influence between the different political groups of women that demands a reconsideration of what constitutes feminist politics.

I approach the RAF and Movement 2nd June as case studies primarily through textual analysis of historical documents. I read the material against mainstream gender ideologies and against feminist theories on gender and violence in order to make visible the process of “gendering” the meaning of terrorism and of women’s political choices. One theoretical framework that critically informs my analysis includes the emergence of the women’s movement campaign against violence against women, a paradigm that would dominate feminist theories on women’s political activism. Other theoretical frameworks include liberal feminist political theory, Marxist and socialist feminist theory, and poststructuralist concepts of feminist subjectivity and gender performativity. My reading of this variety of sources makes evident forces within the history of political violence in Germany and the cultural discourses that
generate a previously unexamined understanding of this history. With this reading, I expose implications for feminist theorizing about political violence, furthering the debate on political violence as it is taking place in gender studies more broadly.

What I am finding in my analysis of the RAF and the implications their actions have for feminist politics and theories is a dilemma posed by a feminist claim to nonviolence that, in its theorizing of women’s relationship to political violence, ultimately upholds a dominant gender ideology. The claim to nonviolence as inherent to women’s politics is clearly contradicted by RAF women’s commitment to armed struggle. I argue that their actions need to be reviewed from within a conceptual framework that recognizes the gendered dimensions of their decisions without denying the contradictions these decisions pose for feminist politics.

In a post-9/11 world, in the West, the term “terrorism” connotes first and foremost activities of Islamic fundamentalists against Western targets or their ideological and economic extensions. In 1970, the term was also used in a much more localized way within the domestic landscape, in addition to its use to refer to international acts of terrorism. By the late 1970s, a series of airplane hijackings and actions like the kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympics in Munich by members of the PLO drew attention to conflicts in the Middle East. These incidents linked the term “terrorism” as it was used in West Germany specifically to secular armed Palestinian and other Middle Eastern groups. In several other European countries, terrorism was linked to ethno-national or religious conflicts that troubled the nation states, such as in the UK and Northern Ireland and by extension in Ireland (the Irish Republican Army) as well as in Spain (the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), or to domestic left-radical terrorist groups, such as the Brigate Rosse in Italy. In West Germany terrorism referred primarily to activists who were working in so-called revolutionary circles, radical leftist movements that identified with a larger global struggle. Until the mid-1970s, media and state officials primarily referred to the RAF and other militants as “gangs” (Banden) (such as in the term “Baader-Meinhof Bande,” which was used early on to refer to the RAF) and/or as “anarchists” in the tradition of politically violent Russian anarchists within radical Marxist movements. Only later did they advance to be considered the more dan-
gerous category of terrorists, which is reflected in the 1976 addition to the criminal code of $129, which explicitly equates radical activism with terrorism.

Perception is everything in defining the nature of political violence. Phrases like “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” and bumper stickers like “Terrorist: What the big army calls the little army” reveal a reluctance to accept the criminalization of violence from the perspective of the state/majority alone. The criminalization of political violence is thereby always historically specific and culturally distinct. Clarification of the terms “political violence” and especially “terrorism” as they are being used in this study is thus important. The term “political violence” as I use it here indicates the politically motivated strategic employment of violence by a group against objects and structures (and, in certain cases, humans) that in the worldview of the group represent either state or systemic power. The aim of political violence, therefore, is to destabilize the existing government through strategic attacks, as well as to direct public attention to issues of perceived injustice. More specifically, political violence in the 1970s and early 1980s was viewed by Left militants in industrialized nations as “revolutionary violence” and “armed struggle”; they saw themselves as “guerrillas” and part of a worldwide fight against U.S. imperialism spearheaded by anticolonial movements in the Third World. The state, in turn, classified these actions as “terrorism.” The topic of political violence is necessarily an ideologically charged discourse reflected in controversies regarding terminology used to describe actions and groups. To emphasize the ambiguous meaning of acts of political violence that always is historical, I use terms like “terrorism” and “armed struggle” contextually.

Finally, the term “feminist” is central in formulating my main argument. As I apply it to publications, groups, debates, and political positions alike, the term is meant to connote a commitment to gender equality and/or the right of women to self-determination that is not homogeneous. The shared belief in gender relations as an oppressive regime that is in need of correction does not necessarily extend to a shared analysis of its roots and/or its relation to other systems of oppression. Consequently, the term “feminist” here functions as an umbrella term for a diverse and at times contradictory or even hostile range of political and theoretical positions. To signal the fracturing within the feminist label
in Western discourse, I add modifiers (such as “anti-imperialist,” “anarchist,” “radical,” “cultural,” “socialist,” and “mainstream”) when discussing feminist publications; when discussing feminist theories I specify their analysis of gender and violence. Overall, my interest is in feminist political practices, not in defining “the” feminist political subject, and my goal is to contribute to a careful reevaluation of a universalizing use of the term “feminist.” Instead of trying to generalize about “feminist” politics, here the emphasis is on a contextualized use of the term.


Any attempts to understand the ways in which the debate on the RAF was gendered, and in particular the implications its violent political actions have for feminist politics, necessitate a philosophical excursion into the question of what actually constitutes violence. If we understand the concept to include injuries other than physical ones, and injuries to be inflicted by both direct and indirect agents, the damage violence does goes further than blows directly aimed at bodies and objects. The RAF’s terrorism constitutes what Slavoj Žižek refers to as “subjective violence,” violence executed by an “identifiable agent.” Žižek argues that subjective violence, however, is only the most visible of three forms of violence that also include two kinds of “objective violence,” namely, “symbolic” violence, which is embedded in language and its forms, and “systemic violence,” “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems.” Objective violence is the violence material and ideological regimes impose, and it generates, according to Žižek, outbursts of subjective violence. Because objective violence remains invisible (the damage inflicted by objective violence is viewed as the “normal’ state of things”), it is subjective violence that triggers outrage. Judith Butler addresses how the privilege of reacting to one’s loss brought about by (subjective) violence silences the victim of (objective) violence, to which one’s own complicity contributes; grief and the aggression that often follows are justified for some, and denied to others: “[T]he differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions...
of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?”26 Terrorist violence becomes measurable to the public because of both its identifiable agent and its unsuspecting victims (those not experiencing objective violence).

The flip side of systemic violence is the way that violence actually interferes with and destroys systems of meaning. In his essay “Image and Violence,” phenomenologist Jean-Luc Nancy defines violence as “the application of a force that remains foreign to the dynamic or energetic system into which it intervenes.”27 Violence “denatures, wrecks, and massacres that which it assaults” and “it takes away its form and meaning,” reducing it to “a sign of its own rage.”28 Violence does not replace order with new order, meaning with new meaning; instead, it “splits open and destroys the play of forces and the network of relations.”29 Finally, as Eugenie Brinkema points out, “violence is monstrous, but also monstrative: Violence demonstrates”30 and, in Nancy’s words, “exposes itself as figure without figure”—it threatens to collapse meaning in its demonstration.

Violence relates to “truth” in two directions: it does “not serve truth: it wants instead to be itself the truth.”33 As Brinkema writes in her discussion of Nancy, “likewise, the history of philosophy suggests truth’s own violence”,34 its need to impose itself, to exist above all else, violates. So “the truth of violence” is “nothing other than the truth of the fist and the weapon,” which contrasts with the “violence of truth,” which is “a violence that withdraws even as it irrupts and [...] that opens and frees a space for the manifest presentation of the true.” 35 Nancy points to the seductive danger of this ambiguity on which any direct or indirect approval of violence feeds. It is the “reason why one could speak of good and necessary violence, and of loving violence, interpretative violence, revolutionary violence, divine violence.”36

The violence of RAF women is present in both of the ways in which Nancy sees violence relating to truth: the “blows” of their “true violence,” the damage their terrorism inflicts on human bodies and physical structures, on the one hand, and their “violent truth,” their existence as violent women, on the other. Their ‘true violence’—which assaults the German social and state system—is what they are primarily associated with; but rarely recognized to be at play here is their ‘violent truth’—which assaults the gender regime, the system of meaning that
explains and organizes gender norms. This truth regime is attacked by their gender transgression, effecting a violence that “denatures, wrecks, and massacres” any existing naturalized “truth” about femininity and masculinity and “takes away its form and meaning.” Their “violent truth” can thus be understood as a very particular form of “counterviolence,” as the gender regime’s disciplinary technologies already inflict violence on lives. The response of the state and the public to this “violence of truth” RAF women bring in turn is the “gendering” of the discourse on terrorism through the cementing of gender norms—the freezing and containing of the image of the female terrorist.

The image of the female terrorist stands in troubled relationship to violence and truth. As Nancy conceptualizes the image in general, it is separate from the symbolic of language; it is “the distinct.” It is distinct from the thing: “The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it essentially.” As Brinkema puts it, “[T]he image is not an imitation (for mimeticism reinscribes the appearance/original binary) but the resemblance from which the thing is detached.” The thing it resembles is invisible (the woman, the terrorist), unlike the image itself (female terrorist). Images of the RAF women as they circulated in media coverage, state documents, and the public’s imagination more broadly are more than mere (distorted) representations of “real” women—that would suppose there are authentic “women” to represent. Instead, their image converses with the “truth” (of the gender regime) it violates, and thus becomes an image of violence (terrorist) at the same time as it is a violent image that assaults us (death in the shape of a young girl).

However, the discursive reduction of the RAF’s violence to its “violent truth” (read: its gender transgression) in order to contain the violence it does to the gender regime backfires—the image of the RAF women actually makes visible, and thereby challenges, the truth(effect) of the gender regime itself. Now the question becomes whether or not their very image—as separate from the thing, terrorism, and the moral indefensibility of it—constitutes a feminist subversion in its violent performing of gender, regardless of their self-identification as feminist.

This investigation of terrorist women as potentially engaging in what I think of as feminist practices rests on a poststructuralist “letting go” of the definition of feminist politics as actions of a feminist subject.
The notion of a feminist subject is linked to the important theoretical presumption that feminism is the development of a subject towards an understanding of the personal as political; liberation hinges on an individual’s consciousness of oppression in everyday life. Furthermore, this consciousness has been defined as oppositional to oppression—and violence is one of the most important markers of women’s experience of oppression. Women participating in political violence thus run counter to a core principle of many of Western feminist theories and political movements, especially as they were formulated during the 1970s and 1980s: that a feminist subject rejects violence as a patriarchal mechanism of oppression. The historical representation of this debate quickly can become polarized into positions trying to claim certain strategies as “feminist” while dismissing others as “antifeminist.”

Letting go of the definition of feminist politics as actions of a feminist subject is not to say that an action has no agent, i.e., that there is no accountability and evaluation of sustainable politics. It however assumes that there are discursive political effects being produced outside of conscious subjectivity, including feminist ones. The concept of “practice” here allows for feminist countertruth-effects to develop through actions, bodies, and images (“true violence” and “violent truths”) independent of the individual’s subjectivity as feminist. I suggest that it is more appropriate to focus on feminist practices, which I understand to be actions whose gender constellations trouble, challenge, and potentially redirect existing oppressive gender regimes. While not necessarily “consciously” feminist in their orientation, these practices have discursive effects and shape power in ways that undermine essentialist notions on femininity and masculinity, and thus a heterosexist economy of desire. “Feminist” then is less a marker of progressive identity than of practices that affect gender relations in ways that challenge conservative and static traditions, and these practices might be controversial in their moral and ethical implications.

Thus, the analytical approach of this book should not be understood to be in search of the feminist subject in the RAF context. Instead, I am interested in reading their actions and existence as potential feminist practices that trouble existing gender norms. So while the RAF did not formulate explicit feminist positions in their texts and/or actions, it is important to ask how the existence of RAF women challenges not only
mainstream ideas about gender but also feminist efforts to *abgrenzen* (demarcate, separate) the women’s movement—and its efforts to change patriarchal structures—from these women’s violent transgressions of gender expectations. The feminist practice is then constituted in the “violent truth” of terrorist women, which relies on the “true violence” of the groups’ politics. In other words, does the *Feminismusverdacht* (charge/accusation of feminism) constructed by the West German state and public debate voiced from misogynist and sexist anxieties about loss of male privilege during times of social change not also somehow address the reality that gender norms were seriously confronted by women in revolutionary groups? Instead of declaring the “nonfeminism” of the RAF and Movement 2nd June and thus treating it as a phenomenon outside of feminist politics, I consider the impact their actions have both on mainstream gender ideology and on a feminist reliance on a preconceived feminist subject in assessing the meaning of political violence for feminist discourse. The repeated assertion by former members of the groups—echoed in many scholars’ analyses—that the RAF and Movement 2nd June were not interested in “feminist” politics does not change the fact that their actions need to be examined in terms of their impact on discourse. The proposition that RAF women’s violence can constitute feminist practices is only sustainable when we understand the term “feminist” not as a marker for moral, progressive politics but as a marker for—often troubling and violent—challenges to existing gender norms—“feminist” as signifying the “violent truth” of gender transgression. A feminist practice, if decoupled from a liberated subjectivity accountable to *all* women’s freedom, can be evaluated for its sustainability in particular historical contexts as furthering (or hindering) gender justice, while the claim of acting out of a feminist subjectivity raises questions of who actually defines what a liberated consciousness is and who is in the position to “rescue” other women.46 The concept of feminist practices allows for divergences in feminist reasoning and fosters feminist theory’s core structure as counterdiscourse—a feminist action then cannot be assumed (because it is executed by a feminist subject) but needs to be examined and explained (in relation and contrast to other feminist practices).

The RAF women’s “true violence” is destructive and morally indefensible to many, and their political effectiveness needs to be seriously
doubted. Nevertheless, the question remains to what extent their existence and actions upset the existing gender regime, how they constitute a “violent truth.” Some indications of this are the state’s response to the RAF as gendered threat to the nation, and public discursive obsession with the gender of terrorists. Women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June might not have been feminist subjects (i.e., few identified as feminist activists who were targeting gender oppression as a primary system of oppression), but they were engaging in feminist practices whose impact on discourse was measurable and concrete. This approach to the RAF’s relationship to feminist politics facilitates a historical understanding of women’s political measures that is complex and accounts for dominant gender ideologies that shape the debate on women’s choices of political resistance. The question “Can political violence be feminist?” then is recast as, “How do women arrive at their feminist politics?” and “How and why do feminist practices differ from each other?”

**Gender and Political Violence: The Terrors of a Violent Woman**

This book approaches women participating in political violence with the understanding that this phenomenon intersects with a variety of what Foucault has termed “discursive technologies”—spaces and moments where cultural and political meanings relating to gender and violence are produced and disseminated through particular knowledge production. These sites of knowledge production range from media coverage, investigative reports, and hunger strike statements to prison letters, movement publications, and statements following violent political actions, as well as scholarly research and artistic expressions. Operating from the perspective that power is discursive and gender is performative, the book offers a multilayered analysis of how the RAF and the Movement 2nd June and their politics produced (and still produce) gendered discourses, how, as Dominique Grisard puts it, in fact “gender is constitutional for the phenomenon of left-wing terrorism on a personal level, as well as on an institutional and symbolic level.” The book accounts for the mechanisms and institutions of these discourses as well as counterdiscourses that result in RAF women’s terrorism constituting what can be understood as feminist practices. It does so by engaging with three different (inter)disciplinary areas of debate. First,
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by placing the analysis of radical politics in relation to feminist theories of violence, this study engages in conversation with and contributes to feminist scholarship on politics in general and terrorism in particular. Second, it provides new insight into the historical discussions of the formation and political trajectories of revolutionary groups in the 1970s and how the public perceived them, with particular attention to how women's participation is explained in terms of their gender and sexuality. Finally, I reframe general conversations on political violence that treat the very notion of the female terrorist as a fundamental paradox, especially as they appear in media representations and in the dealings of the state with gender and terrorism, by offering a new perspective on the intersections of gender and politics: my study examines not how women have been figured as offering an alternative to violence but rather how the political violence exercised by women is rooted in, or emerges in relation to, the violence of gender itself.

Feminist Debates on Political Violence

Our understanding of political violence is structured by gendered behavioral norms that, while always more ambiguous and overlapping in actual interactions, are powerful concepts that shape discourses: simply put, violence is associated with an aggressive, powerful, and strong masculinity, which opposes a passive, gentle, and vulnerable femininity. Normative gender thereby determines bodies, which, as Sarah Colvin points out in Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism, “renders violence inseparable from biology”: “Cultural belief says women give life—they do not take it.” Bodies are thus positioned in particular relationships to violence: men commit it, women do not; instead, they experience it. Appropriate social gendered behavior that originates in bodies includes heterosexual desire: reproduction is the center of sexual relations, and the identity as (potential) mother becomes that which defines a woman's relationship to violence. Violence in a woman becomes not only a criminal deed but an unnatural act. Historically, this association of ideal femininity with nonviolence in Germany is racialized as well as classed (the ideal is projected onto bürgerliche—bourgeois—Gentile women), such that nonconformist gender behavior
is claimed to evince an aberration rooted in nonwhite, nonbourgeois background, such as in the case of poor and Jewish working-class women.

The association of feminism (women resisting social roles and claiming self-determination, including in terms of sexuality and reproduction) with terrorism (women committing political violence) as it appeared in West German discourse in the 1970s, is contradictory in many ways. It is contradictory specifically in terms of a feminist construction of violence as inherently male/masculine (which manifests in sexual, domestic, and social violence of men against women), which sides with mainstream ideology’s definition of women as inherently nonviolent. The general association of violence with masculinity that underlies social interactions and political gestures, as well as state institutions (such as the military, which in most countries in the 1970s excluded women), was politicized by second wave feminists in an unprecedented campaign against violence against women that shook up public discourse on violence in the 1970s and 1980s: women were presented as living in a “daily war” waged against them by men and a male-run state. Motherhood was reclaimed and politicized by feminists as the basis of women’s peacefulness and (moral) superiority. In its demands for women’s rights, the women’s movement countered the depoliticization of women through mainstream ideologies with a declaration of women’s experiences of violence as political and their nonviolence as the trait with the potential to create sustainable politics.

This paradigm shift that pointed to women’s daily suffering of violence at the hands of men as central to defining the women’s liberation movement’s main political focus resulted in two major discursive phenomena. First was the alignment of mainstream gender ideology’s view on women’s nonviolent nature (which declares the female terrorist deviant or insane) with a feminist insistence that women experience, not execute, violence within a patriarchal system. The second discursive formation—which contradicts the first—conveys conflicts within the women’s movement around the paradigm of violence against women as the main structural violence exhibited by the society and supported by the state: many feminists viewed patriarchy as only one of several major systems of oppression and thus resisted the binary characteriza-
tion of violent men versus resisting women. They also urged women to disinvest from the notion that women are peaceful and instead viewed (counter)violence as a legitimate feminist means of resistance.

The violence-against-women paradigm, which positioned women as victims/survivors of male violence and which declared violence as the major structuring force in society, demanded radical (social and political) changes in gender relations for any social justice to become attainable. This position throughout the 1980s was further developed to include commercial and sexual (including visual) violence against women in antipornography campaigns, as well as an analysis of the militarization of women’s lives through institutions, the state, and nationalism. It also resonated in the developing feminist discourse on the ethics of care in the 1990s that emerged from discussions of maternal ethics and politics. Mostly, then, feminist debates on politics have highlighted women’s nonviolent organizing against a global militarization in which underlying assumptions of gendered violence are carried over.

The result of this has been a naturalization of women’s nonviolent activism as the norm in the historicization of women’s resistance. In this history, the use of violence by women in “Third World” countries—in an anticolonial context—is at times acknowledged but mainly understood as alienated political work, furthered by feminist conclusions around the failure of revolutionary and nationalist movements internationally to commit to women’s rights and concerns. Actually, it is within the context of “Third World” women’s struggle that the contrast between feminist subjectivity and feminist practice as it structures the mode of inquiry of this study becomes urgently visible: the movements women globally organize around, while recognizing gender as a crucial force, rarely foreground it as the primary system of oppression, and the political issues driving at times forceful social change do not center on the notion of “liberated women” as premise for success, as Western feminism traditionally does.

But why, as a feminist scholar, turn to women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June to examine these questions of gender and political violence and feminist politics? They clearly represent a radical political minority that—in the grand scheme of things—might be nothing but an anomaly in the tradition of women’s political activism and whose impact on women’s lives has been negligible at best, and damaging at
worst. The political debate surrounding the RAF is actually of particular interest because it takes place within a geographical and discursive space of what in the 1970s was referred to as a “First World country” and today usually is identified as part of the Global North, i.e., industrialized, Western nations in which feminist formulations of nonviolence as women’s prevalent form of activism are dominant. In other locations in the world, different experiences of, and relations to, violence (often state and structural violence) do not preclude women’s participation in or support of what is seen as armed resistance; this was especially true in a world of the 1960s shaken by anticolonial and revolutionary struggles. A disruption of (universal) feminist claims to nonviolence as they were increasingly formulated by Western feminists in the 1970s happening “at home” thus becomes an important site to revisit assumed relationships of gender, power, and forms of resistance.

Until recently, feminist research on understanding the political work done by women in the 1970s and 1980s has created a cultural memory of women’s activism that defines feminist political work as nonviolent. Women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June trouble these memories. They introduce questions of violence as a woman’s or feminist’s tool into the discourse on women and violence within the context of Western democracies that lack the context of anticolonial/anti-occupation struggles reserved as the area where women’s activism is understandably compromised by necessarily violent resistance. As a Western armed group that cannot be understood in the context of ethno-national or religious conflicts, it raises unsettling questions about the use of violence as a political means within a democratic civil society neither at war nor destabilized by ethno-national disputes. Finally, the group’s actions provide a historical precedent for the militant feminist groups in the 1980s and 1990s that did not operate underground.

Death in the Shape of a Young Girl examines how feminist disagreements on political violence have been flattened out in favor of a definition of feminist politics as nonviolent—not least because of the state’s strategic conflation of women’s liberation with female violence. Consequently, in much of the literature on women’s political activism, the historicization of the feminist debate on political violence focuses on the premise of the violence-against-women political rallying point: a non-violent feminist position often is presented as the normative one that re-
jects the aberrant female terrorist whose acts are undermining the “true” women’s movement’s agenda. Countering this presentation, my research shows that women’s movement publications of the 1970s and 1980s actually reflect intense debates about the contradictions of feminist claims to nonviolence and show instances of overlap between feminist aims and uses of violence. Prison letters and autobiographies depict activists debating revolutionary violence and feminist rejections of violence.

Within the discourses, ideologies of motherhood underlie much of the debate on feminist politics, and some RAF and Movement 2nd June women’s rejection of their children emerges as a major theme of contestation. Ultimately, understanding how the women’s movement—and its definition of violence as masculine, which corresponds with mainstream gender ideologies—engaged with women in armed struggle (and vice versa) enhances our understanding of the limitations of feminist theories of political violence. The critical question at stake then is not the necessarily limited “Can violence be feminist?” but rather “What constitutes women’s political choices and feminist practices?” Asking this question allows for a critical evaluation of those practices.

Women in Revolutionary Groups and Their Challenge to Gendered Ideologies

The second area of thought that underlies the analytical approach of this study concerns the perception of female terrorists in public discourse and how that diverged from (and/or corresponded with) their actual experiences. I reframe the historical approach to the RAF by considering gender ideologies as they circulated in mainstream life and in public policy (e.g., women as mothers and men as providers) and as they were challenged and/or reproduced in the political groups in question. Cultural narratives on gender here co-construct other important discourses on national identity, citizenship, and the role of West Germany in global politics. Masculinity and femininity become parameters of political actions that are embodied by men and women, respectively, and transgressions of these alignments produce a moment of cultural crisis. Central to this political embodiment is social space: notions of the public sphere—heavily contested by 1960s counterculture and the Extraparliamentary Opposition (APO)—traditionally privilege the
masculine; politics were men’s business. The private, the domestic space was delegated to women’s influence; women’s work was motherhood and housekeeping. Similarly to the autonomous women’s movement’s challenge to established gender roles in West Germany more broadly, women in revolutionary groups present a moment of such crisis. They destabilize cultural assumptions and political norms primarily on two accounts. First, their experiences and the way they relate to them counter existing ideologies on women’s “nature,” partly because they undermine spatial assignments. The revolutionary space they claim is political and violent. Second, their political beliefs and their very existences disrupt and shape discourses on terrorism in ways that make visible contradictions of gendered discourses.

Discourses on West German leftist terrorist formations barely consider women’s gendered motivations for revolutionary violence, or their participation in terrorism as a gendered experience. If gender is part of the debate, women are highly sexualized and/or infantilized; their political agency is reduced to their being victims of male seduction, or else their deviant sexuality (as lesbians or seductresses) is depicted as perverting and as inciting violence. However, my research reveals the ways that revolutionary spaces provided women (and men) liberation from confining gender expectations, such as in experiences underground. Overall, the 1960s and 1970s introduced new social spaces that challenged normative arrangements of nuclear family homes and monogamous relationships, and redefined politics as not simply happening in Parliament. For example, the infamous Kommune 1, a radical leftist living commune in West Berlin that later became a starting point for members of the Movement 2nd June, was synonymous with a sexually permissive, politicized living environment and grew to be the target of many a proper citizen’s disdain. Similarly, as a terrain “outside of” the social order (including that of gender), the underground symbolizes a counternational social space, society’s “other” place characterized by its ultimate break with everything “normal.” The underground loomed large in the German imagination, both in the Left’s discourse on political legitimacy (with the RAF’s claim of underground as the only true revolutionary space) and in mainstream society’s anxiety about “passing” terrorists among them and their denouncing of neighbors as potentially harboring terrorists.
Clearly, being underground demanded skillful organization, such as renting apartments illegally, “passing” as normal tenants when meeting neighbors, avoiding contact with family and acquaintances, and planning actions within restricted circumstances, from car theft and document forgery to bombings, bank robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations.\textsuperscript{62} This life seemed to have generated gender constellations that differed from traditional gender roles regarding sexual relations, reproductive issues (particularly with regard to logistics around access to health care, such as abortions and contraception), and the division of labor in securing funds and planning actions. Fundamentally, being underground seems to have been experienced by many women as a more egalitarian space than other social arenas, such as the workplace and electoral politics. The media demonized this “outside” space of living without a legal existence by dismissing the activists as anarchist and their social relations as misogynist and hypersexual. Inadvertently, the media thus correctly marked it as a threat to the “proper” German order: sexual liberation was definitely a part of revolutionary groups’ internal logic, lesbian relationships were accepted (or viewed as politically irrelevant and thus permitted), and while both men and women had to participate in “bourgeois drag” to pass within their neighborhoods, their understanding of gender relations seemed to run counter to those of “proper” German citizens.\textsuperscript{63} While we need to be cautious of sensationalized representations of life underground and recognize it as a surface for projected anxiety concerning national security and stability, testimonies of women and men attest to the experience of living underground as being distinct from the experience of living in any other social space, in its limitations and social isolation, its radical, liberating separation from confining norms, and its political meaning.

Another area of women’s experiences examined by the book are prisons as mostly sex-segregated spaces and as sites for political hunger strikes. Many RAF prisoners continued to politicize their incarceration throughout their prison terms, and the RAF was able to maintain a political presence in West German discourse for years through their hunger strikes. The core significance of the hunger strike for the continued politicization of the RAF demands an examination of it as a gendered political practice. Both printed and unpublished sources reveal women’s accounts of their hunger strikes as a source of both political subjectivity
and social isolation. Furthermore, the way the practice relates to sexual difference is rooted not simply in the bodies of the actual prisoners but in political customs organized by gender. The question arises as to how a feminist focus on the body redirects assumptions of a liberal, political subjectivity towards a more radical, collective identity produced in the collective hunger strike that uses bodies to insist on a political presence. The challenges that both underground and prison pose to the spatial division of democratic political traditions—the irrelevance they impose on concepts of “public” and “private”—invites a gendered analysis of how the violent actions of the RAF, which forced them out of public sight (first the strategic retreat underground, then the state’s attempt to make them invisible/irrelevant by locking them away), undermine a political gender regime and thus constitute feminist practice.

Gendered Terrorism

The third area of thought that structures this analysis concerns the ways in which women’s participation in political violence discursively genders the meaning of terrorism (i.e., how it constitutes a “violent truth”). As recent feminist scholarship on terrorism shows, studies of women who participate in political violence enhance our understanding of terrorism itself and how it is shaped by the discourse of mass media and the class, race, and gender presumptions behind it. Conversations about terrorism are often inadvertently informed by gender ideologies, and gender as an analytical variable provides important new insights. If women’s experiences in armed groups counter prevalent assumptions, how does their very existence change the course of debates on political violence? How does gender structure the understanding of political violence for the public, for activists, and for the state through media outlets and scientific claims?

Terrorism as a political and social phenomenon is not simply produced by the violent actions of a group of activists. Instead, it is discursively constructed through the terrorizing act, representation and dissemination of knowledge about the act and its perpetrators, expert opinions, the public response, and the political framing of it—all contribute to the phenomenon of “left-wing terrorism” in West Germany.

The media as a forum for public debate, as a mediator of information,
and as an agent of meaning making is central to an analysis of how terrorism is gendered. The RAF’s and other militant activists’ relationship to the media was shaped by the broader counterculture’s criticism of established forms of news media and their attempts at creating “counter public spheres.” Despite its severe critique (and targeting) of corporate media, the RAF used and relied on media representations to relay their actions and to construct the group as a threat to national security. A new understanding of gendered ideologies and the RAF calls for a reevaluation of the particularly gendered way in which the mainstream media has historicized the RAF. This reevaluation includes the responses by movement activists to media representations, as well as consideration of the increased pressure on intellectuals, civil servants, and average citizens to disassociate publicly from the radical Left so as not to become targeted by the state’s investigations, especially after the legislative introduction of §129. It especially includes a critical illumination of the ways in which the media relied on gendered ideologies dominated by the cultural paradox posed by RAF women to make the threat of the RAF intelligible. These representations shaped and echoed people’s general perception of terrorism. An examination of how masculinity and femininity function as central parameters of media coverage of terrorist acts thus counters a “mediated” cultural memory and historicization of the group that has dominated RAF discourses.

Media representations reached a large audience and contributed to a general public debate on women and violence. “Expert” knowledge on women, violence, and violent women, usually reserved for specialized journals and conferences, was disseminated widely into the mainstream debate primarily through the media’s consultation of “terrorism experts”—criminologists, psychologists, law enforcement personnel, sociologists—whose theories as to why terrorist women committed their actions were paraded in news stories on the RAF and in government reports on the group. Understanding how women’s political violence was contained within a sexist framework of linking their crimes with the supposed physicality of female bodies and with essentialized feminine emotionality and irrationality clarifies the at times over-the-top, hysterical discursive construction of the RAF as threat to the nation (not just to its police officers or powerful representatives). Generally, the violent acts of the RAF and other groups seemed exacerbated by women par-
ticipating in them; in the perceived pathological inversion of their gen-
dered nature, they were more masculine than men: “If what we expect of
women is [. . .] gentleness and passivity, then any level of violent activity
looks relatively more extreme than in a man.”\textsuperscript{71} It is therefore important
to consider the role that “experts”—and the truth-effects on gender and
violence they generated—play in Germany’s reading of terrorism.

Pseudoscientific claims that locate female criminal activity in a per-
verted or thwarted corporeality and hormonal/emotional determinism
that needs to be stabilized through firm social roles find their way into
law enforcement analyses of the group, most notoriously in the \textit{Baader-
Meinhof-Report}, a book-length document on the RAF issued by West
Germany’s Federal Criminal Bureau in 1972. The document reproduces
some of the coarsest gender theories in criminology, including the
association of female political crimes with sexuality (lesbianism, promis-
суity, and physical and psychological effects of “the pill”)\textsuperscript{72} and gender
inversion (RAF women as “more masculine and dominant” than their
male counterparts, Andreas Baader as feminine, as an object of desire
for homosexuals, and as “sadly underendowed by nature”).\textsuperscript{73} Recogniz-
ing how various elements of the state (politicians, law enforcement, the
judicial system, and the prison medical and administrative system) gen-
dered terrorism in an essentialized and sexist fashion speaks to the reli-
ance of the social and political system on a gender regime these women
were undermining. A gender analysis also illuminates the differential
responses of the state to terrorism (e.g., counterterrorist measures, ju-
dicial sentencing), as well as strategies employed by political prisoners
(e.g., hunger strikes). The significance the \textit{Feminismusverdacht} (charge/ ac-
cusation of feminism) had in terms of investigative measures taken for
tracking, arresting, and trying members of the RAF points to the dou-
ble violence the women were perpetrating: violence against actual peo-
ple (“true violence”) and violence against the gender regime (“violent
truth”). As Colvin points out, “Like feminists, women terrorists were
under attack as unholy aberrations from an ideal of womanhood.”\textsuperscript{74} The
\textit{Feminismusverdacht} speaks to the fact that the RAF posed a \textit{gendered}
threat to the state and society at large—mainstream ideology permeated
a discourse that couched the RAF as posing a feminized threat (that is,
the dark side of femininity: irrational, destructive, deceitful, and hysteri-
cal), whose violence originated not in masculine honor or heroism but
in fantasies of self-empowerment to a masculine state/society (characterized by rationality, predictability, and just reasoning and as employing justified, because honorable, violence in order to protect its citizens).

Finally, the social and state perception of the RAF as a gendered threat raises the question of the political subjectivity of a “revolutionary.” How are revolutionary theories that influenced the radical Left in West Germany gendered? How did terrorist women relate to the autonomous women’s movement’s and feminist theories on violence? Autobiographies and prison letters give some insight into how some women in armed groups, while not necessarily identifying as feminist “subjects,” were impacted by feminist formulations of resistance and claimed armed struggle to be intimately related to women’s liberation. They also give insight into how others only turned to feminist analyses and theories once they denounced the armed struggle, as if a revolutionary consciousness disallows a feminist consciousness. In all cases, gender (or the disavowal of its relevance for politics) informed how these women came to and experienced armed struggle and encountered it as a gendered phenomenon. Understanding the complex ways in which terrorism is gendered is a necessary step towards analyzing the subversive effect of the RAF women’s violent actions: while they generated a reactionary and conservative backlash in media and much of the public, they also disclosed the continuous inherent sexism permeating German culture and facilitated a push-back—a counterdiscourse that critically challenged the gender regime.

**Debates on Political Violence in the New Left and the Women’s Movement**

The discourse on female political violence as it took place in West Germany was created in a particular historical moment in which leftist activists were debating and utilizing strategies of political violence. The question of violence in West Germany’s Left, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey emphasizes, needs to be localized “within the context of the strategies of action and transformation of the New Left”\(^7\) (also referred to as “the 1968 movement”) that linked it to the movement’s “alternative scheme of order” and to its “method to alter society by subversion.”\(^7\)

The idea that violence can constitute an important element in politics
thus cannot be reduced to the bombs and bullets of the RAF. Instead, as a concept that circulated within various activist scenes in West Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the question of violence proved to be a central component in defining both the need to resist (against state violence, against patriarchal violence, against the threat of military violence and war) and the political means of responding to that need (which were manifold and convey the complexity of the term). This study places debates about political violence that were taking place among leftist activists—in particular extremist positions as they solidified in the formation of the RAF and other militant groups—into conversation with feminist discussions on violence as they were emerging in the West German autonomous women's movement. While the formation of underground armed groups took place parallel to the emerging feminist movement, the separate strands of discourses on violence are rarely analyzed in relation to each other—they are assumed to be fundamentally oppositional. Instead, I argue, more than simply coinciding in terms of temporal occurrence, they signify important divergences from originally shared leftist positions—many of the actors had at one point been politically connected with those who eventually represented opposing views on violence and others found themselves caught in the deepening schism between the Left and the autonomous women's movement. Understanding these strands of discourse illuminates their contribution to the phenomenon of “female terrorists” (and of “terrorist women”) as it was constructed in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s.

The differing theorization of violence within political resistance that took place in armed struggle and the women's movement was definitional for the relationship between the two political formations (and responsible for much of the schism between the two): there existed a tension between the concept of violence as revolutionary (counter)force as it was conceptualized by many in the Left's increasingly radicalized circles, and the gendered theory of violence as male/masculine and patriarchal, put forth by the developing autonomous women's movement, which imagined a countering of this oppressive violence with a female/feminine nonviolent alternative culture. While for both movements the need to resist was produced by existing violence, the origin of that violence and the political means of how to resist it differed. The RAF viewed
violence as produced by an oppressive state and market system and—by extension—a social value system that necessitated a violent self-defense and/or defense of others. Emerging segments of the women’s movement presented violence as originating in masculinity—and thus by extension in actual men and their socially sanctioned behavior as well as a state represented by men. This understanding of violence positioned it as a gendered form of political resistance that was rejected by a feminist sensibility that suspected violent responses to political oppression were simply reproducing masculine destruction. These seemingly irreconcilable theoretical positions were crossed by the lived experiences of armed women as well as challenged openly by feminist militants within the Left. Women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June undermined demarcations between assumed political movements and positions. They make visible important implications for a feminist theory that relies on a binary gender system to conceptualize violence.

The Gewaltdebatte (Debate on Violence) in the West German Left

Somewhere between the terrorism of the RAF and the pacifism of radical feminists lies the complicated relationship of the West German Left to violence as political resistance. Focusing on armed groups like the RAF generally, this study treats political violence as indicating the politically motivated strategic employment of violence by a group against objects and structures (and in certain cases, humans) that in the worldview of the group represent either state or systemic power. The aim of political violence therefore is to destabilize the existing government through strategic attacks and/or moments of resistance, and to direct public attention to issues of perceived injustice. The Gewaltdebatte (debate on violence) within the West German Left, however, as well as a consideration of the political strategies employed by it, reveals the concept of political violence to be less stable and actually quite ambiguous outside the context of armed struggle. Its multidimensional meaning runs through three decades of political activism: it emerges in actions and strategies of the New Left aimed at violating social norms and rules of the 1960s, in the terrorism of the RAF and other armed groups and the increasingly brutal street battles between police and leftist activists, as well as the state repression and surveillance of the 1970s, and
in the confrontational militancy of the radical leftists, referred to as Autonomen, as much as their anti-establishment lifestyle, in the 1980s.

The Gewaltdebatte became a major point of political discussions early on and would remain central. Its significance for the Left originated partly in the spirit of provocation and of challenging conventions that was inherent to the 1960s movements. Violating social and political norms meant resisting a systemic violence, often construed as a legacy of the Nazi past. The German “Gewalt” includes connotations of the English terms for both “violence” and “power,” e.g., the power of the state is called “Staatsgewalt,” and the monopoly of violence that it holds is referred to as “Gewaltmonopol des Staates.” So the term signifies both legalized power to maintain order as well as violent acts against its rightful citizens. The perceived misuse of the state’s power through violence was at the center of the debate about legitimized political violence. As Gilcher-Holey puts it, “This dual characteristic, which the German-language term brings to light, helped to make ‘violence’ a combat term in 1968, used on both sides to scandalize and delegitimize the actions of the respective opponent.”

Borrowing concepts such as the “construction of situations” from International Situationists and civil disobedience from the American civil rights movement, the New Left adopted and transformed the relation of direct action and violence. Contrary to political participation as it had been traditionally measured in its democratic representational forms in industrialized countries after World War II, the 1960s and 1970s introduced forms of political participation that were quickly construed as violence by the mainstream public. Protests, building occupations, boycotts, theatrical staging (and comical ridiculing) of conflict with the authorities, the use of flour and paint bombs, housing squats, petitions, and street barricades gave face to a new generation of activists who differed not only in political content from the “Old Left” but also and especially in their activist strategies that addressed the refusal of the political establishment to consider reforms. Yet even in its most peaceful manifestations, such as sit-ins and strikes, direct action is often perceived as violent by mainstream society because of its violation of political convention. As acts of civil disobedience, direct action activism actually often breaks the law. Its less peaceful forms, such as property destruction, violence against people, sabotage, and blockades, are quickly associated with terrorism. As Gilcher-Holey points out,
The unconventional direct action in the border zone between legality and illegality broke with everyday life, with the normality of things. It violated norms, rules, laws, expectations. It caught the attention of the public and called for a reaction, for taking a position. [...] In many instances police, prosecutors and courts reacted sharply and took to stern repression and legal sanctions, which, as a kind of chain reaction, enhanced the movement’s readiness to apply violence.

This interactional element also becomes visible in the increased debates on violence following instances of police brutality, such as after the 1967 death of Benno Ohnesorg, who was shot by police at a protest, or after violent acts associated with right-wing ideology propagated by mass media, such as in 1968 when popular student movement leader Rudi Dutschke was shot and severely injured by a man who felt inspired by the spiteful hatred against leftist activists published in the tabloid Bild. Police brutality thus both generated feelings of radicalization and spurred actions of self-defense and/or counterviolence in the moment of confrontation.

While police brutality against protesters created situations where activists felt directly threatened, political strategy sessions demanded clarification of the ways in which “violence against objects, which is a primarily symbolic gesture, related to violence against people.” Others thought this to be nothing but a technical distinction. By the 1970s, violence formed an important—albeit contentious—aspect of the radical leftist landscape: “‘Violence,’ without question, was one element of a variety of strategies leftist activists during the 1970s considered [...] whether for self-defense against police or nonstate brutality, [or] as part of a ‘theatrical’ expression of one’s opinion.” For some people, the line was drawn when it came to major destruction of private/state property (such as bombing of buildings) and/or the injuring of people. However, direct-action strategies established countless instances of “grey” zones of political violence that precariously navigated the conceptual lines between provocation and destruction, between generating shock and generating fear, between hurting those in power and terrorizing those who thought differently, between assault and self-defense. These concepts structured the movement’s focus on the ethical distinctions between vi-
violence against objects and violence against persons. As Gilcher-Holtey points out, the strategy of direct action, “which later was adopted by the diverse movements that succeeded the 1968 movement (the alternative, peace, women’s and environmental movements), gradually found its place in the 1970s and 1980s in the political culture of the Federal Republic,” including a changed public perception of what constituted political violence towards more tolerance of direct action. However, those movements also inherited the New Left’s precarious negotiations of what the limits of acceptable violence constituted.

Overall, the majority of leftist activists confined themselves to discussing political violence. At the same time, state violence left its mark on activists’ experiences, impacting more than simply the “extremist” sections of the Left. For example, the intense battles between police and protesters, in particular in the Häuserkämpfe (housing battles) in the urban centers of Berlin, Frankfurt, and Hamburg that lasted into the late 1980s, deeply scarred many activists’ relationship to the state. Police brutality against protesters increased during the 1970s, in part as the state’s reaction to the RAF. This began the cycle of leftist terrorist actions against a state they defined as inherently violent, which in turn provoked more national security measures, including increased surveillance and persistent persecution that defined the “leaden times” of the mid-1970s.

After the passing of the Emergency Laws in 1968 that allowed for the limitation of democratic rights during times of crisis, measures by the state that increased pressure on leftist activists included additions to the criminal code that criminalized leftist activism, especially direct-action strategies and confrontations with the police. These legislative actions (§88, 129, and 130s) effectively limited freedom of speech as well as established the Decree against Radicals (Radikalenerlass, 1972) in order to protect the government from unconstitutional elements that resulted in the expulsion/exclusion of leftist thinkers from public service, including professors. While formulated against unconstitutional elements, in fact the decree targeted leftists while not affecting large numbers of members of right-wing groups employed in the public sector. By the mid-1970s, state and media discourse had succeeded in constructing all leftist activists as violent and as “sympathizers” who all were potential RAF members, making political organizing dangerous and more difficult.
conflict among state, media, and leftist activists, the image of the female terrorist became central in defining the dangers that left-wing terrorism (and implicitly, feminism) posed to German society.

*Death in the Shape of a Young Girl* consists of five chapters; each addresses the three interdisciplinary areas that organize my reading of the material: the relationship of feminist theories to political violence, women’s experiences in revolutionary groups, and the way gender structures responses—public and state—to terrorism. The historical and cultural background provided in each chapter does not serve merely to supplement but to *frame* the gendered analysis. Only when the specific context of the RAF and Movement 2nd June and the context of gendered ideologies in West Germany are established can we appreciate the work feminist theorizing on gender and violence does. The chapters are loosely organized around the chronology of events, beginning with an overview and discussion of political movements and groups and their theories in chapter 1. The seemingly oppositional politics of the RAF and feminism introduced very different models of thinking about resistance and violence; RAF women seem to represent a crossover between those models. The chapter introduces feminist theories (and claims) of nonviolence that—together with mainstream ideologies of gender—throughout the book are troubled by RAF and Movement 2nd June women’s commitment to armed struggle as well as by gendered responses to their actions. Chapters 2 and 3 highlight German terrorist discourse during the “leaden times”. Chapter 2 focuses on the ideology of motherhood as a major contested theme in this study. The cultural background for this is the feminine ideal constituted in a woman’s realm of “Children, Kitchen, Church” that centers around her duties of motherhood. The decision of RAF founders Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof to leave their children to go underground is revisited in this chapter in the context of feminist theories on “maternal ethics.” As it turns out, both mainstream expectations of motherhood and the concept of feminist maternal politics are unable to account for the gendered experiences of Ensslin and Meinhof. The extent to which media structured public debate is the starting point of chapter 3. The emergence of violence against women as a major theme in feminist activism in the mid-1970s thereby forms the backdrop for this chapter, which analyzes movement publications as a discursive space in which main-
stream ideologies of gender are countered with a set of diverse feminist positions on political violence. The chapter investigates an emerging dialogue among feminists, mainstream culture, and radical activists, in which these groups debated how terrorist acts constituted a disruption of both social contract and gender prescriptions. Chapter 4 discusses the years of the RAF hunger strikes, which span fifteen years of RAF activism, with a particular focus on the 1980s. I present an analysis of the RAF hunger strikes in terms of feminist theories on how embodiment relates to political subjectivity. The focus in this chapter is twofold: one is on hunger strikes as signifying a female (or, rather, feminized) political subject position in general inhabited by both women and men (the practice as a feminized trope), the other on women participating in hunger strikes in particular (female political subjectivity in the context of hunger strikes). Ultimately, the gendered dynamics within this political strategy reveal the limitations of the concepts of public/private, autonomy and state control, as they emerged in the state's conflict with RAF prisoners. In chapter 5 I read autobiographies of former female terrorists, as well as a set of unpublished prison letters by a former member of the Movement 2nd June. Their writings about their experiences and beliefs are narrative constructions of political subjectivities in the context of revolutionary violence. The departure point of each text is crucial: some memoirs and letters were written during the actual experiences (which, especially given long prison sentences, could span decades). Others were written in retrospect and/or are related through interviews, i.e., are coauthored. Thus the women’s personal understandings of their political careers are mediated by time, context, and other voices. The time span in which these texts were written ranges from the late 1970s to the 2000s. All texts engage directly with the question of feminist politics and the women’s movement; all create diverging narratives of how their revolutionary subjectivity intersected with or was separate from a feminist consciousness.

Prominent in all chapters is a tension among three discursive agents: voices of the autonomous women’s movement (including feminist theories on political violence), the state and public opinion as representative of those threatened by the RAF and Movement 2nd June, and the women active in armed groups. This tension creates productive nodes of discursive connection that potentially transform the way gender func-
tions as a structuring force. The main goal of this book is to revisit the question of whether political violence can be feminist by redefining what constitutes feminist politics. Instead of searching for the feminist subject executing the true violence of women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June, I explore the effects of their actions—their violent truth—on gender discourse as potential feminist practices. This can only be done in any sustainable way when we recognize that actions take place in certain contexts, and are not universal. Thus they need to be examined situationally (actions as constituting feminist practices) and not from a position of theoretical absolutes (actions are executed by feminist subjects). My hope is that this case study of women in the RAF and Movement 2nd June and the implications for feminist theories it raises will impact the discussion on political violence as it is taking place in gender studies to include less polarized, more complicated understandings of women's relationships to and use of violence as a part of their political choices.