“Vietnam is the Auschwitz of our Generation”

National Socialism, the Holocaust, and the Cold War in the writings of the Red Army Faction, 1968-1977

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 3

I. Postwar Germany, 1968, and the Turn to Violence .................................................................................. 14

  Admitting Defeat: Post-War West Germany and the Nazi Legacy .............................................................. 14

  Youth In Revolt: 1968 and the Student Movement ................................................................................... 20

  From Protest to Resistance: The RAF and 1968 .................................................................................... 25

II. The Nazi Influence: The Relevance of the Nazi period to the RAF ...................................................... 27

III. The Writings of the RAF: Pre-formation and Ideological Foundations, 1960-1969 ............................... 37

  An Introduction to the Writings of the RAF ............................................................................................ 37

  Ulrike Meinhof for konkret ....................................................................................................................... 39

  Correspondence between Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper, 1968-69 ............................................ 62

IV. The Writings of the RAF: Active Years and Incarceration, 1970-1977 .................................................. 70

  Founding Declarations and Pre-May Offensive, June 1970 – April 1972 ................................................. 70

  The May Offensive and Early Incarceration, May 1972 – 1975 .............................................................. 79

  Stammheim and the Last Days, January 1976 – October 1977 ............................................................... 89

    das info and letzte texte von ulrike: Personal writings and correspondences, 1973-1977 ............ 91

Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................... 98

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................................. 102
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Introduction

In November 1968, in response to the West German court’s conviction of four young activists for arson, their close associate Bernward Vesper wrote, “Vietnam is the Auschwitz of our generation.”¹ The defendants in the case, which included future Red Army Faction (Rote Armee Fraktion, RAF) leaders Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, explained in court that they had set fire to two Frankfurt department stores “in protest against people’s indifference to the murder of the Vietnamese.”² This illegal act in protest of a war waged by foreign powers thousands of miles away in Southeast Asia was the first of many for Baader and Ensslin. Vesper’s justification of the crime by invoking the death camp Auschwitz, which had become an unmistakable symbol of the Holocaust after the Auschwitz trials of 1963–65, succinctly describes the attitude of many on the West German radical left in 1968.³ The student activists of the 1960s protest movement had rallied around international causes such as Vietnam, African-American civil rights, and liberation struggles in the Third World,⁴ all while asserting that Germany’s history as a perpetrator of genocide implored them to speak out against worldwide oppression. For some of these activists, determined to combat what they saw as fascism in the American-allied West German government, 1968 was only the beginning of a campaign to incite societal change by any means necessary—including violence.

The twentieth century in German history encompassed a series of ruptures. The destruction of the First and Second World Wars, the indelible impact of the Nazi period and the Holocaust, and the

³ From 1963–1965 in Frankfurt, twenty-two former SS and Nazi officials were charged with crimes connected to their involvement with murders at Auschwitz. The trials were public and brought to light in West Germany many of the details of the Holocaust and Auschwitz in particular, crystallizing the camp as a symbol of the Holocaust for West Germans.
division of the country into East and West are well-known examples of recent German turmoil. Lesser known to American audiences, however, is the period from 1970 to 1977, characterized by the fear of domestic terrorism in West Germany. Embroiled in the ideological struggle of the Cold War, the country faced the threat of communism externally from its neighbor to the east while attempting to normalize relations in the form of Ostpolitik; at the same time, the RAF operated during these years as a terrorist group and communist cell aiming to subvert the West German capitalist establishment from within. The RAF was navigating a society that had recently experienced upheaval during the student movement, culminating in 1968, and that still remained in the shadow of the Nazi period. The RAF and domestic left-wing terrorism posed an unprecedented challenge to the West German democracy, defining much of the political discourse of the 1970s and raising complicated questions about political freedom, justice, civil liberties, and Germany’s past and future.

Made up of radicalized left-wing activists who branched off from the student movement, the RAF formally existed from 1970 to 1998, although the activities of its main members began before the founding date and ended before the date of dissolution. The so-called “first generation” of the group operated until 1977, with subsequent “generations” carrying out smaller and less frequent attacks until 1998. Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, who would become two of the leading personalities of the RAF’s first generation, first met in July 1967 when they threw a smoke bomb into the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin. April 1968 marked the first significant action of the RAF members, when Baader, Ensslin, and others set fire to a department store in Frankfurt, which they claimed was in protest of the Vietnam War. They were arrested and sentenced to three years in prison in October 1968. Ulrike Meinhof, at this time a widely-read columnist for the left-wing newspaper konkret, was becoming more involved with the cause of Baader and Ensslin, who stayed at her house in March 1970 while on

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5 For this section on the history of the RAF, see Willi Winkler’s timeline in Die Geschichte der RAF (Berlin: Rohwohlt, 2007), 519-527; and Klaus Weinheimer, “Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik der Siebzigerjahre. Aspekte einer Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der Inneren Sicherheit.” Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, Vol. 44 (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 2004), 224-229. For a detailed version of these events, see Aust, Baader-Meinhof.
the run. Baader was arrested in April of that year, and his escape from police custody in May, facilitated by Ensslin and Meinhof, became recognized as the official starting point of the RAF as a group.

Following the operation freeing Baader, the RAF members went underground and began planning the so-called “armed struggle” against the West German government modeled on South American guerilla warfare under Che Guevara and Maoist doctrine. After training with Palestinian guerillas in Jordan, the members returned to West Germany, where the situation escalated in the summer of 1971 when more activists and police were killed in stand offs, including RAF member Petra Schelm in Hamburg. In May 1972 the RAF launched the May Offensive, which included an attack on the American military headquarters in Frankfurt under the name “Commando Petra Schelm,” the attempted murder of federal judge Wolfgang Buddenberg, and the bombing of the Springer newspaper office in Hamburg.

During the May Offensive, the police search for RAF members reached a fever pitch and the frequent attacks generated a climate of fear in West Germany. In July 1972, Baader, Holger Meins, Ensslin, and Meinhof were arrested and in 1973 the imprisoned RAF members began a hunger strike to protest prison conditions, such as solitary confinement. On November 9, 1974 Holger Meins died during a hunger strike, spurring public outcry and serving as a catalyst for further mobilization of the group’s members on the outside. In April 1975 the “Commando Holger Meins” took hostages in the German embassy in Stockholm in exchange for the release of the RAF prisoners. The proceedings against the RAF members began in 1975 as well, renewing public interest in the group. Ulrike Meinhof was found dead in her cell on May 9, 1976, having committed suicide by hanging.

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7 The RAF often named the groups that carried out attacks after fallen comrades.
Figure 1: RAF “wanted” poster (c. 1970-72). The heading translates as, “Anarchist Perpetrators of Violence, Baader/Meinhof-Gang.” In the top row, left to right: Ulrike Meinhof, Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Holger Meins, and Jan-Carl Raspe. Brigitte Mohnhaupt, prominent second-generation RAF member, is depicted in the third row, third from the left. Source: German History in Documents and Images, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=2395.
The high point of the drama of RAF terror came in 1977, beginning in April with the murder of federal lawyer Siegfried Buback in Karlsruhe (“Commando Ulrike Meinhof”) and culminating in the “German Autumn” of September-October, 1977. On September 5, RAF members kidnapped entrepreneur and labor representative and former SS-lieutenant Hanns-Martin Schleyer in Cologne and held him for ransom of the release of RAF members. On October 13, members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, aided by German terrorists, hijacked the Lufthansa plane Landshut en route from Mallorca to Frankfurt in support of the RAF prisoners. On October 18, after days of intense media coverage and government deliberation, the plane landed in Mogadishu, Somalia, where a GSG 9 unit—Germany’s elite terrorism response forces—freed the hostages on board. The pilot and all but one of the hijackers were killed. That same night, Baader, Ensslin, and Jan-Carl Raspe were found dead in their cells of an apparent mass suicide; RAF member Irmgard Möller was severely wounded but survived, claiming to this day that her comrades were murdered in Stammheim.\(^8\) Schleyer was found dead the next day in Mühlhausen. With the German Autumn, the most prominent chapter of the RAF came to a close.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the RAF continued to carry out more minor attacks and assassinations, especially aimed at corporate executives and the American military presence in Germany. On April 20, 1998 the RAF formally disbanded with a letter stating, “Today we are ending the project.” During the RAF’s existence, its attacks killed 67 people, injured 230, caused €250 million in damages, and led to the conviction of 517 group members and 914 supporters for involvement with the terrorist operation.\(^9\)

During the 1970s, the actions of the RAF provoked a public discussion in West Germany on the power of the police and the state, the nature of state security and its relationship to civil liberties and political freedom. These issues were particularly salient given the context of the Cold War, which

\(^8\) Varon, *Bringing the War Home*, 198; endnote on 343.
\(^9\) Winkler, *Geschichte der RAF*, 440.
especially put pressure on the West German state to control its domestic situation and contain its own communist threat in the form of the RAF. The history of the RAF continues to intrigue the public internationally and, especially in Germany, the group retains a cultural legacy of almost mythical quality—something that Christopher Hitchens calls “the quasi-sexual charisma of the outlaw.” In the 2008 film The Baader Meinhof Complex, based on Stefan Aust’s book of the same name, some of Germany’s most famous actors played Baader, Ensslin, and Meinhof, ultimately earning an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

Figure 2: Actors in the film Der Baader-Meinhof Komplex (2008), left to right: Moritz Bleibtreu as Baader, Johanna Wokalek as Ensslin, and Martina Gedeck as Meinhof.

In recent years, representation of the RAF in pop culture has spawned discussion and criticism of the group’s “terrorist chic” image, exemplified in art exhibits, books, interviews with former members, and fashion based on the RAF, such as a 2001 shirt that read “Prada Meinhof.” The myth of the RAF is alive and well in Germany, fueled by the compelling story of “six against sixty million” and a glamorized image of vigilantes whose actions centered on murder and the delusion of inciting a revolution.

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14 “Six against sixty million” was coined by Nobel Prize-winning author Heinrich Böll to describe the RAF. Quoted in Varon, Bringing the War Home, 198.
Scholarship on the RAF is often intertwined with a general narrative on the student movement and 1968, and the question of the extent to which the RAF represents the 1968 generation and vice versa is also a somewhat separate—and complicated—question. The body of scholarship on 1968 and the student movement in West Germany is fairly large and encompasses a wide range of topics, including examinations of the generational nature of conflict in German society, the transnational connections between German student groups and international student groups, and the intersection of social and political movements during the Cold War. The scholarship on the student movement in West Germany also makes up only a small part of an even larger field of literature on the “international 1968,” which includes works on the events of that year and the broader student movements in countries from the United States to the Eastern Bloc and everywhere in between. The scope of these works is much larger than the focus of this investigation, with the West German contingent alone offering more fuel for discussion than I can adequately cover here. For this reason, I will only present the major lines of thought pertaining to the RAF specifically in relation to the Nazi period. In doing so, I hope to lay a foundation for my own contribution to this field.

The aim of most scholarship on the RAF has been to understand the motivations and psychology of the leaders of a terrorist group and to postulate some explanation for the emergence of radical violence out of the West German student movement. Stefan Aust’s work on the RAF is considered to be a foundational text, although it is somewhat popularized and not from a scholarly, historical perspective. In two volumes, Wolfgang Kraushaar has compiled an exhaustive collection of German-language articles on many different facets of the RAF and left-wing terrorism in West Germany.

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17 Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof*.
18 Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*. 
Articles in Kraushaar’s collection range from examinations of ideological foundations of philosophy and guerilla warfare, representations of the RAF in media and film, and comparisons with other extremist groups both within Germany and internationally. These themes are reflected in the existing body of RAF scholarship as whole as well; Ulrike Bierlein, for instance, has written on the RAF in film, Jeremy Varon has examined the emergence of the RAF as compared to Weatherman in the United States, and Klaus Weinhauer has commented on the media debates surrounding the RAF. Considering that two of the three most famous RAF members were women, gender is another intriguing lens through which scholars have viewed the history of the RAF, specifically Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann, Sarah Colvin, and Petra Terhoeven. Hanno Balz and others have written regarding the relationship between the state and the RAF, looking at both the acts of terrorism and the response by authorities. Most of these works have analyzed the phenomenon of left-wing terrorism in Germany in a social context, seeking to explain the actions of the RAF and the responses of authorities from different angles.

As I will discuss in depth later on, scholars have also contextualized the actions of the RAF in relation to the historical position of West German society, especially in relation to the Second World War, the rule of the Nazi Party (1933-1945), and the Holocaust. These events were catastrophic for Europe, severely damaging the collective German psyche in the post-war years, and their magnitude suggests that the German experience with National Socialism had to, in some way, influence the student

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22 Ulrike Bierlein, “Suicide? – Action!”: Die Darstellung der Roten Armee Fraktion (RAF) im Spielfilm (Marburg: Tectum, 2010); Jeremy Varon, Bringing the War Home; Klaus Weinhaber, Terrorismus in der Bundesrepublik: Medien, Staat und Subkulturen in den 1970er Jahren (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006).
activists of the 1960s and 1970s and the members RAF. This historical analysis of the RAF in relation to the Nazi period, along with the position of the RAF as a successor to the 1968 movement in some ways, will form the basis of the secondary works I employ here.

In this paper, I seek not to prove that the Nazi period was or was not a motivation for the RAF’s actions, but rather, I seek to clarify the nature of the RAF’s relationship with German history. As evidenced by the writings of the RAF, which will serve as the most important sources for this work, the relationship of the RAF to the Nazi period is complicated and not always clear or consistent. The RAF’s ideology itself was a muddled mix of Marxism-Leninism, Maoism, anarchism, and urban guerilla warfare; the group did not advance nearly any positive doctrine or proposal for what the West German government should be, only what it should not be. The sources I will examine include published works directed at public audiences, such as Ulrike Meinhof’s columns for konkret and official RAF declarations. These works show the image the RAF wished to portray: theoretical, action-oriented, and reasonably well-organized. I will also analyze personal letters and communications, both before the main members’ incarceration and during the time they were in Stammheim prison. These documents are generally consistent with the published works in doctrine, but they are rambling, disorganized, and tend to show more weakness within the group rather than a united front. Throughout all of these sources, the members of the RAF continually reference German history, fascism, Nazism, and what they believe are the modern parallels to those events.

Like the statement from Vesper comparing Vietnam to Auschwitz, the public and private discourse of the RAF reflected a sense of connection to Nazi history and a connection to the international political events of their contemporary era. It is clear from the primary sources that the members of the RAF viewed their nation’s history through the framework of Cold War German and international politics. Outside of this context, the RAF’s mission and its use of the Nazi legacy to support it would have been nearly irrelevant: an armed struggle aimed at crippling the capitalist system needed
the fear of communism in West Germany to feed its purpose and its image as the resistance. While the legacy of the Nazi period and the Holocaust in German society should not be underestimated, it should also not be held up as the singular event that determined the course of the rest of the twentieth century in Germany. West Germany’s position in the Cold War—including the divided country, American influence, the threat of nuclear war, and the extreme fear of communism—defined the paradigm through which the RAF members and their contemporaries viewed the past and the future.

I will argue that the German experience of National Socialism was a major influence on the RAF, but only in as far as it represented a historical example that foreshadowed the events of their own era. They perceived the Nazi period as important because it seemed to be a precedent to the Cold War struggle, and to the RAF’s own struggle, but the RAF members do not seem to have related to the Nazi period in its own, distinct right. Instead of viewing Nazi crimes with the intent to memorialize the victims and absolve German guilt, the writings of the RAF indicate that the group saw these events as one piece of the larger international struggle of the proletariat, which continued into their contemporary period in the form of political repression in the West and in the Third World. To the RAF, the West German government was acting in the same way as its totalitarian political predecessor by persecuting communists and colluding with other imperialist powers. This time, it was in the context of the Cold War, but both the Nazi regime and the West German government were always a part of the larger Marxist historical struggle against the power of the capital-rich ruling class. The historical continuity the RAF members saw between the Nazi period and their own government during the Cold War suggests that, while the RAF certainly had an intensified view of the Nazi period after growing up in post-war Germany, their view was rooted more in the present than in the past and had value perhaps only due to its perceived contemporary relevance as a point of political comparison.

I will make my argument for the importance of the Cold War context in understanding the RAF’s relation to the Nazi period in four chapters. The first chapter will provide a historical background, briefly
providing an overview of the post-war years in Germany including the prevailing views on the Nazi period during the 1950s and early 1960s, an introduction to the events of the West German student movement, and the transition to radicalism with the formation of terrorist groups such as the RAF. In the second chapter, I will discuss scholarship on the RAF that specifically relates to its relationship to the Nazi period, creating a backdrop for my own contribution to the field. The third chapter contains the first primary source analysis, which is a close reading of the early writings of RAF members, before the group’s formation (1960-1969). These texts provide insights to the individuals who formed the RAF, specifically Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin, and their ideological backgrounds that would contribute to the group’s doctrine. The fourth chapter will examine the texts of the RAF after the group’s formation and during the members’ incarceration (1970-1977), including the official statements of the RAF as well as the personal communications between members in prison.
I. Postwar Germany, 1968, and the Turn to Violence

Admitting Defeat: Post-War West Germany and the Nazi legacy

The starting date of this paper, 1968, comes twenty-three years after the end of the Second World War. Understanding the consequences of that turning point in German history, however, and the struggles that ensued after 1945 is crucial to understanding the atmosphere in which the student movement and later, its extremist extension in the RAF, emerged. The experiences of the post-war years shaped the political outlook of West German left-wing activists and, indeed, of the entirety of West German society in one way or another.

On May 8, 1945 the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany went into effect and ended the Second World War in Europe. As a condition of the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, the allied victors of the United States, France, Britain, and the Soviet Union divided Germany into zones of occupation. The Soviet Union controlled territories in the East, while the West was divided between American, French, and British control. Germany was also forced to relinquish all territories east of the Oder-Neisse line, which forms the present-day border between Germany and Poland; most notably, the states of Pomerania and Silesia were ceded to Poland. Other sanctions leveled at Potsdam included war reparations to the Soviet Union, demilitarization, and a cap on the German standard of living—although this last condition became irrelevant after the 1948 inception of the Marshall Plan to assist Europe economically. On November 20, 1945 the Nuremberg Trials began, in which the Allies tried Nazi war criminals in a military tribunal, convicting and sentencing many of the surviving orchestrators of Nazi terror to death or imprisonment. In 1949 the Allied occupation of Germany gave way to two new German states: the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), a capitalist, liberal democracy, and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), a Socialist dictatorship that was independent but

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25 See Figure 3.
heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. Because of this physical and ideological division, Germany would soon become a Cold War battlefield in the center of Europe.

As both halves of Germany trudged through the tumultuous latter half of the 1940s and into the 1950s, the difficulties of confronting the historical truths about German crimes and experiences during the war became apparent. The attitudes of West Germans towards Nazi crimes in the immediate post-war years were varied and complex and cannot easily be generalized, but trying to understand the ways West Germans in the 1950s and 1960s thought about the Nazi period is an important basis for understanding the conflicts in German society that came later. I will give a general picture while keeping in mind that this overview brings together a myriad of different voices, opinions, and experiences of Germans during and after the war.
The early analyses of the West German response to the Nazi period converged into a general opinion that the Germans generally avoided talking about the war years, the experience of National Socialism, and the Holocaust. Later scholarship that has examined both public and private discourse in the late 1940s and 1950s has shed new light on whether Germans talked about the issues of the Nazi period and what they said when they did. In 1959 German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno quoted Goethe’s *Faust* in reference to the overall opinion of the Nazi period, saying, “And it’s as good as if it never happened.” This sentiment embodies the silence and apathy that Adorno saw in his fellow Germans, leading him to criticize them for remaining silent about Nazi crimes in the post-war years. Adorno, who later became a leading philosophical figure to student activists during the 1960s, laments that Germans minimized Nazi crimes, talked “as if Dresden made up for Auschwitz,” and operated with the “fixated attitude of those who don’t want to hear or know anything.” Adorno argues that West Germans’ failure to address their responsibility for the causes of the Nazi period and the Holocaust left intact those very causes, proclaiming, “We will not have come to terms with the past until the causes of what happened then are no longer active.”

In *The Inability to Mourn* (1967), a Freudian psychoanalytical examination of German memory of the Holocaust, psychiatrists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich wrote: “We Germans, as a group, do not understand either ourselves or our own actions during this most terrible chapter of our history.” The Mitscherlichs argue that “critical examination of the period of the Third Reich” had “thus far been so inadequate,” and that despite experts’ reflection on the subject, “so little of that knowledge [had] as yet seeped into the political consciousness of the general public.” Their analysis concludes that for Germans, Hitler represented the “collective ego-ideal,” which allowed them to play out their personal

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27 Adorno, “Coming to Terms with the Past,” 116-117.
28 Adorno, “Coming to Terms with the Past,” 129.
“fantasies of omnipotence,” but also left Germans unable to mourn the loss of the Führer due to their emotional investment in his success.  

According to the Mitscherlichs, instead of dealing with the loss of Hitler and the Nazi regime, Germans chose instead to pretend the Nazi period and the Holocaust had not happened. Like Adorno, the Mitscherlichs argued that the Germans had collectively chosen to ignore or forget the realities of the Nazi period and the political and moral implications that came with remembering this history.

Historian Jeffrey Herf has analyzed the political causes and effects of remembering the Nazi period and the Holocaust in East and West Germany. Herf argues that in West Germany, where building a democratic society was the primary concern of politicians and early leaders, the prevailing opinions of parts of the West German electorate precluded discourse about the murder of the Jews. In short, Herf writes, “The lesson was that one could speak openly about the Nazi past or win national elections, but not both...silence won votes.” According to polling data from the Office of the Military Government, United States, Herf shows that in 1945-1947, “between 47 and 55 percent of [West] Germans thought that National Socialism had been a good idea badly carried out.” Herf points to the Nuremberg Trials (1945-46) as a turning point in discourse about the Nazi period, shifting blame onto individuals and their choices and away from the German people as a whole. “In the 1950s,” Herf summarizes, “memory of the Holocaust, restitution to Jewish survivors, and timely justice were peripheral issues in an era dominated by the Cold War.” Herf’s arguments show that while there was not complete silence about German accountability for Nazi crimes, the extent to which West Germans confronted the Holocaust was mitigated by the primary goal of forming a successful democratic government. Political pressures, both domestically and internationally, Herf argues, made recognition of

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33 Heft, *Divided Memory*, 203.
34 Herf, *Divided Memory*, 205.
35 Herf, *Divided Memory*, 208.
36 Herf, *Divided Memory*, 387.
German guilt and full atonement for the murder of the Jews less than a priority, with attempts to confront the past remaining incomplete during the 1950s.

Robert Moeller, one of the foremost experts on the post-war period in West Germany, challenges the idea that Germans were silent about the war years after 1945. He argues instead that West Germans talked about war experiences in terms of German victims instead of the victims of the Germans, meaning they did talk about something; Moeller writes, “remembering selectively was not the same as forgetting.” Moeller contends that West German discussions in the 1950s focused mainly on two groups of wartime victims: German prisoners of war held by the Soviets and ethnic Germans who were expelled from Eastern territories. The German expellees were a group of around twelve million ethnic Germans living in Eastern Europe, in some cases for hundreds of years, who were deported by Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Yugoslavia at the end of the war. Many of the expellees were sent to internment or forced labor camps and hundreds of thousands died there or in transport. The story of the expellees and the POWs became the story of all Germans.

While West Germans certainly acknowledged the Jews as victims of Nazi atrocities, the narrative of Jewish suffering and victimhood was much less salient to the German population; Germans could not relate to the experience of the Jews during the war and thus had little use for this story as a wartime narrative. Instead, talking about German victimhood allowed for a discussion of National Socialism without taking responsibility for its crimes, and West Germans could claim a status as “heroic survivors” rather than as collectively guilty perpetrators. In a condition that Moeller compares to a continuation of the Volksgemeinschaft idea—the “People’s Community” of Nazi ideology that included ethnic Germans and excluded others, such as Jews—non-German victims were excluded from the German

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38 Moeller, 16.
39 Moeller, 3.
narrative of wartime suffering.\textsuperscript{40} In Moeller’s view, West Germans discussed only that which seemed relevant to their own national victims, a group which left out the Jews and other victims of German aggression.

Dorothee Wierling agrees that there was no silence in the 1950s, drawing a distinction between public and private stories about the war years. In public discourse there was a “ritualized renunciation of Nazi ideology,” but in private, narratives focused on the experiences of German soldiers and their wives at home rather than on the crimes committed by the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{41} As public fervor built around the success of the West German \textit{Wirtschaftswunder}—economic miracle—the opportunity for a critical reflection on National Socialism was pushed even further out of the picture.\textsuperscript{42} Wierling identifies a common “family narrative” that was repeated by Germans in an attempt to explain a family’s activities during the Nazi period: the 1930s were good times, family members were manipulated by Hitler and the Nazi Party, and resistance had not been possible under the authoritarian regime.\textsuperscript{43} This narrative reflects an overall trend that Wierling sees in the 1950s of shifting blame to the Nazi elites and recognizing Jewish victims while claiming that crimes were committed “by Nazis ‘in the name of Germans,’” but not by Germans.\textsuperscript{44} Wierling argues that in the wake of West German prosperity in the 1950s, the hardships of the war years were no longer close to home, making the family narrative seem less and less credible to younger generations; in East Germany, however, the myth persisted longer as economic troubles still plagued the GDR.\textsuperscript{45} Wierling argues that the erosion of the family narrative in West Germany led to the breakthrough of the 1960s, when the younger generation challenged their parents, demanding answers to the difficult, personal questions about the Nazi period and the Holocaust.

\textsuperscript{40} Moeller, 7.
\textsuperscript{42} Wierling, 105-6.
\textsuperscript{43} Wierling, 107.
\textsuperscript{44} Wierling, 105.
\textsuperscript{45} Wierling, 107.
Youth in Revolt: 1968 and the Student Movement

The year 1968 has become international shorthand symbolizing a worldwide culmination of tensions between the younger population and the older generation in power that persisted through the 1960s and into the 1970s. Not all historians, however, agree with the generational analysis of these events and historical analysis on the subject in some ways differs greatly from the common memory of 1968. Protesters, in some cases students, created civil and political unrest in the United States, France, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Mexico, Scandinavia, the Czech Republic, Spain, Greece, and elsewhere as well. Although the Chinese situation differs from those in the Western world and the Communist bloc in Europe, Jeremi Suri even includes the Cultural Revolution in China under Mao Tse-Tung in the notion of a “global 1968.” Either way, however, 1968 symbolizes the entirety of the “long 60s”—Klimke and Scharloth date this 1956-1977—which signaled a major social shift for the younger generation in many societies around the world in response to a variety of international and local, specific issues.

In West Germany, while international issues were certainly part of the student platform, most agree that Germany’s very recent history of National Socialism gave the West German student movement unique characteristics, even compared to other post-fascist countries such as Italy and Japan. Wolfgang Kraushaar names “industrialized mass annihilation implemented by the state” as the decisive difference that set Germany apart from other former authoritarian countries. While the extent to which Nazi history influenced the protest movement generation is in debate, as will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter, it is clear that West German students were operating in the wake of a history unlike any other in Europe or the rest of the world at that time.

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46 See: Cornils and Waters, Memories of 1968; von der Goltz, Talkin’ ‘bout my generation; Klimke and Scharloth, 1968 in Europe; Klimke, The Other Alliance; Suri, Power and Protest.
47 Suri, Power and Protest.
48 Klimke and Scharloth, 1968 in Europe.
On December 18, 1964, Congolese president Moise Tshombe arrived in West Berlin, where hundreds of German demonstrators greeted him at the airport to protest crimes Tshombe committed in his home country.\textsuperscript{50} From this point onward, politically charged protests by university students continued, especially in West Berlin; as student leader Rudi Dutschke later noted, this was the first time students had actively broken rules and even laws at a demonstration.\textsuperscript{51} On July 1, 1965—a date later referred to as Aktion 1. Juli—students at the University of Freiburg gathered in the largest protests for university reforms of the 1960s in West Germany. The students demanded more participation in the governing of their schools to “clean house,” that is, rid the universities of professors and administrators who had occupied positions of power during the Nazi period. Students at a 1967 protest in Hamburg held a banner that became an icon of the German student movement, bearing the phrase “Unter den Talaren, Muff von 1000 Jahren”—“Under the academic gowns, the mustiness of 1000 years,” referencing both the old-fashioned university system and the “thousand-year Reich” of Hitler’s rhetoric.\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.jpg}
\caption{Student protest in Hamburg, 1967. Source – Norddeutscher Rundfunk, \url{http://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/sendungen/hitlisten_des_nordens/hitlisten303_item-20322_liste-55.html}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{50} For an excellent chronology of European protest movements including West Germany, see the online teaching/research resource of Klimke and Scharloth’s volume: \url{http://www.1968ineurope.com}. Most dates and statistics in this section taken from this resource.

\textsuperscript{51} Klimke, The Other Alliance, 57.

The student group that led the so-called “APO” or Extraparliamentary Opposition was the Socialist German Student Union, or SDS. This external group formed in response to a parliamentary grand coalition of the traditionally opposed Social Democrats (SPD) and the Christian Democrats (CDU), which eliminated the opportunity for dissent within the parliament. The SDS was founded in 1946 in Hamburg as the student branch of the SPD, though this relationship did not last into the 1960s after the SDS declared itself as belonging to the “New Left” of Europe, causing the SPD to break off the relationship. The SDS maintained contact with its identically named American counterpart and served as the main representative of German student concerns during the events of 1968.

The overall West German political relationship with the United States was a major pressure point for the student movement, especially with regards to the war in Vietnam. As the former subject of American occupation, West Germany remained a close ally of the United States. West German students saw their government as supporting U.S. actions in Vietnam as a political ally, which they found objectionable. As a result of this international political concern, the protests that started internally to address local issues and university reforms grew as students became more and more politically active. In May 1966, 2,500 protestors led an anti-war march through Berlin during which demonstrators threw eggs at the Amerikahaus—an American cultural institution. Demonstrations against West German support for the Vietnam War continued throughout the decade. The next month, in June 1966, students and teachers staged a sit-in of 3,000 protestors, led by Rudi Dutschke, at the Free University in Berlin. American Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited Berlin in April 1967 and was met by large anti-American demonstrations. Eleven members of the radical student group Kommune 1 were arrested and accused of planning to assassinate the Vice President; in reality they planned to throw pudding at him. A leaflet by the group read:

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53 Außerparlamentarische Opposition.
54 Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund.
55 Klimke, The Other Alliance, 14.
56 On the relationship between the German and American SDS groups, see Klimke, The Other Alliance.
Hitherto, the Yankees have been dying for Berlin in Vietnam. We were sorry to see the poor souls obliged to shed their Coca-Cola blood in the Vietnamese jungle. So we started by marching through empty streets with placards, throwing the occasional egg at America House, and we would have liked to finish by seeing HHH (Hubert Horatio Humphreys) die smothered in pudding.57

This statement, albeit polemical and sarcastic, shows the connections the protestors saw between American politics, the Vietnam War, and the position of West Berlin within the Cold War framework of Europe. They saw the tensions between capitalism and communism in Europe, symbolized by Berlin, as being directly connected to American action in Vietnam through a larger Western concern for containing the spread of communism in all parts of the world. In their view, American soldiers were “dying for Berlin in Vietnam” because the Cold War struggle in Vietnam mimicked the situation in Berlin as an American attempt to maintain capitalist rule and control in places threatened by communism.

As student protest actions intensified, the police responses to demonstrations intensified as well and on occasion, turned violent. On June 2, 1967 large protests were staged throughout West Germany to denounce the visiting Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Three to six thousand people gathered in Berlin, and amid the chaos of protestors clashing with police, Officer Karl-Heinz Kurras shot and killed 26-year-old Benno Ohnesorg.58 This tragedy marked the turning point of the West German protest movement, from a series of mostly peaceful demonstrations to full-blown mass unrest with a far more radical tone. In the days following the shooting, demonstrations broke out all over West Germany at nearly every university calling for an end to police violence; in Hamburg the protests led to more backlash from police. In all, around 100,000 students took part in such demonstrations, including 10,000 who marched in Ohnesorg’s funeral on June 9. Events in this vein—protesting the police, the Vietnam

57 Quoted in Aust, Baader-Meinhof, 21.
58 In 2009, researchers uncovered evidence that Officer Kurras was in fact an agent of the East German Secret Police (Stasi) and a member of the East German Communist Party at the time that he shot Ohnesorg. This revelation reverberated through Germany and raised questions as to whether the shooting was a deliberate act by the GDR to destabilize West Germany. As Nicholas Kulish writes, “It is as if the shooting deaths of four students at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard had been committed by an undercover K.G.B. officer.” See Nicholas Kulish, “Spy Fired Shot that Changed West Germany,” New York Times (26 May 2009) Accessed 3 Feb. 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/27/world/europe/27germany.html; “Police Covered Up Truth Behind Infamous Student Shooting,” Spiegel (23 Jan. 2012) Accessed 17 Feb. 2012. http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,810877,00.html.
War, and generally the West German state and university systems—continued throughout 1967. Similar protests occurred all over the world protesting the war and other issues.

Into 1968, protest actions at universities continued to become more radical and violent. In February an anti-war demonstration in Frankfurt devolved into a riot and an attempted attack on the American consulate. Violence targeting newspapers such as the *Berliner Morgenpost* and American offices ensued, as did SDS protests at many American-affiliated events throughout West Germany, where a staunch police presence ended frequently in fights and general chaos. In mid-February the International Vietnam Congress convened in West Berlin, and both anti-war protests and pro-American counter-protests accompanied the Congress. In March, department stores in Frankfurt were burned down (discussed further below). On April 11, 1968 a young right-wing extremist named Josef Bachmann shot student movement icon Rudi Dutschke in West Berlin. Following the shooting, massive unrest including riots broke out all over West Germany once again.

In May 1968 protests began in opposition to the proposed German Emergency Acts, which would give the government the power to limit some constitutional rights in case of national emergency. Criticism of the “emergency laws” stemmed back to the early 1960s, when it was a defining issue of the APO at its founding, spurring memories of the “rule by decree” that took place towards the end of the Weimar period (1919-1933) and allowed the Nazis to take power. The passage of these laws on May 30 led to widespread riots, protests, and strikes at German universities, continuing throughout the summer and intensifying with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, which crushed the reforms of the so-called “Prague Spring.” Throughout the year and into 1969 the movement continued until the students and others on the Left became divided over issues such as whether the use of violence was justified, among others. The SDS lost support and gradually the long year of “1968” came to a close in most of West Germany.

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59 Dutschke survived three bullets to the head, but his injuries were severe and eventually caused his death in 1979.
From Protest to Resistance: The RAF and 1968

For some, however, the resistance had just begun. The spirit of revolt of 1968 spawned extreme factions whose members began as participants in the overall student democracy and anti-war movement, but soon took protest to another level as the mainstream of the movement dissolved.\(^{60}\) The student movement already had radical factions, such as *Subversive Aktion* (Subversive Action) and *Kommune 1* (Commune 1), which was founded by radical activist Dieter Kunzelmann. Kunzelmann later served as the head of the Tupamaros West-Berlin, a terrorist group whose most infamous attack was the attempted bombing of a Jewish Community Center in West Berlin on November 9, 1969—the anniversary of “Kristallnacht,” the night of Nazi terror against Jewish businesses in 1938.\(^{61}\) The successor group of the Tupamaros was the extremist group *Bewegung 2. Juni* (Movement 2 June), named after the date of Benno Ohnesorg’s death; *Bewegung 2. Juni* committed small-scale attacks and kidnappings from 1971-1980. The terrorist group *Revolutionäre Zelle* (Revolutionary Cells, RZ) gained some notoriety in 1976 when two members hijacked an Air France flight that landed in Entebbe, Uganda. By far the most well-known extremist group to come out of 1968 in West Germany, however, was the RAF.

Before the formation of the RAF, all of its key members of the first generation were involved with the left-wing activism of the student movement.\(^{62}\) Ulrike Meinhof had been a prominent figure on the West German left, writing for the magazine *konkret* from the early 1960s onward and supporting the student movement both through her work as a journalist and her own activism. Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin were both in Berlin during the summer of 1967, when the fervor surrounding shooting of Benno Ohnesorg erupted and galvanized the student movement in the city. Baader and Ensslin’s 1968

\(^{60}\) For a summary of terrorism after 1968 in West Germany and Italy, see Dorothea Hauser, “Terrorism” in *1968 in Europe*, 269-280.

\(^{61}\) The Tupamaros West-Berlin took their name from the Uruguayan Tupamaros, an urban guerrilla National Liberation Movement supported by the Soviet Union. For more on the Tupamaros West-Berlin and this incident, see Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005).

arson in Frankfurt “signaled a new level of militancy” in the protest movement, employing large-scale destruction of property, which was previously absent from student activism. Meinhof became involved in Baader and Ensslin’s cause during the arson trial, visiting them in prison for interviews and publishing a column entitled “Setting Fire to Department Stores,” in which she questioned the effectiveness of the attack but praised the idea of breaking laws to send a message. After the defendants’ appeal was denied, Baader and Ensslin did not turn themselves in to serve their sentence, but instead were on the run, staying with Meinhof for some time. Meinhof, who had become increasingly radicalized herself, became entangled in the plan to free Baader from custody after his arrest. After the botched operation nearly killed a bystander, Meinhof was a wanted criminal and went underground with Ensslin, Baader, and others, forming the RAF—a group still committed to the revolutionary spirit of the student movement, but willing to use force to bring about change. The RAF came into being as a group of activists who unexpectedly became outlaws together, forced to continue their actions in the dangerous and more extreme environment of the underground.

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63 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 42.
64 Ulrike Meinhof, “Setting Fire to Department Stores,” in Everybody Talks About the Weather...We don’t, Karin Bauer, ed. (New York: Seven Stories, 2008) 244-248.
65 For Meinhof’s declaration on her shift to radicalism, see Meinhof, “From Protest to Resistance,” in Everybody Talks About the Weather, 239-243.
II. The Nazi Influence: The Relevance of the Nazi period to the RAF

The catastrophic nature of the Nazi period, the Holocaust, and the Second World War meant that in the 1960s, the wounds to German society were too fresh and too gruesome for student activists not to be affected by them in some way. The exact nature of the relationship between the generation of 1968 and the Nazi period, however, is a widely debated topic among German historians of this time period. The question that drives most scholars in this area is, to what extent and in what way did Germany’s recent history influence the left-wing activists of the 1960s and 1970s? The answers to this question vary greatly, are often complex, nuanced, sometimes contradictory, and probably will never be completely settled in the historical record. By examining this question, however, scholars are able to draw closer to the heart of the process by which West German student activists made meaning out of their country’s past and the influences that pushed them to pursue change in their society.

The most common and most often quoted belief about 1968 in West Germany and the RAF is that these events were some form of rebellion against the previous generation, demanding accountability for the horrors of the Holocaust and the Nazi period. This view is constantly being tested and challenged by historians of the period, but the idea remains an influential one if only for its ubiquity. Even for some who dig deeper into the motivations for revolt, this idea of retribution against the parents underlies their hypotheses. For instance Stefan Aust, journalist and author of what many consider a definitive account of the RAF, portrays the group in an often negative light and expresses cynicism about the group’s claim to represent an antifascist resistance. He writes, however, that “[l]ike many of their generation, they had lined up to oppose the old style and what they thought was the new style, of fascism.”66 This gets at the RAF’s motivations, even though Aust claims that the terrorists “ended up as guilty as many of their parents’ generation.”67 Christian Schneider, by no means justifying the violence, alleges that “[f]or people like Ulrike Meinhof, the crimes of the parents’ generation were a

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66 Aust, Baader-Meinhof, xix.
67 Aust, xix.
permanent impetus for the political-moral appeal” to a call to action.\textsuperscript{68} Schneider postulates three core complexes that he applies to the post-war generation, which includes the members of the RAF: the silence of their parents on the issue of the Nazi past meant that a central piece of their personal family history was held back; they held “[t]he suspicion that something of the murderous legacy of National Socialism had penetrated” their own being; and they perceived “a strange coldness” from their parents’ generation, feeling that some hostility was directed at them personally.\textsuperscript{69} Whether or not these complexes existed or applied to an entire generation, Schneider clearly argues within the context of a generational approach, directly tying the RAF to the idea of rebellion against the “Nazi generation” as a backdrop for political action.

In 1977, Jillian Becker published \textit{Hitler’s Children: The Story of the Baader-Meinhof Terrorist Gang}, putting forth an argument as provocative as the book’s title. In fact, the book was initially published in English with this title, but the publishing company Fischer Verlag added a question mark to the title of the German version so as not to offend readers (\textit{Hitlers Kinder? Der Baader-Meinhof-Terrorismus}).\textsuperscript{70} Becker writes a general history of the RAF and the events leading up to the German Autumn of 1977, but in doing so she argues that the RAF represented a continuation of certain Nazi ideologies, including anti-Semitism and political terror. By highlighting the anti-Semitic and totalitarian elements of the RAF’s actions and ideology, Becker advanced a different, albeit sensationalist, view of the RAF. In Becker’s view, the group was not rebelling against the Nazi generation, but rather continuing their extremist practices in the name of a different cause, retaining crucial elements of the Nazi movement in their attacks.

Becker’s position came into German public discourse about the RAF in the 1980s, and while her contribution is significant, several authors challenge or flat-out reject her assertion that the RAF took up

\textsuperscript{69} Schneider, 1333.
\textsuperscript{70} Wolfgang Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?” in Cornils and Waters.
the mantle of the Nazis after the war. In response to Becker, political essayist Walter Boehlich wrote that the RAF members were actually “Schleyer’s children”: they were reacting to a society in which former Nazis such as Hanns-Martin Schleyer remained in power.\(^{71}\) Agreeing with Boehlich’s position, contemporary German scholar Sarah Colvin likens Becker’s argument to the RAF’s own rhetoric, writing:

> Boehlich was right: the RAF was not, in fact, a Nazi organization. To reduce it to that was an act of self-distancing on the left that replicated the group’s own black-and-white, ‘us and them’ thinking. It was a form of complicity in the RAF’s own fantasy of war.\(^{72}\)

Andreas Musolff also responds directly to Becker, noting the omnipresent narrative of the family in German historical discourse about this period; Musolff points to the general notion of ideological followers as “so-and-so’s children” and the idea of multiple “generations” of the RAF; Musolff notes that the terrorists were branded as the “children” of liberal figures such as Che Guevara and John F. Kennedy.\(^{73}\) In addition, the core members of the RAF are often referred to as the first, second, and third “generations.” While Musolff acknowledges that some members of the 68 generation were literally the children of the “Hitler” generation, he also cautions that the “implied ethical assessment” inherent in Becker’s accusation is “ambiguous,” implying that children were either “in revolt against the perpetrator parents or inheriting/carrying forward their legacy,” depending on the point of view.\(^{74}\) Musolff does, however, remind us of the murkiness of the RAF’s role in relation to the Nazi period, citing its members’ continual references to the Holocaust, Auschwitz, a narrative of victims, perpetrators and resistance, and the underlying and sometimes overt anti-Semitism that often emerged along with pro-Palestinian/anti-Israel sentiment. Hanno Balz also picks up on the familial discourse about the student movement, positing that in a way, the “false fathers” of the Nazi generation were replaced by the “real

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\(^{71}\) Originally published in *konkret*, cited in Sarah Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2009), 127. Unable to locate the original text.

\(^{72}\) Colvin, 128.

\(^{73}\) Andreas Musolff, “Hitler’s Children Revisited: West German Terrorism and the Problem of Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 23 (1), http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2010.505457, 61.

\(^{74}\) Musolff, 61-62.
fathers” such as Herbert Marcuse and Mao, who became “political mentors” to the 68 generation. In response to Becker, Balz argues that the “Hitler’s Children” argument is based on the circular logic that “the ‘terrorists’ are Nazis because the Nazis were a ‘terrorist group.’” Balz notes that this type of argument was also present in the German press at the time Becker wrote and while not usually argued completely to its logical conclusions, such metaphors were meant to show the severity of the RAF’s actions by means of invoking Nazi violence.

In his controversial 2008 book *Unser Kampf* (Our Struggle), clearly alluding to Hitler’s manifesto *Mein Kampf* with the title, historian of Nazi Germany and former radical ’68 activist Götz Aly advances, similar to Becker, that the student activists and their movement shared traits of the Nazi youth movement, especially in that they were both totalitarian in nature. In response, Wolfgang Kraushaar, another former activist and accomplished scholar of the RAF, takes aim at Aly and Becker’s “Hitler’s children” arguments. Kraushaar criticizes Aly’s approach of extending Becker’s argument, which applied only to the RAF, to the entire generation of 1968. All student activists, rather than only the members of 1968’s most radical offshoot, were now labeled as successors to the Nazis. He highlights the argument of critics, however, who claim that Becker’s approach was still much too simplistic and that it “reduced complex developments to a question of family psychology.” Kraushaar points out many factual and logical fallacies in Aly’s work, ultimately concluding that his classification of 1968 as an extension of 1933 is unfounded and sweeping in its generalizations. Kraushaar asserts that the “media hype” surrounding Aly’s sensationalist work has pushed scholars even further from finding an answer to the question of the 1968 movement’s relationship to the Nazi past.

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75 Hanno Balz, 235.
76 Balz, 249.
78 Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?”
79 Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?,” 96; 83.
80 Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?,” 85.
Though not a professional historian, journalist Hans Kundnani presents a thought-provoking picture of the 1968 generation’s complex ties to the Nazi period in his book *Utopia or Auschwitz*. Kundnani examines some of the problems and contradictions of radical activism, including that the RAF and others became dangerously close to replicating elements of the fascist state it claimed to resist. Specifically, Kundnani points to the “Führer-cult” surrounding Andreas Baader, the executions, and the “Hitler’s bunker” feel of the group’s last days in Stammheim, fighting to the end in the face of imminent defeat. Kundnani argues that while this is where the initial spirit of 1968 ended up, the student activists originally “felt compelled to act to save Germany from itself,” seeing a genuinely terrifying “all-or-nothing choice” between “Utopia or Auschwitz.” In Kundnani’s view, “[t]he idea that the Federal Republic was in some sense a continuation of Nazism,” which RAF members repeatedly express in their writings, “was perhaps the central driving force of the West German student movement.” Kundnani’s argument about the 1968 generation and the RAF is more complex than Becker’s and Aly’s, while still examining the activists’ conflicted relationship with Nazi history.

Some scholars point to other factors in explaining the viewpoint of the RAF and their generation, arguing that something other than the memory of Nazi crimes drove the student movement and the RAF. Dorothea Hauser argues, for instance, that the war’s end in 1945 served as the “central historical point of reference” for the ’68 generation. Hauser distinguishes this from the idea of Auschwitz as a “historical factum brutum,” symbolizing an entire “generational paradigm.” She notes that “the 68 movement showed a noteworthy disinterest in the concrete rehabilitation from the Nazi past.” The distinction between Nazi crimes and the war’s aftermath is important because it reminds us that “the

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83 Kundnani, xi; 140.
84 Kundnani, 140.
85 Kundnani, 12.
86 Kundnani, 12.
89 Hauser, “Deutschland, Italien, und Japan,” 1277.
“war” is not a monolith, but rather for Germans, could be viewed in segments of the Nazi period and the Holocaust, followed by the post-war period of foreign control and division of Germany. This is especially relevant for the 1968 generation, who did not witness Nazi persecution or the concentration camps, but they did live in the post-war world in which daily life was directly impacted by the division of the country, control by the Allies, and economic hardships resulting from the war’s end. Invoking the Nazi past, with its implications of destructive totalitarianism, restriction of civil liberties, and negative impact on Germany does not necessarily entail a discussion of the Holocaust—a point that is very apparent in the works of the RAF.

In her work comparing the RAF and the Provisional Irish Republican Army, Joanne Wright writes that while the history of Nazism gave the RAF importance in Germany society and history, the group’s foundations were firmly rooted in the 1960s and the student movement rather than in the Nazi period.90 This view points to the importance of remembering the context of the RAF in German history and recognizing it as an outgrowth of the student movement, not as a totally independent entity with its own, separate ties to the Nazi period. Kraushaar reminds us to seek answers to questions about 1968 in West Germany not only in the Nazi past, which certainly made the situation unique, but also in the context of the divided Germany, East versus West, and the overall Cold War.91 Kraushaar quite appropriately urges today’s observers of this era to carefully contextualize the events of 1968 and beyond, which emerged from “the most extreme geopolitical setting that developed after 1945, in the wake of a destructive, murderous political system.”92

Historian of 1968 Martin Klimke suggests an entirely different influence as a cause for the RAF members’ radicalization out of the spirit of ’68: contact with the American Black Power movement.93

91 Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?,” 80.
92 Kraushaar, “Hitler’s Children?,” 80.
93 Martin Klimke, The Other Alliance, 107. On this topic see also Klimke, “Black Power, die Black-Panther-Solidaritätskomitees und der bewaffnete Kampf,” in Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus, 562-582.
Klimke argues that heading into the 1970s when literature on and support for the Black Power movement began to grow in West Germany, student activists began to model themselves after the Black Panthers, leading to groups like the RAF. Klimke argues that there was some “assumed obligation [to fight oppression] stemming from the legacy” of the Nazis and “as a consequence, the German past was manipulated to understand, though not condone, the motives for domestic political violence and to justify and demand solidarity with revolutionary violence in other parts of the world.” While the writings of the RAF are certainly not rife with allusions to the Black Power movement, Klimke’s view is helpful in that it points to another possible factor in the radicalization of the RAF’s members.

Many scholars challenge the notion of sincere reverence for the Nazis’ victims and the Holocaust as a whole in the RAF’s writings, arguing that the group used this period as a rhetorical device to garner sympathy and support by identifying as victims and resistance fighters. Colvin, in her critical analysis of the works of Ulrike Meinhof, argues that Meinhof focuses “on creating dramatic rhetorical connections between Nazism and those who oppose the things she supports...and support what she opposes,” putting herself in the category of “the new Jews” being victimized by the West German state. The parallels that Meinhof makes between the West German government and the Nazi regime, in Colvin’s opinion, are meant as “metaphors that justify counter-violence.” Colvin asserts that it did not occur to Meinhof that her frequent analogies using Jewish victims and Nazi Germany might be disrespectful to those who suffered during the Holocaust. Hauser is also quite clear in her belief that the Nazi legacy served an “often purely instrumental” role in the ideology of the RAF: she argues that “the RAF’s fixation on Germany’s Nazi past had nothing to do with an attack ‘against the Auschwitz generation.’” Hauser alleges:

94 Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 107.
95 Klimke, *The Other Alliance*, 139.
96 Colvin, 28.
97 Colvin, 44.
98 Colvin, 231-232.
In reality, the RAF cultivated a mere cynical reference to the Holocaust. On the one hand, [the RAF] frivolously, but effectively, exploited it for self-description...in its campaigns against its alleged torture in prison. On the other hand, as was true for most West German guerillas, the Holocaust served as the somewhat paradoxical rationale for the RAF's militant anti-Zionism.”

While Hauser describes the use of Holocaust imagery by the RAF dismissively as “merely cynical,” her view is not entirely uncommon and certainly not entirely inaccurate. Painting the psychological and propagandistic motivations of the RAF with such broad strokes, however, could risk oversimplifying any serious analysis of the RAF’s connection to Germany’s history.

One offshoot of this cynical view of the RAF’s use of National Socialism in its rhetoric is the “victim narrative” that Christian Schneider examines. Schneider takes the relationship of the RAF to the Nazi period considerably more seriously than Hauser does, arguing that the RAF “represented the most extreme case of the complex victim identification of this generation.” He calls the RAF, paradoxically, “omnipotent victims,” because they cast themselves as victims of an oppressive system, and yet they wielded significant control over the lives of others through the political violence they employed. Turning on its head the core idea of identification with the Nazis’ victims, Schneider argues that, to “be a victim and at the same time to be able to decide the life and death of others” put the RAF in the perfect “double role” of simultaneously “the crucified and the judges.” Unlike the Holocaust victims they purported to resemble, RAF members enjoyed the advantage of the opportunity to fight back. Stefan Aust also brings up the victim narrative of the group, writing: “[t]he perpetrators of terrorist acts now took on the role of the victims. In a post-war German society stricken with guilt, that lent them a position which they...exploited to the full.”

In his book examining the RAF and the American group Weatherman, Jeremy Varon takes a more sympathetic and less presumptive view of these left-wing radical groups, claiming that he “seek[s]
to restore a stronger measure of rationality and moral purpose” to the groups and their motives. Underlying Varon’s analysis is a strong current connecting the RAF to the Nazi past, in the sense that the terrorists intended to avenge Nazi crimes, although they did not succeed. Echoing Theodor Adorno, Varon writes, “West German terrorism was a tortured form of Vergangenheitsbewältigung—a symptom of Germany’s difficulty in confronting and working through its Nazi past.” Varon notes that instead of solving any conflict with the past, the RAF incited an authoritarian government crackdown that set the whole process back. Varon’s argument shows that, while the RAF understood itself in terms of an anti-fascist resistance whose “killings were not only just, but heroic,” they failed to accomplish and managed to further obscure any reconciliation they set out to achieve.

As these multifarious opinions on the RAF show, there is hardly consensus about the group’s connection to the Nazi period. They are not all mutually exclusive, but they are often contradictory, and they weave together a broad and complicated picture of the RAF’s possible motives and influences. The works of Becker and Aly, which more or less brand the RAF and the 1968 generation as neo-Nazi organizations, rely on premises that, however provocative, simplify the situation too much. While anti-Semitism, totalitarian mindset, and a culture of terror and fear did result from the RAF’s campaign, the founding principles of the group were fundamentally Marxist and borne out of the left-wing protest movement demanding civil liberties and reform—far from “Nazi” ideas. Analysis of the RAF in the context of the Nazi period requires a more balanced approach that, while not as catchy as “Hitler’s children” or Unser Kampf, allow for subtler distinctions and varying interpretations of the same events. Although she offers a more reasonable analysis than Becker and Aly, Hauser also tends to overgeneralize and dismiss the RAF as using references to the Holocaust and Nazi period in a cynical sense. Her emphasis on 1945 as the defining moment for the 68 generation, however, brings up the important issue of viewing “the war” as a multifaceted object of memory for Germans. Kraushaar, Colvin,

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104 Varon, 15.
105 Varon, 15.
Schneider, Kundnani, and Varon present the most salient arguments about the RAF in relation to the Nazi period, and while they do not agree on every point, these authors take many factors into account: the Cold War, the idea of generational conflict, complexes of victimhood and resistance, and the justification of violence through an appeal to the past.

The Cold War context is certainly not ignored in scholarship, but I hope to add to the precedent of the latter scholars I have mentioned, conducting an examination of the ways concerns about capitalism, communism, and the international Cold War interact with ideas about the Nazi period in the RAF’s writing through in-depth analysis of references to National Socialism in the major texts of the RAF. Most authors on the RAF cover this in bits and pieces in various works, but they usually look at the RAF comprehensively instead of focusing specifically on the question of the Nazi legacy. I aim not to explain definitively why the RAF became radicalized and carried out terrorist attacks, but to gain a better understanding of how the group members viewed what they were doing and gave their ideology and actions meaning.

I have tried to evaluate the arguments of the RAF through the lens of one of their contemporaries, keeping in mind the political turmoil of the Cold War and the societal conflicts of West Germany as it tried to reconcile with its horrific, and very recent, history. I also attempt to distance myself from the assumption that the RAF’s positions are on the fringes of political discourse; in fact, the New Left, the East German government, and Marxists all over the world shared some of the RAF’s fundamental opinions about the nature of international politics and economics. I began my analysis by asking, when RAF members referenced the Nazi period in their writings, how and why did they use it and what were they trying to accomplish with their references? While seeking answers to this question will certainly not resolve the debate about the major factors influencing the RAF, it can bring us closer to understanding the connections the terrorists saw between themselves, their history, and their contemporary political position in the heat of the Cold War.
An Introduction to the Writings of the RAF

The main primary sources that I will analyze in this paper are the various works that first-generation RAF members and the RAF as a whole produced, running from Ulrike Meinhof’s columns for *konkret* beginning in 1960 and up to and including pieces from the core members’ last year of life, 1977. Some of the works were published and intended for public consumption, such as the *konkret* columns, the document declaring the founding of the RAF, *Build up the Red Army* (June 1970), and *The Concept of the Urban Guerilla* (April 1971), among others. Other writings that remain from the RAF’s first generation were not intended for publication but instead were either correspondence between group members or writings in diary form. In the collection *Notstandsgesetze von deiner Hand*, for instance, editors Caroline Harmsen, Ulrike Seyer, and Johannes Ullmaier have compiled letters between Gudrun Ensslin and her ex-fiancé Bernward Vesper that they wrote when Ensslin was on trial for arson and while she was on the run in 1968-9. Other collections include Pieter Bakker Schut’s *das info*, which contains fragments of correspondence between the RAF members while in prison (1973-77), and *letzte texte von ulrike* (last texts of ulrike), published by the International Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners in Western Europe.

The writings of Ulrike Meinhof make up the largest percentage of the works featured here simply because she was the most prolific writer of the RAF, and her works as a journalist in particular make up a very large and important body of texts providing insights into her theoretical foundations.


Meinhof was also the main intellectual mind of the RAF, sometimes to a fault, with Baader serving as the “man of action” with little interest in theory and Ensslin falling somewhere in between. I have tried to feature the writings of as many different group members as possible, but the sheer volume of Meinhof’s works necessitates that her representation here is the strongest. While I present here selections from the writings of the RAF that deal with the Nazi period, these passages are by no means anomalies. Throughout all of the RAF members’ writings, references to fascism, imperialism, the Nazis, oppression and victimization appear very frequently. Many of these writings, especially the later ones, advance no clear argument and follow little, if any, logic; for this reason, I have only included a small sampling of those writings here, instead choosing to focus on pieces where I could glean a useful argument about fascism and the Nazi period.

These primary documents tell the story of the RAF in their own words and provide an invaluable window into the minds of individuals whose convictions drove them to abandon everything and go far beyond political activism into full-blown terrorism. It is a particularly salient issue today to try to understand the inner workings of a terrorist cell and the individuals behind it, given the large and highly publicized presence of terrorist cells that pose a threat to domestic and international peace. In the case of the RAF, the nature of the group’s specific relationship to the Nazi past has been the subject of intense debate as discussed in the previous chapter. In this context, the RAF stands as an extreme example of the 1968 generation as a whole, possibly also representative of its relationship to German history. Instead of viewing the RAF and the ’68 generation through the lens of a collective crisis of identity stemming from Germany’s turbulent history, my aim is to look at what the RAF members actually said about the Nazi period, how they talked about it and related themselves to it, and how they used this history to convey their message.

Another important consideration is to use caution in treating the RAF as a monolithic voice because the group was made up of individuals who sometimes came into conflict about ideology and
how to continue operations, especially as 1977 grew nearer and tensions mounted. Any reader of the works of the RAF must maintain an open mind, but still approach the sources with a healthy amount of skepticism considering the extreme nature of the RAF’s actions and polemical writings; finding the boundary between rhetoric and genuine conviction is difficult and in some cases here, probably impossible, but I will try to be as balanced as possible in my analysis.

**Ulrike Meinhof for konkret, 1960-1969**

In the introduction to her edited collection that made Meinhof’s columns available in English for the first time, Karin Bauer calls the works from *konkret* “extraordinary documents of [Meinhof’s] time,” which show Meinhof’s growing dissatisfaction with West German democracy, her radicalization, and also testify to the overall “radicalization of the protest movement.” It is worth noting that these early journalistic works had considerable reach: *konkret* circulated weekly or bi-weekly to a readership of over 230,000 people in West Germany. Bauer upholds Meinhof’s image as an icon of the Left and portrays her as a “gifted writer with a dream” whose idealism led her to violence, but who still has something to offer if we engage with her through her columns.

Bettina Röhl, Meinhof’s daughter, on the other hand, provides a critical portrayal of her mother’s work and legacy in the afterword of Bauer’s volume, which she included in the book as a condition for granting permission to publish the columns. Röhl accuses her mother of working for the East German SED and questions the authenticity of her motivations and her lasting public image as an icon and moral leader of 1968:

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111 Quote from Bauer, “In Search of Ulrike Meinhof,” 20.

112 Röhl published her own collection of documents pertaining to her parents and their magazine, *konkret*, including evidence that it was funded by and collaborated with East Germany. See Bettina Röhl, ed., *So macht Kommunismus Spass! : Ulrike Meinhof, Klaus Rainer Röhl und die Akte Konkret* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2006).
Ulrike Meinhof was therefore not an anti-fascist as her followers from the 1968 movement would still like to see her today. She was not a freedom fighter or a lone intellectual who could no longer tolerate the conditions the way they were and described them out of the depth of her feeling... Ulrike Meinhof wanted to have an effect...But she made her name as a terrorist...Ulrike Meinhof’s influence seems to be underestimated in historical and factual terms, while she is morally overestimated as an icon of the 1968 movement, a figure of German history.  

As Bauer points out, Röhl’s harsh characterization is most likely colored at least in part by her experience as one of the children Meinhof abandoned to pursue her terrorist activities, but this is no reason to discount her view entirely, either. 

A portrayal that is hesitant to glorify a woman most closely associated with murder and violence seems to be a rational counterpoint to Bauer’s idea of Meinhof as a woman who genuinely believed in fighting injustice.

In Meinhof’s konkret columns, her tone progresses from activism and advocacy to a gradually more radical and action-oriented rhetoric. Meinhof references the Nazi period in some way in most of her columns, either directly or through allusions. These references are usually presented as a way of criticizing contemporary political policies—the development of nuclear weapons, social injustice, and perceived government oppression—by relating them to a darker period in German history. The reader must keep in mind that while many of the comparisons to the Nazi period seem extreme to us today, these political issues were extremely divisive during the 1960s and such accusations were common from every side of the political spectrum in response to policies or opinions they opposed. In addition, Meinhof was writing for a left-wing magazine with a radical agenda that called for equally radical language, which could be achieved through referencing a period commonly understood as abominable in order to convey a message.

In this section, I will examine selections from nine of Meinhof’s articles that originally appeared in konkret between 1960 and 1968. While I have chosen these specific pieces because they each deal with the Nazi past in some way, they are not anomalies in Meinhof’s body of articles and instead span

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113 Bettina Röhl, “Icon of the Left, Propagandist, and Communist,” in Meinhof, Everybody Talks About the Weather, 262-263.
across the entire period she wrote for *konkret* and across many different subjects. The themes and opinions that Meinhof brings forth in these early articles laid the groundwork for her later works and the works of the RAF as a whole, and by extension, provided a foundation for the RAF’s positions on political and historical issues.

*Selections, 1960-61*

In “Shadows of the Summit Pointing West,” published in 1960, Meinhof comments on the future of Cold War politics and nuclear arms in Europe in light of the upcoming May 1960 summit in Paris where the leaders of the major powers met amid the height of nuclear tensions. She expounds on the issues surrounding Berlin’s precarious situation in the tug-of-war between the Soviet Union, France, and the United States, but then refocuses the discussion to West German domestic politics, stating that while “Germany is not the center of the world,” it is “racked by crises, and so every German policy has the chance to contribute to improving the political situation of the world.” Meinhof views Bonn’s policies, however, as going down a path towards “nuclear armament” and the weakening of democratic principles. In response to the fierce debate over the Emergency Laws, Meinhof claims:

> [F]ederal ministers are promoting reactionary attitudes that scrawl the shadows of an unholy past back onto the walls while the government is planning...to abolish the little bit of democracy that still remains in this country.

These loaded words refer to the limitation of constitutional rights that would result in case of emergency if the Laws passed, and the “unholy past” she describes is most likely the rise of the Nazi Party out of Weimar democracy. During the interwar period (1919-1933), a democratic government in Germany emerged from the devastation of World War I, formed by the constitution signed at Weimar. However, the democracy was weak and split between many parties, giving way to paramilitary groups, riots in the streets, and the eventual rise of the Nazi Party after a period of rule by emergency decree.

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(1930-1933). This history is crucial to understanding Meinhof’s arguments about West Germany in the 1960s, and to understanding why the planned Emergency Laws were generally met with considerable hostility during this period. It is clear that Meinhof saw direct parallels between the erosion of constitutional rights that ushered Germany from liberal democracy to Nazi dictatorship and the possibility of rule by emergency decree if the Emergency Laws passed. Meinhof sees these parallels in all aspects of her contemporary political situation, which she sees as mimicking the destruction of Weimar democracy through the restriction of civil liberties.

Meinhof’s employment of Nazi-era comparisons becomes more direct and forceful in “New German Ghetto Show” (1960), where she decries what she sees as political conservatives’ discriminatory policies targeting members of the Left.\(^\text{118}\) She calls this a “new example of the authoritarian thinking and ghetto mentality” of the West German government, referring to the idea of pushing dissenters into ghettos as the Nazis did to Jewish victims.\(^\text{119}\) Meinhof goes on to say, “The people being targeted this time are not members of the Polish intelligentsia, or Jews, or even half-hearted or partial Communists; this time they are the skeptics who oppose the nuclear politics of the Federal Republic...”\(^\text{120}\) Not only does she compare anti-nuclear activists to Holocaust victims, but her reference to “this time” also shows that in Meinhof’s opinion, history was repeating itself in West Germany, with a dictatorship re-emerging from a democratic state and pursuing a new version of Nazi persecution against members of the Left. In her analysis of this article, Colvin calls Meinhof’s use of the metaphor of ghettos “profoundly disrespectful of those who suffered in the real ghettos.”\(^\text{121}\) Meinhof’s interpretation is certainly disrespectful and exaggerated, but it also shows that she views or wants her audience to view contemporary events as repeating earlier patterns of political persecution.

Further in “New German Ghetto Show,” Meinhof goes on to discuss the authors of the so-called

\(^{119}\) Meinhof, “Ghetto Show,” 110.
\(^{120}\) Meinhof, “Ghetto Show,” 110.
\(^{121}\) Colvin, \textit{Ulrike Meinhof}, 29.
Rotbuch, or “Red Book,” whose actions she compares to the anti-communist witch hunt of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the United States.\(^{122}\) A committee called “Save the Peace” published this book, which listed West Germans who had suspected communist leanings and included those who opposed nuclear armament. On the language of the Rotbuch, Meinhof writes:

The vocabulary is militant, reminiscent of the jargon of the Freikorps after the First World War; this is just an external feature, but frightening enough after the experience we acquired in that department and the innocence we bitterly forfeited.\(^{123}\)

The Freikorps, or “Free Corps,” was a collection of paramilitary groups active during the Weimar period in Germany, from which many members transferred to the Nazi organizations such as Hitler’s military command, the SA, and the SS.\(^{124}\) The Freikorps was made up of many extreme right-wing members and targeted communists and other enemies associated with the Treaty of Versailles in the years following the First World War (1918-1920). Meinhof’s reference to this group conveys the pattern that she saw in rooting out left-wing activity and further, in restricting political parties or beliefs of a dissenting nature. She viewed the conservative authors of the Rotbuch as reigniting the Nazi persecution and elimination of political enemies, especially communists, drawing on German “experience” and the loss of “innocence” that came with a loss of democratic freedoms after Weimar. An irony in this quote is Meinhof’s criticism of the “militant” tone of the anti-communist writers, when she would later take on an extremely militant tone herself and actually become a communist combatant bent on eliminating the conservative opposition. Meinhof writes that the impending descent into authoritarian government:

...starts with the minister of the interior resorting to a theory [of persecuting dissenters and political enemies] that has always served openly fascist countries as an irrational justification for implementing illegitimate claims to power, an approach that we actually see in use here.\(^{125}\)

\(^{122}\) Meinhof, “Ghetto Show,” 111.

\(^{123}\) Meinhof, “Ghetto Show,” 112.

\(^{124}\) Sturmabteilung and Schutzstaffel, respectively.

Meinhof saw the writers of the Rotbuch, and by extension the conservatives in government, as justifying the persecution of dissenters by appealing to the urgency of winning the Cold War. Meinhof feared that this imperative to win against communism will turn “the Cold War into a fuse for a hot war,” pulling Germany into a likely nuclear conflict for the sake of political homogeneity. Justifying such persecution as imperative to victory, in Meinhof’s view, had been the modus operandi of authoritarian—“fascist”—countries time and again. Meinhof’s warning to Germans about the dangers of accusing communists and the continuation of Cold War paranoia is stark, and draws again on the experiences of the Nazi period. She writes, “There has already been a time in Germany when people thought ‘This can’t be true,’ and it was true, and cost millions of them their lives.” Meinhof saw a clear connection between the path to Nazi rule and the path West Germany and much of the Western world was on in 1960. Despite her sensational language, as readers we must remember that Meinhof was viewing the fervor of Cold War anti-communism with Germany’s intense, recent experience with a failed democracy in mind.

In possibly her most inflammatory and notorious konkret piece, “Hitler Within You” (1961), Meinhof again spoke out against the West German government and officials, this time writing to the younger generation and imploring them to combat the issues of Germany’s past and their manifestations in the present. The title itself conveys the weight of the accusations Meinhof makes in the column. In the original German, the title reads “Hitler in euch,” meaning in “you,” plural; Meinhof is speaking not to one person, but to all Germans and perhaps especially to the young who may think they have no connection to Nazi history. Colvin asserts that this choice of title is especially “provocative” because instead of writing “Hitler in us,” Meinhof includes all of her readers, but not herself, in the

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127 Meinhof, “Ghetto Show,” 118.
128 Meinhof, “Hitler Within You,” in Everybody Talks About the Weather, pp. 138-143.
The generational component that comes through in Meinhof’s work and in this piece specifically is present even in this potent three word title: although many Germans she speaks to were not involved and some not even born, the legacy of Hitler and the Nazis is relevant to all of the younger generation, who had a responsibility to confront it and prevent it from happening again.

Meinhof points out that while the young people were “not involved in the crimes of the Third Reich,” they have still become “entangled in the blame for something [they] are not responsible for.” She says that students especially, however, still must face what she calls “the responsibilities of the present,” which are to avenge the crimes of the past and oppose contemporary conservative politics. Meinhof then quotes a lengthy text from Dieter Bielenstein, who spoke for the Association of German Student Organizations to address the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Bielenstein chastises the students in the Weimar period for their anti-Semitism, book burnings, and exclusion of Jewish students and faculty from the university communities. In her comments on Bielenstein’s statements, Meinhof applauds his overall message but urges him to go further in his criticism of “old Nazis” to include “the equally old political ideas that still hold sway.” It seems that to Meinhof, confrontation of the past is a necessary first step, but it only has value if translated into action in the present to combat similar injustices. The injustices she saw were actually not similar to Nazi persecution of Jews and others, but her general imperative to fight oppression and champion democratic freedoms where they are threatened is clear. To this end, she goes on to say, “Anyone who castigates anti-Semitism must also speak up for freedom wherever it is being threatened today,” including the “political terror” she sees the government committing against “those who think differently, those who believe differently, and those who feel differently” than the politicians in power.

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129 Colvin, Ulrike Meinhof, 29.
132 Bielenstein is quoted in Meinhof, “Hitler,” 139-140.
133 Meinhof, “Hitler,” 141.
134 Meinhof, “Hitler,” 141.
Overall, “Hitler Within You” portrays Meinhof’s belief that the political policies of the 1960s must somehow function as a response to German history during the war. Near the end of the column she lays out several historical situations and what she sees as their contemporary counterparts in West German politics, such as:

The response to concentration camps is not just to close them down, but to guarantee total political freedom for political opponents. The response to the invasion of Poland does not lie in refusing diplomatic relations with Warsaw…police actions against black students in 1961 are not a response to the exclusion of Jewish students from German universities in 1933.¹³⁵

In the last sentence, Meinhof is referring to police actions in Bonn, Frankfurt, and elsewhere against black students demonstrating after the 1961 assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of Congo after its independence.¹³⁶ With the above statements, Meinhof conveys that West German democracy has not come far enough from its historical predecessor, implementing restrictive policies such as Cold War stand-offs and allowing police to injure peaceful protesters, another way of oppressing those of dissenting opinion as Meinhof noted in earlier columns. Her prescription instead is that the “response to National Socialism must be found in…freedom for political opponents, separation of powers, and the sovereignty of the people,” including “coexistence rather than war, negotiation rather than rearmament.”¹³⁷

In her final line of the column, Meinhof delivers a final dagger in the heart of West German democracy, writing matter-of-factly, “One day we will be asked about Herr Strauss in the same way we now ask our parents about Hitler.”¹³⁸ This simple statement had serious consequences for Meinhof. The subject of the jab, Minister of Defense Franz Josef Strauss, sued Meinhof and konkret for libel in 1962, a case which the lower court of Hamburg dismissed when it declared that Meinhof had “spoken in the

¹³⁵ Meinhof, “Hitler,” 141-142.
¹³⁷ Meinhof, “Hitler,” 142.
¹³⁸ Meinhof, Hitler, 142.
Taylor Lescallette 47

name of legitimate interests.” Comparing a West German leader to Hitler in any way is clearly one of the most severe attacks a writer could level against her government, showing in the same breath both Meinhof’s desire to incite controversy and her level of actual concern that the Federal Republic was failing to uphold the democratic principles of its constitution. Her statement also implies that just as the Nazi period was recognized as a turning point in German history, so would the egregious actions of Strauss and his colleagues inspire future shame and scrutiny from a younger generation looking back.

In her line about Strauss and in all of the three columns explored thus far, Meinhof was warning her generation that although they escaped responsibility for Nazi crimes, they risked bloodying their own hands if they did not resist West German policies as their predecessors failed to do in response to the Nazis. Nuclear war resulting from Cold War tensions and the possible rearmament with nuclear weapons was the most obvious violent outcome Meinhof foresaw in both Germanys’ futures if her warnings were ignored. Meinhof also foreshadowed other consequences that mirrored the past, such as the possibility of “new ghettos” for suspected communists or escalating persecutions of left-wing activists. Meinhof argued that anti-democratic actions like publishing the Rotbuch and passing the Emergency Laws lay on a continuum not far from totalitarianism and another Holocaust. These notions may have been alarmist, but they do convey just how intertwined Meinhof believed the German historical example and West German Cold War politics to be. In Meinhof’s estimation, the erosion of human rights and free speech served as a connection running from the collapse of Weimar democracy, through the rise of the Nazi dictatorship, to the re-establishment of democracy in German and finally to the precipice of authoritarianism Meinhof believed the country to be on in the early 1960s. Meinhof saw continuity and the fundamental causes of past mistakes emerging again in West Germany, and she urged her contemporaries to resist this time around.

139 Karin Bauer, notes to Meinhof, “Hitler,” 142.
In drawing on the Nazi period repeatedly to denounce contemporary policies, Meinhof does run the risk of trivializing the Holocaust and using the Nazi period simply as a rhetorical device to attack her enemies. In focusing on the communist victims of Nazism, Meinhof ignores the distinctly racist nature of the Nazi regime, and elsewhere when she does mention persecution of the Jews and anti-Semitism, it is a product of capitalism, which is historically inaccurate. It seems that Meinhof appreciated the severity of Nazi crimes as a monumental mistake perpetrated by the Germans, and she genuinely saw her society as headed in a similar direction, but the specific nature of the Holocaust as perpetrated against the Jews and as more than a simple decline in civil liberties seems lost in her writings. Meinhof did not see the Holocaust as anomalous, but rather as a natural progression of a society that allowed its leaders to act with unchecked authority. In this way, she related Nazi crimes and the political situation that led to them as precedents to events in her own time period, such as the persecution of communists and the repression of student activism. Meinhof’s arguments remain firmly the present, with reference to the Nazi past used only as support for her positions on Cold War West German political issues.

Selections, 1964-65

In two columns originally published in 1964, Meinhof directly addresses the issues of justice for former Nazis and resistance under the Nazi regime. The first I will examine here is “A Man with Good Manners: A Day in Court with Karl Wolff,” a rumination on the trial of Karl Wolff, a former personal aide to the Reichsführer of the SS Heinrich Himmler during World War II; as Meinhof puts it, he was “the contact between Himmler and Hitler.”

Wolff was accused of murder and eventually found guilty of being an accomplice to the murder of 300,000 people in concentration camps and sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

Meinhof opens the piece by pointing out a dichotomy in morality as the court of Munich, and by

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140 Meinhof, “A Man with Good Manners: A Day in Court with Karl Wolff,” in Everybody Talks About the Weather, pp. 121-129. Quote from Meinhof, 121.

141 Bauer, 128. Wolff was released in 1969.
extension the German public, saw two accused murderers. She recalls the case of Vera Brühne, accused two years earlier in Munich of killing her former lover, a doctor, and his housekeeper, supposedly for her large allotment in the doctor’s will. Meinhof compares the harsh public judgment of Brühne to the ambivalence towards Wolff, who was connected to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Both were worldly individuals, attractive, and blonde, but Wolff had the distinction of being a “man who had principles,” albeit the principles of the Nazi Party.  

Brühne, on the other hand, was “unprincipled,” and unlike Wolff, about whom the German public felt conflicted, the public was “through with her after only one day in court.” Meinhof condemns the absurdity that “prudishness” in response to Brühne’s marital infidelities spawned virulent public opinion against her whereas Wolff’s connection to genocidal crimes garnered a lukewarm and indecisive reaction. This response, Meinhof writes, marks yet another missed opportunity for Germans to “resist National Socialism” after the fact; she represents the West German public as still not grasping the severity of Nazi crimes and still being unwilling to express adequate outrage toward the perpetrators in their midst.

In her criticism of public responses to the Wolff trial, Meinhof draws a distinction between her generation and older Germans who experienced Nazism, placing blame on the previous generation and exonerating herself and others her age. Meinhof writes to this end:

The writer [Meinhof], fortunately a member of the generation that did not experience National Socialism consciously, and thus missed the opportunity to be guilty-by-association—for admiring the system or for lacking the civil courage to oppose it...

This statement, though written as an aside, is anything but minor in its content as it succinctly conveys Meinhof’s view on so many issues in West German society. She again points out the guilt of the general public, this time expressing the guilty nature of bystanders during the Nazi period. Meinhof says that the previous generation lacked “civil courage,” implying that her generation, or at least her left-wing

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142 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 121-122.
143 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 122.
144 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 122.
145 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 122.
146 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 122.
contemporaries, recognized this shortcoming in their elders and sought to remedy it through their own anti-authoritarian activism. In “Hitler within You,” Meinhof expressed that the younger generation had a responsibility to stand up to current injustice, which reconciles with her idea here because while they were not guilty of Nazi crimes, they risked being guilty of West German crimes if they did not act.

The main witnesses in Wolff’s trial were his fellow former SS officers, who Meinhof portrays as operating under a kind of code of silence, generally testifying that they tried to stop the extermination of Jews, that everyone thought this way back then, and that they were “forgetful” when it came to their interactions with Wolff.147 For example, in response to the question of whether Wolff was present at Dachau when Himmler watched camp officials perform experiments on inmates, Meinhof quotes a witness as answering, “I suppose. Can’t say.”148 These unhelpful testimonies, Meinhof writes, come about because “[t]he witnesses for the prosecution are the comrades of the accused.”149 In the trial of Wolff, Meinhof finds that the West German justice system has squandered a chance to “try...a man who was higher-ranking than Eichmann,” and such chances to bring Nazi criminals to justice are “fizzling out” as time passes.150 To Meinhof, the court chose in error to call on the “supporters of National Socialism” instead of “its opponents” to testify to the history of Wolff’s crimes, further perpetuating the silence and lack of public accountability for past transgressions.151 Meinhof ends the piece with the eerie observation that she “overheard the young people sitting on the public benches wondering whether there wasn’t something to National Socialism after all.”152 It is unclear whether this is true or merely added for dramatic effect, but the message is evident either way. The failure of the court and the public, as Meinhof saw it, to acknowledge their responsibility for the past set a dangerous precedent for the present, conveying that if no one recognized public guilt, perhaps there was nothing to be guilty about.

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147 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 123-127.
148 Quoted in Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 126-127.
149 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 127-128.
150 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 128.
151 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 128.
152 Meinhof, “Good Manners,” 128.
Meinhof argued that her generation understands how Germans must atone for Nazi crimes, but at the same time, they were not the ones who should be doing penance; she portrayed herself as righteous and knowing, looking down on those who are guilty yet refuse to acknowledge their guilt. Meinhof purports to cover the trial of a former Nazi in this column, but in actuality she was conducting her own trial of the West German public in which she found them guilty of yet again abiding Nazi ideals and atrocities. In this sense, the idea of sympathy towards the Nazi officer functions as damning evidence against a society that Meinhof wished to condemn for many other reasons besides tolerating old Nazis. In “A Man with Good Manners,” Meinhof shows that West Germans were still willing to turn a blind eye to injustice against communists and to the stripping of their liberties in the same way that they still blindly failed to decry Nazi crimes. Although the court did convict Wolff, the proceedings indicated to Meinhof that the perpetrator generation had not changed much at all since the days of SS terror.

In 1964’s “On the Topic of July 20,” Meinhof writes on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, weaving this story of resistance and the memory of it in West Germany into the political conflict between the government and the people she sees present in her time.153 The conservative politicians and press, Meinhof writes, characterize the anniversary of July 20 as a “day we all somehow feel better, and more earnest.”154 In Meinhof’s telling of the remembrance of July 20, this is a day when West Germans pretend to put their differences aside and collectively pat themselves on the back to commemorate an incident that proves Germans tried to stop National Socialism. Meinhof facetiously calls it a “day of concord” when “we all agree to agree,” mirroring the 1944 alignment of the interests of a few Nazi officers and the entirety of the German people.155 The mythical portrayal of the spirit of German resistance, embodied in the assassins of July 20, lent the elites of 1964 a foundation upon which to claim solidarity with their people in a “concord” that Meinhof calls

“completely fake.”¹⁵⁶

Meinhof then points to the elements of National Socialism she saw as still active in West German society, including both Nazi officials who remained in power and social injustices against the left wing. Judges, generals, and government officials, active under the Third Reich but conspicuously absent from the July 20 plot, talk about “conscience,” as Meinhof puts it, yet they persecute Communists, “plan the renewed suppression of basic rights,” and are in favor of nuclear armament.¹⁵⁷ Meinhof had written on these themes before, and continued to underscore the applicability of German history to the 1960s, with government enforcement sometimes carried out even by the same individuals.

The most fascinating and rich passage of the article, however, comes in the last paragraph, where Meinhof writes:

> It is high time for us to realize that the gas chambers of Auschwitz have advanced to technical perfection in the shape of the nuclear bomb, and that the game being played with the nuclear bomb with an eye to the Germans in the GDR, the Poles east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers, the Czechs in Sudetenland, and the Russians in the Baltic States is a criminal game of Hitleristic dimension. It is high time for us to realize that the struggles against injustice and violence waged by the men and women of July 20 are not yet over. Surely the worst does not have to happen for us to oppose government policy. And the comeback of someone like Franz Josef Strauss is not the moment for a political assassination, either. Still, the differences that defined people on July 20, 1944 are as intact as ever.¹⁵⁸

The direct line of continuity running from the Nazi period through the 1960s and Cold War politics that Meinhof identifies in much of her work appears here in one of its most powerful instances. The most obvious manifestation of this is the metaphor of the gas chambers of Auschwitz used to describe nuclear weapons of the West pointing towards Eastern communist opponents. This comparison brings forth not only the killing power of both mechanisms, but also the implication of a similar intent behind them; to Meinhof, the threat of nuclear action against Cold War rivals due to differing political ideology was scarcely different from the annihilation of peoples out of a specific racial, expansionist ideology. To this

end, she lists Eastern bloc locations that all represent key pieces of Nazi consolidation of power and territory in Europe: the GDR representing vanquished communist opponents within Germany; the Poles and the Czechs representing invaded nations whose occupation paved the way for Nazi expansion; and the Russians in the Baltics representing both the German-Soviet non-aggression pact and the Allied Soviet enemy. The prospect of forcing the expansion of capitalist ideology onto the Eastern territories under the threat of nuclear annihilation, for Meinhof, was equivalent to forcing Nazi occupation onto these same territories in a “Hitleristic” bid for world domination.

In recalling these historical landmarks and reorienting them in the present, Meinhof shows the reader why resistance in the same vein of July 20 is needed again. The politician Meinhof mentions as having a “comeback,” Strauss, was forced to resign as Minister of Defense in 1962 following a scandal in which he ordered the unlawful arrest and detention of Spiegel editors whom he accused of treason. In a rare moment of discretion, however, Meinhof acknowledges that the situation in West Germany was not quite comparable to Germany under Hitler and thus it was not a “moment for a political assassination.” This admission does not weaken Meinhof’s position, however, as she had consistently argued that a Nazi-like authoritarianism was but a small step away from conservative government policies. Similarly, in this piece, she ends by emphasizing the divide between those with the courage to resist and those who comply blindly with authority, which existed as much in 1964 as it did when some attempted to stop Hitler in 1944. Meinhof paints “authority” and “resistance” in broad categories which include the protagonists in both time periods, and while she does recognize the differences in these historical situations, she draws a straight line from the anti-Nazi resistance to the left-wing activists of Meinhof’s day. Both opposed powerful, heavily armed governments they saw as oppressive and both stood out in contrast to their complicit contemporaries. Meinhof’s analysis of the need to resist the

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159 The Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact after the two countries’ foreign ministers, was signed in secret on August 23, 1939. A secret protocol gave the Soviet Union control of the Baltic states as a part of its sphere of influence. Hitler broke this pact with Stalin when Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.
West German government employs the July 20 plot against Hitler purely as a historical example of the power of individual resistance, the precedent of which provides a justification for resistance during Meinhof’s era.

In the 1965 article “Dresden,” Meinhof tackles a question that remains contentious in Germany to this day: the discussion of questionable Allied attacks against Germany during the Second World War, particularly the firebombing of Dresden in February 1945. Meinhof writes on the twentieth anniversary of this occasion, when somewhere around 25,000 people died after one night of British bombs falling on the Eastern German city. Her remarks on Dresden in this column sound dangerously like the those of the post-war Germans whom Theodor Adorno condemned for portraying destruction of the city as “making up for” Auschwitz in some way. The first part of the article recounts the details of the attack on Dresden, including allegations that any strategic targets in the city were unscathed and instead British bombers targeted the city center where mostly women, children, and refugees resided.

Meinhof then turns these claims against the British government, writing:

Until the end of the war, until March 1945, the British government and its Prime Minister Winston Churchill managed to conceal the truth about the actual, deliberate, and planned attacks by British bombers on German cities...At the same time as the German people learnt the truth about Auschwitz, the British learnt the truth about Dresden. The perpetrators were refused the honors they had been promised by those in power. Here, as well as over there.

The parallel between Britain and Nazi Germany and further, between Dresden and Auschwitz, shows Meinhof’s belief that these two former enemies—and now, allies in the Cold War—actually contained the roots of the same deplorable potentiality for senseless destruction. This potentiality is exactly what

161 Meinhof cites a figure of 200,000 casualties, but this figure is probably much too high. Though the exact number of casualties is still in debate, a commission in 2010 affirmed that the count is probably near 25,000. See: Matthias Neutzner, et al., Abschlussbericht der Historikerkommission zu Luftangriffen auf Dresden zwischen dem 13. und 14. Februar, 1945, (Dresden: City Archives of Dresden, 2010) http://www.dresden.de/media/pdf/infoblatt/ Historikerkommission_Dresden1945_Abschlussbericht_V1_14a.pdf, see p. 67 for statement of the statistical findings of the investigation commission.
162 On Adorno see Chapter 1, p. 16 of this work. Theodor Adorno, “Coming to Terms with the Past,” 116-117.
Meinhof saw in the Western European/American alliance against the East and the threat of nuclear conflict, proving in the tradition of Dresden “that the defensive position must always turn into an aggressive position.”\(^{165}\) The position that West Germany claimed to take as a defensive one against its communist neighbors teetered on what Meinhof believed was the brink of a dangerous, aggressive position with the potential for far more destruction than seen at Dresden.

In Meinhof’s mind, the British and German governments were alike during the war because they deceived their respective peoples into believing in a destructive cause. The theme of government deception is even stronger in the closing paragraph, where Meinhof writes: “If we needed proof that the people are always abused by the governments that enter into war, and are degraded into being both the pretext and the victims of applied barbarity, then Dresden is that proof.”\(^{166}\) That the governments have agency in her view here, and the people are passively “abused” by them, tells us that she sees governments as the perpetrators in the British and German cases and not the people. This is somewhat at odds with her ideas about the 45 generation being responsible for Nazi crimes, since here she portrays the governments as the actors. This can be reconciled at least somewhat because her point remains that the peoples of Britain and Nazi Germany were not actors as they should have been; instead, they remained passive and allowed their governments to get away with murder and destruction. It seems that she thinks the government has ultimate power, but the people let that power go unchecked when they fail to stand up to unjust policies.

Although Meinhof ends the piece writing against a federal period of limitation for prosecuting Nazi crimes, she intended to convey much more than that, using Dresden and alleged government abuses as an allegory for her position in Cold War West Germany. The claim that Britain and Nazi Germany both had manipulative governments fits into Meinhof’s later criticism of capitalism as a whole and places two Cold War capitalist allies in the same league as perpetrators who continue to betray and


deceive their people as they did in the last war. Though she does not write it here, Meinhof could easily include the United States and its actions in Vietnam in this group of deceiving capitalist powers. While the equation of the bombing of Dresden with the Nazis’ systematic murder of millions seems callous and exaggerated, Meinhof’s real point was that just as the British and German governments justified war crimes to their constituents in the 1940s, this time they were doing it again in the name of an ideological war in Europe that could have ended in similar destruction. It seems that to Meinhof, these two capitalist countries and others like them would always carry out atrocities and then, confronted with history, take hypocritical stances and manipulate public opinion to their advantage.

In the three columns examined in this section, Meinhof continued her warnings about the political fate of West Germany if it continued on its path as a Cold War ideological combatant. This time, however, instead of covering contemporary topics and making reference to German history as in the first three columns, Meinhof wrote on historical topics and used their examples to foreshadow the future of her country. Again, she emphasized the idea of a generational divide with an older generation still living with the guilt of the Nazi period and a younger generation poised to inherit the same guilt if they refused to act and prevent government abuses in their time. Meinhof made clear her position that West German society still had not adequately atoned for its past mistakes, let alone was it willing to recognize the contemporary mistakes it was allowing to happen. In her earlier columns, Meinhof twisted current events by pointing out nods to the past, but in the three in this section, she twisted historical events by extracting grains of truth for her own use in describing contemporary politics. As we shall see in her last group of columns for konkret, her vitriol continued and her paranoia intensified as Meinhof became radicalized leading up to her eventual involvement in the RAF.

Selections: 1967-1968

In her later konkret articles, Meinhof continues the same general criticisms of West German society she presented in the earlier pieces, but her arguments become less coherent and even more
sensationalized than before. Here I will look at three columns written between 1967 and 1968, covering topics including Israel, a crime show on German television, and media characterizations of the student movement. The diversity of these topics and the way Meinhof relates them to her criticisms of the West German public and government is one testament to the increasing obscurity of her logic in the late 1960s.

In “Three Friends of Israel” (1967), Meinhof examines the question of Israel, a notoriously sticky subject for Germany considering the nature of its history. She wrote in the wake of the Six Day War of June 1967, in which Israel took control of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, among other territories from Jordan and Syria. The titular “friends” of Israel are, Meinhof argues, the European Left, American interests supporting a strong Israel, and the West German government. Meinhof recognizes the German predicament in its relations with a Jewish state after the Holocaust, writing, “If the request for reconciliation with Poland makes reference to the suffering that National Socialism inflicted upon Poland, then the same applies to Israel.” Her intent, however, was to condemn Israel and her own government, so her argument turns critical in her discussion of West German policies aiding Israel in the war, calling the sympathies for Israel in the press “utter mockery.”

Meinhof’s discussion of West German involvement with Israel then takes a turn for the bizarre, in the following passage that intertwines the Second World War, the Cold War, the Six Day War, the Holocaust, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, and more in one rambling statement:

Twenty-five years late, and in Sinai, Bild finally won the battle of Stalingrad. Anti-communist resentment flowed seamlessly into joy over the destruction of Soviet MIG fighter planes; the fact that the Soviets stayed out of the conflict was taken as encouragement to mimic the Israeli initiative and apply it to the German question. The invasion of Jerusalem was seen as the prelude to a military parade through the Brandenburg Gate.

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169 Meinhof, “Israel,” 163.
170 Meinhof, “Israel,” 163.
The first striking feature of this passage is that it contains perhaps the most defined example of Meinhof’s notion of historical continuity of the previous twenty-odd years. Meinhof describes the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 as not only a proxy war for the Cold War tensions in Europe, but also as a proxy for a delayed German victory over the Soviets avenging World War II. Curiously, however, while the article certainly implies West German government involvement in the Middle East, Meinhof names Bild here as the actor in the retroactive “win”; the conservative press and its representation of the Six Day War, drumming up sympathy for Israel, thus sold the German public on its ally’s justification for invasion of Arab territory. Arab forces, rumored to have military support from the Soviets, did fly MiG fighter planes as Meinhof mentions—to her, a symbol of Israeli, and in turn West German, victory over the Soviet Union and all its communist system had come to signify in the Cold War period.

Next, Meinhof makes the jump from a Western ally’s victory over a possible Eastern ally to, by extension, the “encouragement to mimic the Israeli initiative and apply it to the German question.”\(^{171}\) The “Israeli initiative,” understood here as Israeli expansion into Arab territory, becomes a model in Meinhof’s mind for West Germany to reclaim its other half to the East. Her next line, that the “invasion of Jerusalem was seen as the prelude to a military parade through the Brandenburg Gate,” solidifies this claim.\(^{172}\) Meinhof’s sentiment implies two significant things: that she saw West Germany as potentially willing to use military force to take back land it believed was rightfully German and capitalist, and that it could have done so by taking cues from a state made up of its former victims, the Jews. Meinhof advances that the West German government, aided by the conservative press, is so eager to defeat communism and assert its dominance that it would resort to an Arab-Israeli style conflict—albeit ideological instead of ethno-religious—on German soil. Outside influence on and manipulation of West Germany, by other Western capitalist states and by the Jews in Israel to whom Germany “owes” support, is a theme that runs through many of Meinhof’s writings. In this context, Meinhof saw support

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\(^{171}\) Meinhof, “Israel,” 163.

\(^{172}\) Meinhof, “Israel,” 163.
of Israel as playing into West Germany’s eagerness to take a lead role in winning the Cold War in Europe and using an Israeli precedent to justify doing so.

The inevitable overtones of the Holocaust in West German-Israeli relations are certainly not lost on Meinhof, who hypothesizes about the “questionable reconciliation” between the two nations. She writes:

If the Jews had not been gassed to death, and had been taken along to the Ural Mountains instead, the Second World War would have ended differently. The errors of the past were recognized as such, anti-Semitism was regrettable, a purging took place, the new German fascism had learnt from its past mistakes. Anti-communism will be victorious with the Jews, not against them.

Here, Meinhof describes her idea of how West Germany had gone about making amends for the Holocaust. In the first sentence, she is suggesting that if the Germany army had enlisted Jews to fight the Soviets instead of gassing them, it could have won the war. The language contains at least some measure of sarcasm considering Meinhof’s previously expressed opinions about West Germany’s failure to address its history; the underwhelming nature of the emotion expressed in these lines—calling Nazi anti-Semitism simply “regrettable”—show the low level of sincerity that Meinhof believed the West German government to have in its recognition of past crimes. The lesson learned about the Jews is that they were a valuable military ally instead of an enemy, and this time around in the Cold War the West Germans would “be victorious with the Jews,” or with Israel. This “new German fascism,” as Meinhof calls her country’s political system, had learned only to abandon the anti-Semitic aspect of National Socialism and proceeded to defeat communism, alongside the Jews, with other aspects of fascism intact.

Meinhof’s description of the basis of the West German relationship with Israel is startling, driven by Germany’s history, and implies that Israel’s policies mirrored Germany’s troubling example:

A questionable reconciliation occurred, not because the humanity of the Jews was suddenly recognized, but because of the ruthless way they waged their war; not because of their rights as citizens but because they used napalm; not because we

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acknowledged our own crimes but because we admired the Israeli blitzkrieg, in solidarity with brutality, with actions that drive citizens from their homes, and with conquest.\textsuperscript{175}

Meinhof argues that West Germany and Israel forged a bond not based on collective guilt and suffering, but on a shared bloodlust and a form of “comparing notes” on genocidal policies. That the Jews in Israel adopted the murderous strategies of their former oppressor and that West Germany maintained an appreciation for “brutality” shows Meinhof’s belief that the only distance either country had put between itself and the Holocaust was a militarization of the victims, mimicking their former overlords. The implication that Israel represented a form of “new Nazis” is not unique to Meinhof or to this article as it was a common accusation lodged by others critical of Israel on the Left, expressing an anti-Zionist and borderline anti-Semitic opinion of Israeli policies. The idea that West German support for Israel hinged on this reality, however, is an interesting and somewhat disturbing outgrowth of this idea that Meinhof supports in this column.

In a column worth mentioning at least briefly here due to its content regarding Nazi history and as an example of Meinhof’s masterful appropriation of even the most innocuous details of society to make her point, 1968’s “File Number XY: Dissolved” examines the popularity of the West German television show \textit{File Number XY: Unresolved Crimes}, starring Eduard Zimmermann.\textsuperscript{176} Meinhof’s convoluted argument is essentially that, by examining unsolved crimes and hunting down criminals, Zimmermann gave Germans a new object of hatred to replace the Jews and the Communists, emphasizing the need to stop criminals before “a new Hitler will come along and do it for them” as he did in the 1930s to stop other perceived enemies.\textsuperscript{177} She claims that in Zimmermann’s show, “Germans’ devotion to Hitler is retroactively justified” because he was a leader who attempted to root out criminal

\textsuperscript{175} Meinhof, “Israel,” 163.  
\textsuperscript{176} Meinhof, “File Number XY: Dissolved,” in \textit{Everybody Talks about the Weather}, pp. 224-228. Zimmermann created the show and was the host from 1967 to 1997. It is currently still on the air.  
\textsuperscript{177} Meinhof, “File Number XY,” 226.
elements in society but “overshot his target.” File Number XY, in Meinhof’s opinion, aimed to help Germans feel good about themselves again by letting them believe they were helping society. She faults Zimmermann for focusing on “petty every day crime” instead of attempting to capture former Nazi criminals, claiming that the focus of the show on ordinary criminals “is only possible because [Zimmermann] alludes to the latent but omnipresent self-pity of the Germans, a product of the history they have not understood.” Meinhof goes even further and questions whether Zimmermann’s program has ulterior motives, writing:

The program may actually be serving as a test to see to what extent criminals can be deployed as hate objects in Germany and Austria, and to what extent such fascist methods can both mobilize and control Germans and Austrians.

Meinhof’s paranoid view that the German government was somehow testing the extent to which it could get away with fascist policies in the form of a television show testifies to the absurd tendencies of her viewpoints in her later articles, especially with regards to Nazi history. Meinhof’s argument is barely coherent and is evidence of her turn towards even more radical views and her paranoia about history repeating itself through government control and oppression. It is also indicative of her tendency, seen in the konkret articles in many instances, to project the difficulties of German history onto any and every event in her contemporary time period.

In the last column for konkret that I will discuss here, entitled “Counter-Violence” (1968), Meinhof responds to Rudolf Walter Leonhardt of Die Zeit, who she says compares the bases of the student movement in West Germany to the origins of 1933 and the rise of the youth vanguard of the Nazi Party. Leonhardt had allegedly attacked the Left in the same way that Meinhof and others attacked conservatives: by equating them with Nazis. Leonhardt’s statements and Meinhof’s response speak to the political discourse of this era in West Germany, reinforcing the fact that Nazi history was

180 Meinhof, “File Number XY,” 228.
181 Meinhof, “Counter-Violence,” in Everybody Talks about the Weather, 234-238. This author is unable to locate the exact article in Die Zeit online archives to which Meinhof is responding.
incredibly relevant during the 1960s and that the “Nazi” label was an effective tool for any side of an argument to use against the opponent.

Meinhof continues to drive home the same point she has in many previous pieces, arguing that Germany had still not addressed or understood the Nazi period in the way it should have. One new idea that is worth pointing out in this article, however, is Meinhof’s reference to terrorism. She writes, “And suddenly, brown is the same as red, and oppression the same as protest against oppression...terror from the Left is the same as terror from the Right.” Meinhof differentiates between the causes and seems to justify terror tactics as long as they serve a righteous purpose, such as fighting her idea of oppression. Her tolerant attitude towards violence, coupled with her transition to an active resistor of the government voiced in another article from 1968, shows the inclinations that brought her closer to her involvement with the RAF. In “From Protest to Resistance,” Meinhof paraphrases Black Panther leader Fred Hampton, stating:

Protest is when I say I don’t like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don’t like. Protest is when I say I refuse to go along with this any more. Resistance is when I make sure everybody else stops going along too.  

Along with her declaration in the same article that “The fun is over,” Meinhof signaled the end of her passive approach of simply writing down her opinions as a journalist. While her involvement with the RAF did not officially begin until later, these two columns from 1968 seem to indicate her readiness to take her beliefs to the next level. Meinhof saw herself as resisting a West German government that was comparable to Hitler’s Germany, but she was driven by current issues she saw as mirroring the past, not by the memory of Nazi victims and perpetrators.

**Correspondence between Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper, 1968-69**

While Meinhof was still writing for *konkret*, Gudrun Ensslin was a step ahead in her radicalism, committing arson, going on trial, and then going on the run in 1968-69. During this time, she

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182 Meinhof, “From Protest to Resistance,” in *Everybody Talks about the Weather*, p. 239.
corresponded with her ex-fiancé Bernward Vesper, son of the famous Nazi poet Will Vesper, who looked after their son, Felix, in Ensslin’s absence. Their collected letters in the volume *Notstandgesetze von Deiner Hand* (*Emergency Laws from Your Hand*) provide a fascinating and surprisingly mundane insight into their lives at the time. The letters’ value to this investigation, while less extensive than that of other sources, is important because it consists of documents that were intended to be private, presenting a materialistic side of Ensslin as a woman, perhaps like any other, requesting comforts such as eyeliner and shampoo.

While many sources can lead a researcher to believe that Ensslin and other RAF members had one-track minds when it came to their mission, these letters prove that family and day-to-day happenings were still present to them, albeit in a way that evidently was still subservient to their political beliefs considering their dedication to them at all costs. The bulk of these letters do not belong here in any depth, but an acknowledgment of their largely unexciting content is worth mentioning as a contrast to the heated rhetoric of most other RAF documents. Most of the content relevant to this discussion, which I will present here, actually comes from Vesper, who supported Ensslin and her cause despite her desertion of their family to pursue it.

That Ensslin is under a significant amount of stress is evident in her letters to Vesper, even before the arson in April 1968. While still living with her parents and her son in Stuttgart in January of 1968, Ensslin wrote, “I am tired in my bones and even more so in my brain.” Ensslin frequently asks Vesper and others to send her packages while in prison, although she seems concerned about the cost and the burden of doing so and often writes the lists begrudgingly; in a May 1968 letter she writes, “now the shitty part again, the list.” Two weeks after the arson, on April 14, 1968, Ensslin wrote from prison asking Vesper to send, in addition to a picture of Felix:

1 brassiere (in a cellophane bag in the little dresser)

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184 Ensslin, 11 May, 1968 in *Notstandgesetze*, 82.
1 pair of light blue panties (also [in the little dresser])
Pen or pencil (this is all I have here)
1 Maja soap (only if you don’t eat or smoke less because of it)
I can also buy cigarettes myself now.
(If someone fatter and richer asks you what I want, then say:
1 Crème Hydratante from Orlânel)
1 Sulfrin Shampoo
1 Lakalut toothpaste (my teeth are bleeding and my hair is falling out. It isn’t a complaint, that’s just how it is)...
...If you don’t need it, perhaps send me Rosa L.? [Rosa Luxemburg]

After her birthday, Ensslin recounts to Vesper the fun she had, at this point out of jail after her release in June. She writes:

I gawked, totally baffled and almost hysterical, at all the things I got for my birthday, 28 insanely beautiful roses, tons of barbarically good sausage—I stood there and ate out of both hands at first—, sweets, fruit, cakes, good heavens...

These types of statements, either asking for supplies, talking about the packages she received, or especially asking for money, are found very frequently throughout Ensslin’s letters to Vesper. Even in these, however, we can see that Ensslin was constantly strapped for money and supplies. Her health also seems to have deteriorated, considering that she mentions her teeth bleeding and her hair falling out while she is in custody.

Ensslin also mentions Felix often, requesting pictures, news about him, and sometimes making suggestions about his care. When Felix was about to turn one year old, she wrote Vesper to express her concern that he should have help in looking after the child, writing, “If he were 3 or 5, then there would be no question about where he should go, in a commune. But that won’t work now.” Ensslin expresses worry about her son’s future, telling Vesper in June 1968: “Meanwhile, I am...slowly sure, that we will always find a way so that no one separates from Felix; and at some point he will grasp that he has two types of affection and two worlds.”

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185 Ensslin, 14 April, 1968 in Notstandsgesetze, 35-36.
186 Ensslin, 17 August, 1968 in Notstandsgesetze, 128.
187 Ensslin, 2 May, 1968 in Notstandsgesetze, 58.
188 Ensslin, 20 June, 1968 in Notstandsgesetze, 106.
Ensslin still thought like a mother at this point and considered both her son and her own comfort in her letters to Vesper.

Ensslin does not discuss political theory nearly as much as expected in her letters to Vesper; in fact, Vesper is the one who initiates most of the conversations about politics. It is clear, however, that Ensslin was reading the works of relevant political philosophers during this period, such as Rosa Luxemburg, Marx, Mao, and Jürgen Habermas, along with French author Marcel Proust. In the only instance where she does mention political theory more than in passing, Ensslin’s words foreshadow some of her future endeavors in putting theory into action. On August 24, 1968 she writes to Vesper:

What the [European] struggle of socialism has been missing for 100 years is, however, the “insane” element—but we have the lessons in insanity, Bolivia or Vietnam or Cuba or also China or Oct. 1917 itself; how many actions, demonstrations, etc. must not fail or be defeated until one day the situation emerges, in which the struggle no longer fails. Truism, I know; but we forget it so often,—fatigue, sluggishness, lethargy after false hopes, etc. Oh well. In any case, I don’t have the fatigue…

Ensslin believes that she has the answer to the success of the struggle for socialism in Europe, which is to pick up on the violent, revolutionary examples of the international struggles she lists. She claims to be prepared to engage in this revolutionary struggle, although others are not; Ensslin saw herself as having the vision and dedication that others lacked. Her opinion here on the nature of armed struggle suggests that Ensslin was eager to do more than talk, which she had already proven and would prove even further as a leader of the RAF.

Vesper writes the most about political matters the most in this collection of correspondences, and he is the only one who references the Nazi past. While Vesper never joined the RAF, he was a left-wing contemporary of Ensslin and the others, sharing many of the same viewpoints especially in light of his personal involvement with Ensslin. For this reason, and because his personal history with a Nazi ideologue for a father deeply affected him, Vesper’s opinion on the Nazi period can serve as a view from the outside of the RAF, but from the inside of the close circle of radical student activists. Vesper

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discusses political matters with reference to his son, Felix, a few times in his correspondence. In one particularly amusing instance, while discussing his daily routine with the toddler, Vesper writes, “In the morning, the bottle [for Felix] (I know, he should eat proper adult food, but I do it because he likes it and it is also antiauthoritarian, he still gets cookies and other hard foods...).” Vesper expresses a viewpoint consistent with the idea of “antiauthoritarian child rearing” advanced by the socio-critical philosophers of the Frankfurt school, which became popular among members of the so-called 1968 generation. It seems that Vesper incorporated attempts to subvert the dominant strains of society into raising his child, defying developmental recommendations to wean him at a certain age. Even if this was not his entire motivation for this type of child care, the fact that he mentions it provides a window into the lengths he went to prove his beliefs—or perhaps to impress the woman who left him to become a professional antiauthoritarian.

In another reference, Vesper describes Felix and other around him as victims, stating, “We should finally recognize ourselves as victims, Felix, you, me, the people who detain you, in the prisons, the stony repression of society’s feelings of guilt.” Vesper’s idea of victimhood here is similar to how Meinhof presented the situation of activists in the konkret columns, alluding to control and manipulation by the state and society. Vesper expresses that even though Ensslin has committed a crime, her motivation and the consequences of the action come as a result of being victimized by society. This idea in a passive sense seems important here because the idea of a victim has an inherently passive quality; Ensslin passively sits in prison (even though her actions put her there), implicating her family as victims in this too. For a victimizer to succeed, the situation requires a willing participant on the receiving end, and although Vesper and Ensslin support an active resistance, Vesper sets this up as a response to initial victimization by society. A victimization complex does not necessarily imply a

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191 The Frankfurt School included philosophers such as Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas, all of whom were influential to the West German student movement.
192 Vesper, 21 or 28 July, 1968 in Notstandsgesetze, 121.
connection to Nazi victims, but Vesper does directly reference this idea in connection with the Nazi period in later passages.

In a November 1968 published exposition on Ensslin and her comrades’ conviction for arson, Vesper frequently alludes to the Nazi period. On what he believed was the unfair nature of the trial and the justice system as a whole, Vesper writes:

A so-called trial would be won by those who defend “law and order,” but must be won by those who have made up the rules of the game themselves because, as Bloch notes, the ruling law and the ruling order are always the law and order of the ruling class. In reality [the trial] was lost by a generation...in any case people who identify with the system they pay into, who belong to that generation that, in 1938, failed to torch department stores out of protest against fascism...

Clearly skeptical of the basis of the legal system, Vesper continued to see Ensslin and others, including the overall West German public, as victims of ruling class domination. It seems that he sees no possibility for a fair trial of those who act against the ruling class, if the trial itself and the laws it is based on all derive from the interests of the ruling class. Then, Vesper continues with an analogy that we have already seen employed by Meinhof, comparing his generation to the previous one and blaming the war generation for not stopping fascism. Vesper implicitly suggests that Germans should have staged a counter-protest to the Nazi pogrom against Jewish businesses in 1938, Kristallnacht, by burning down department stores—also suggesting that Baader, Ensslin and company were doing precisely this with their arson in opposition to contemporary fascist policies.

Keeping with the same theme of comparing the Nazi period to his contemporary situation, Vesper then makes a series of references comparing the Third Reich to the Vietnam War:

Understanding—what does that mean?—Hitler found it, the war of extermination against the Vietnamese revolution is finding it...

The legitimation of jail sentences for convicted anti-fascists under the Third Reich

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developed...into the war against the Vietnamese revolution, into the political trial after the official end of German fascism in 1945.\textsuperscript{196}

Here, Vesper recognizes continuity between political repression under the Nazis and Western governments’ repression of dissenting political groups in the form of communist revolutionaries. Both the Nazis and capitalist powers during the Cold War saw their political enemies as threats to their ideological power, but Vesper saw West Germany as using Nazi methods to silence its opponents, including the arsonists. Vesper saw the arson trial, for a crime in protest of the Vietnam War, as analogous to Nazi persecution of political dissidents. The term he uses in the first quote above, calling Vietnam a “war of extermination,” is a deliberate reference to the Holocaust as well. The German term for extermination, \textit{Vernichtung}, is distinctly connected to the extermination of the Jews in death camps. Vesper’s choice of this word underscores not only the connection he forges between Vietnam and Hitler, but also brings the Holocaust into the fold instead of leaving it at Nazi political repression.

Felix Ensslin, the subject of many of his parents’ letters in this volume, contributes an Afterword to the story of the events surrounding his childhood. Largely sympathetic, Felix tries to explain his parents’ actions using a generational context that hearkens back to German history. Of his parents’ generation, Felix says:

\begin{quote}
The generation that was born back in the years of the Nazi war...experienced more strongly, more often, and more violently that it is possible to shatter the old ...They paid a price for that, as did others. But this experience, I repeat, is not uncommon: every life begins in the traumatic place of the narrative from which it emerges.\textsuperscript{197}
\end{quote}

In his view, the activism of his parents’ generation resulted at least in part from its experience as a group born amidst the destruction of the war and what the Nazis wrought. His statement sets forth that this generation took action to split itself from the old, and their methods were violent because they came out of violence. Felix also seems to say, in his last line undermining the uniqueness of this generation, that any group of people born in the wake of such trauma would have reacted in the same way in

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{196} Vesper, “Nachwort,” in Notstandsgesetze, 168.
\end{flushright}
Germany, and indeed that many people do react this way in the rest of the world. The psychological intricacies of Felix’s relationship to his parents is not in the scope of this paper nor in my realm of expertise, but his explanation more or less justifying his parents reactions provides an interesting contrast to Bettina Röhl’s near condemnation of her mother, Ulrike Meinhof.

Vesper presents ideas similar to Meinhof’s with regards to the fascist nature of the West German government, the guilt of the perpetrator generation, and ideas about political repression and the injustice of Vietnam and the Cold War in general. One curiosity of the letters between Vesper and Ensslin is that Ensslin never mentions fascism or the Nazi period. This is surprising, given the frequent references to this period in her later writings, and perhaps it serves as an argument against the idea that she saw fascism as a constant threat. The intended audience of these letters, however, most likely explains why Ensslin never mentions the Nazis or even any significant political discussion at all. Vesper is the one who tends to bring up political ideas and concerns, not Ensslin; most of her letters to Vesper are discussing far more innocent matters than one would expect. The most likely explanation for this is that Ensslin did not view Vesper as an intellectual equal worthy of lengthy theoretical discussion. In places she seems frustrated with him, calling him an “idiot” and claiming that he has “the bourgeois brain” of the two of them.198 Her preoccupations in these letters seem to be with obtaining money, cigarettes, and other creature comforts from Vesper and her parents. In this way, it seems that Ensslin sees Vesper as someone she can use to get what she wants and to stay in contact with her son, although only he expresses a serious desire to reunite their family. The lack of concern for the threat of fascism or avenging Germany’s Nazi history is perhaps not significant in Ensslin’s letters to Vesper considering the startling lack of political discourse in general. Ensslin clearly talked about different issues to different people, as evidenced by her later correspondences with her RAF comrades in Stammheim.

IV. The Writings of the RAF: Active Years and Incarceration, 1970-1977

Founding Declarations and Pre-May Offensive, June 1970 – April 1972

On June 5, 1970 the article “Die Rote Armee Aufbauen” (“Build up the Red Army”) appeared in the Berlin anarchist publication Agit 883. This piece, meant to explain the effort to free Baader from custody a few weeks previously, was the first of many published RAF declarations clarifying their actions and political positions. Using Martin Hoffmann’s edited collection, I will attempt to interpret the RAF publications between the group’s formation in 1970 and the arrest of its key members in 1972. 199 These texts show how the RAF described its motives and intentions during its early actions and the “May Offensive” of 1972, which was the climax of bombings and robberies before the arrests in the summer of that year. They also show how the RAF presented itself to the public, conveying how its members wanted West Germans to view their positions and its actions during this period. Most believe that Meinhof was the primary author of these texts, owing to her background in journalism and penchant for theory.

In the first official RAF statement mentioned above, “Red Army,” there are no direct references to fascism or to the Nazi period, as Holger Nehring has also noted. 200 Instead, the group lays out its intentions, claiming to speak to the “potentially revolutionary section of the people.” 201 The RAF states that it plans to bring “the conflicts”—between the powerful and powerless groups in society—“to a head” and that the revolution they aim to incite “will not be an Easter parade.” 202 Their mission is, in their words, “to not let yourself be slaughtered” by the authority figures in society such as the police, who they claim resort to violent methods to solve society’s problems. 203 While the authors do not

202 “Rote Armee,” 25. Original phrase in the first quote: “Um die Konflikte auf die Spitze treiben zu können, bauen wir die Rote Armee auf.”
203 “Rote Armee,” 25.
reference German history in this declaration, a strong sense of victimization is clear from their description of the functioning of society—that authority figures dominate those not in power in a “rule by pigs” aimed at oppressing the lower classes.\textsuperscript{204} They also found it evident that “punishment for political [activists] will be tightened,” meaning that they saw increasing trouble on the horizon for those who spoke out in opposition to the government politically.\textsuperscript{205} In her \textit{konkret} pieces, Meinhof invoked a similar sense of victimization time and again and compared it to that of Holocaust victims, and Vesper also used a narrative of victimhood in his writings. Although we can assume some continuity in Meinhof’s thoughts on the issue of authority, Nazi or even fascist references are curiously absent from “Red Army.” This silence on German history in the official statements of the RAF does not last, however, as evidenced by the group’s other declarations from the early 1970s.

The next two documents of the RAF work in references to Nazi history more explicitly. In “\textit{Das Konzept Stadtguerilla}” (“The Concept of the Urban Guerilla”) from April 1971, the RAF attempted to clarify its positions after what it considered to be unfair media portrayals of the group after its first declaration the previous year.\textsuperscript{206} \textsuperscript{207} The source of the backlash against the RAF was the serious injury of a bystander, George Linke, in the operation to free Baader, representing a civilian death in the course of the armed struggle.\textsuperscript{208} The piece is a lengthy treatise on Marxist and Maoist doctrine, using quotes from the Chinese leader, references to vague concepts such as “the System” and rhetorical, circular ideas such as, “The ruling-class public is the public of the ruling class...”\textsuperscript{209} At one point, in explaining the importance of the urban guerilla understanding his or her own purpose, the author accuses the \textit{Bild} newspaper of applying the idea of an “Anti-Semitism-criminal-\textit{Untermensch}-murder & burning...”

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{204} Bullenherrschaft, “Rote Armee,” 24.
\textsuperscript{205} “Rote Armee,” 25.
\textsuperscript{206} “\textit{Das Konzept Stadtguerilla},” in Hoffman, pp. 27-48.
\textsuperscript{207} On “\textit{Das Konzept Stadtguerilla}” and the strategic differences between Meinhof and Horst Mahler, who initially competed with Meinhof for position of main ideologue of the group, see Bernhard Gierds, “\textit{Das ‘Konzept Stadtguerilla’}: Meinhof, Mahler und ihre strategischen Differenzen,” in Kraushaar, ed., \textit{Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus}, 248-261.
\textsuperscript{208} For a deeper analysis, see Jeremy Varon, \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 203-207.
\textsuperscript{209} “Urban Guerilla,” 43 and various other places with reference to the System. Original line: “Herrschende Öffentlichkeit ist die Öffentlichkeit der Herrschenden...”
\end{footnotesize}
syndrome” to the revolutionaries. The term Untermensch—literally, sub-human—refers to the Nazi ideological concept of peoples considered racially lower than Aryans, especially Slavic peoples.

The rest of the passage contains no explanation of this curious conglomeration of terms other than that it is “all the shit that only isolates [the revolutionaries],” but the string of words is clearly connected to Holocaust history. What we can decipher is that the RAF believed the press put this label on their group, they denied that allegation, and they called it a “syndrome,” possibly implying a mental delusion not based in serious historical fact. Later in “Urban Guerilla,” the authors allege that the government is carrying out a “mass mobilization” reminiscent of fascism, including “cracking down” and employing a “death penalty” to assert its power. These overt references to Nazi policies—in this instance, racial theory, anti-Semitism, death by burning, and fascist police terror—emerge in “Urban Guerilla” and continue through several of the other RAF declarations in 1971-72.

In May 1971, one month after “Urban Guerilla,” the RAF published “Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa” (“On the Armed Struggle in Western Europe”). This piece deals with fascism in more depth, using explicit references to the Nazi period and also emphasizing the link between fascism and capitalism, often using the two terms interchangeably; this tactic continues through most of the RAF’s writings into their later works. Using the well-worn method of listing several contemporary episodes in the same breath as the Holocaust, the authors write:

The names of Auschwitz, Setif [Algeria], Vietnam, Indonesia, Amman [Jordan] stand for the knowledge that massacres do not belong in the systems of government of the past, rather they still belong to the instruments of the ruling class.

The first two examples, Auschwitz and Setif, are from the Second World War. The meaning of Auschwitz

211 Jews were not considered to be even in this category, but eventually designated instead as “Lebensunwertes Leben”—“life unworthy of life.”
212 “Urban Guerilla,” 43.
213 “Urban Guerilla,” 47.
214 “Über den bewaffneten Kampf in Westeuropa” in Hoffmann, pp. 49-111.
215 “Westeuropa,” 50. Original uses the term “Herrschaftssysteme” for “systems of government,” implying a ruling class in power.
is clear, and Setif refers to the town in Algeria where French soldiers massacred largely Muslim Algerian natives on V-E Day, 1945 in response to anti-colonial protests. The choice of Setif as a pairing with Auschwitz is interesting because of all the tragedies of World War II, the authors chose one with a colonial implication, drawing attention to imperialism in Algeria. Auschwitz, however, particularly registers with Germans and, while not colonial in nature, is indicative of the atrocities of what the RAF would call Nazi imperialism.

The next three examples are Cold War struggles: the Vietnam War, anti-communist purges of 1965-66 in Indonesia, and Black September 1970 in Amman, Jordan when King Hussein targeted Palestinian organizations. The quote alleges that all five examples of massacres were carried out by the hegemony (*Herrschaft*), implying a Marxist sense of an international ruling class considering the international nature of the events. The RAF, however, tended to see the Cold War struggle as the West playing puppeteer to Third World conflicts, so *Western* capitalism seems to be pulling the strings of local oppressive powers in this statement. As evidenced here, the RAF saw the Western capitalist system as backing and employing murderous methods, tying together Nazi German capitalism, French imperialism, and Arab and Southeast Asian Cold War struggles as examples of the dangers of this overarching system in power.

In the remainder of “On the Armed Struggle in Western Europe,” the authors present arguments about fascism and capitalism in Europe as they relate to the perceived class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the lower classes. The authors write that the class struggle “found its temporary consumption in the Italian Black Shirts, the ‘Sturmabteilung’ (SA) and the ‘Schutzstaffeln’ (SS) of the Nazis.” The Marxist class struggle is seen as one against fascist forces, not least because fascism is a capitalist system. The RAF says that the class struggle manifested itself in twentieth-century Europe as

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216 The Palestinian terrorist group Black September, perpetrators of the 1972 killing of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, took its name from these events in Jordan.

217 “Westeuropa,” 55. Original word *Vollendung*, meaning consummation, completion, or perfection.
fascist governments oppressing their peoples in a “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.” The equation of Italian and Nazi fascism with Marxist class struggle, however, does ignore the fundamentally racist nature of these political systems, especially in the Nazi case. While race does play a role in Marxist theory as a factor that further alienates the working class, especially in colonial systems, the division of the class struggle is primarily economic. The RAF’s argument that the SA and the SS, the perpetrators of the Holocaust, were acting within a system driven by economic factors with no mention of anti-Semitism, while negligent, also shows their further insistence that German history holds continuity with the struggles happening in the present between forces of capitalism and communism. The only alternative to communism the authors present is fascist capitalism, which was found not only in Italy and Germany of the 1930s-40s, but also in the U.S. and in Western Europe of the 1960s-70s.

In April 1972’s “Dem Volk dienen: Stadtguerilla und Klassenkampf” (“To Serve the People: the Urban Guerilla and Class Struggle”) the RAF turned its attention toward social issues in West Germany, especially the living and working conditions of immigrants, addressing these issues with reference to Nazi history. They open by accusing the West German government of installing “execution commandos” in police forces and describing annual deaths they attribute to the capitalist system including deaths in car accidents because car companies produce for profit, and suicides of those who would rather kill themselves than die in “service of capital.” They describe the recent deaths of their own comrades as having been “in the struggle against dying in service to the exploiter,” meaning that they would rather die fighting the system than die taking part in it.

Pointing out the ills of this allegedly murderous system, the authors criticize the representative of this system himself, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt (1969-1974). Brandt, who spent the war years in Norway fighting against German occupiers, was seen by many as a leader with a “clean slate”

218 “Westeuropa,” 58.
219 Section on “the fascism of the USA” found in “Westeuropa,” 106.
221 “Dem Volk,” 112.
from the Nazi years, ushering in an era of new beginnings and a break from the Nazi legacy. The RAF, however, portrays Brandt as continuing Nazi policies by supporting the Shah of Iran and restrictive domestic policies. The following passage references one of his most famous actions as Chancellor, kneeling in front of a memorial to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943) on a visit to Poland in 1970:

After the Chancellor fell to his knees in Poland, now he falls to his knees before the murderer, the Shah. The subjugation of the Polish, Russian, Czech, and Hungarian peoples under German fascism is not current any more. The subjugation of the Persian people under German imperialism is current. The Nuremberg Laws are not current any more. Laws against Iranian students, against Greek, Turkish and Spanish workers, who come from countries with fascist regimes, are current.

The authors draw direct parallels here between Nazi policies and contemporary West German policies. The image of the kneeling Chancellor was symbolic of commemoration of the victims of Nazi crimes and of reconciliation with the East for the past and the present. Here, this act is compared to what the authors see as Brandt’s bowing to the Shah; more specifically, however, the authors saw Brandt as bowing to pressures from his Western allies, especially the United States, and supporting the oppressive government of the Shah. In this way, Iranians were victims of “German imperialism” in an ideological sense, because West Germany’s attempt to spread capitalist ideology and maintain Western influence in Iran subjugated the true desires of the Persian people. In the comparison with the German occupation of Eastern Europe, the authors claimed that just as Germany committed the atrocities of the Nazi period, so again it was aiding atrocities in another part of the world as a result of the contemporary Cold War struggle. The notion of expansion is also important here because this was a key component of Nazi policies in the East, and the RAF contends that it was also central to the position of West Germany and its allies in advancing the capitalist cause.

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223 The German term for this is the “Warschauer Kniefall,” literally the “Genuflection of Warsaw,” which I have glossed in the quote, replacing Kniefall with “fell to his knees.” This gesture came to symbolize Brandt’s overall policy of Ostpolitik, in which he fostered a more open dialogue with the Eastern Bloc countries, especially the GDR.

224 “Dem Volk,” 114. The original uses the word “aktuell,” meaning current, contemporary, or relevant. I chose not to use “relevant” as a translation to avoid any value judgment it could convey.
The next example compares the contemporary situation of students in Iran and foreign workers in Germany to the Nazi Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which legally defined who was “Jewish” and forbade non-Jews and Jews from marrying, among other prohibitions. The passage references the phenomenon of immigrant workers in Germany called Gastarbeiter or “guest workers.” An important constituency of the German labor force, guest workers first arrived in Germany in the 1950s and continued to immigrate throughout the 1970s, especially from Turkey after 1961. These workers often lived and worked in poor conditions in industrial jobs, which the RAF references here as unjust and on par with the conditions resulting from the Nuremberg Laws. These statements attempt to show parallel efforts of German laws to cordon off “non-German” sections of society and single them out for mistreatment and the dissolution of their rights. There is a distinct racial component to this comparison as well, equating laws that racially defined Jewishness with laws regarding foreign workers, against whom many Germans were and still are on some level xenophobic or racially prejudiced. The ethnic element adds an extra level of comparison to the RAF’s claim here. One important aspect of this passage and of the piece “Dem Volk dienen” in general is the shift in focus from the repression of the West German student movement, which by this time had dissolved, to the perceived repression of those in the Third World (Iran) and those of the lower classes in West Germany (guest workers).

The authors further define their point about immigrant workers later in the article, writing:

After ten years of immigrant employment in the Federal Republic—since the Wall in 1961—the accident rates of immigrants are double that of German workers, which are already high enough, the accommodations are still ghettos...and the foreign workers are starting to organize...in case the constitution changes to take away more of their rights.226

The parallel between the Jews and the guest workers continues here, where the RAF refers to worker housing as “ghettos,” referencing the Jewish ghettos of the Holocaust. The image presented here is

226 “Dem Volk,” 127.
striking, and it goes along with the previous reference to the Nuremberg Laws: a disenfranchised, non-German segment of society made to live in a designated section of a city, often in poor conditions with little to no opportunity to leave. While not a counter-factual characterization of the situation of guest workers in Germany, the imagery connecting this arrangement to the Jewish ghettos is certainly exaggerated. Just as the Nuremberg Laws served as a pre-cursor to the total loss of the rights of Jews in Germany, the authors foreshadowed a similar fate for guest workers if there was no resistance to what the RAF saw as restrictive policies. While genocide was certainly never on the agenda of West Germany regarding its immigrant population in the 1970s, the idea of a “slippery slope” of government control and oppression was not a new tactic for the RAF. Ulrike Meinhof employed the same reasoning in her *konkret* columns, claiming that communists and other dissidents were also experiencing an erosion of civil liberties and facing the prospect of “new ghettos.” The RAF continued to use the allegory of ghettos and other elements of the Holocaust to make a point about the West German government.

Addressing the perceived oppression of the working class in West Germany, the authors of "*Dem Volk dienen*” ask rhetorically, “What do the comrades actually expect in a country that could endure Auschwitz without resistance? In which the workers’ movement has the history of the German workers’ movement and the police the history of the SS?” The “history of the German workers’ movement” mentioned here is most likely a reference to the full name of the Nazi Party, which was the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP). Playing on the theme of German inaction during the Nazi period, the RAF expresses here that passivity in the face of discrimination and oppression was nothing new to the German public; the RAF saw itself as responding to this passivity by taking action to fight what it saw as a new version of the oppression of Nazism. Here, once again, “Auschwitz” is used to symbolize the entirety of Nazi crimes and as a compass with which all following German issues orient themselves. Comparing West German police to the SS

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227 “*Dem Volk,*” 128.
here is important because it expresses a theme that the RAF points out numerous times in this work and others—police brutality and “terror” as evidence of a fascist state repressing all resistance. Although in many cases the police were merely responding to the RAF’s violent attacks, the RAF saw this, or more importantly wanted the public to see this, as evidence of a police state and terror against German citizens who resisted state policies.  

Near the end of the piece, the conservative press also becomes entangled in the Nazi accusations and the discourse about class struggle. The RAF writes, on the subject of the Springer-owned newspaper *BILD*:

Still before the exploited masses turn away from the institutions of the *Rechtsstaat*, *BILD* has turned away from them; before they can set up the dissatisfaction with the class state as class consciousness, *BILD* places itself at the peak of dissatisfaction, there, where the Nazis stood in 1933, appointed by capital, not by the proletariat.

The *Rechtsstaat*, literally the “state of law,” is a legal concept most closely approximated to the idea of rule of law in the American system, where government authority is constrained by law. The RAF clearly did not believe the West German system lived up to its billing as a *Rechtsstaat*, having produced institutions that oppressed and exploited “the masses.” The *BILD* press stands for a tool by which conservative forces in society manipulated the people and played on their dissatisfaction, just as the Nazis did in 1933 with respect to the alleged economic ruin wrought by the Treaty of Versailles. An interesting aspect of this claim is that the RAF names a private company, *BILD*, as the entity that was poised to manipulate Germans like the Nazis did, and not the West German government. One possible reason for this is that the RAF saw *BILD* and other Springer publications as a kind of propaganda wing of the capitalist government, absent the official Ministry of Propaganda that existed under the Nazis. The

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229 “*Dem Volk*,” 135.
government itself perhaps did not have the resources to manipulate the people, but the conservative elements of the press did have reach and influence.

Again, we also see the intersection of economics and accusations of Nazism in this example. At a time when German economic recovery was of paramount importance, the Nazis gained power as a result of promises of prosperity. The fascist system, as the RAF would argue both the Nazis and the Springer press represented, played into the hands of big business—those with “capital”—instead of workers, the “proletariat.” In what the RAF saw as a further example of manipulation, both the Nazis and the West German government claimed to seek benefits for the working classes, but in reality their policies ignored the proletariat as capitalist systems always do. According to the RAF, these governments, then, were propped up by those with economic means and influence in service of the capitalists’ cause, disregarding the German workers but also manipulating them into believing the governments fought for the proletariat. The RAF presents here yet another instance of drawing parallels between the Nazis and West German conservatives on the basis of economic policy and the common tie of capitalism, foreshadowing the dark road the group saw ahead for West Germans if they failed to resist manipulation this time. In this example it is clear that, to the RAF, Nazi Germany served as a cautionary tale showing the danger of capitalist regimes like their own government of the 1970s.

**The May Offensive and Early Incarceration, May 1972 – 1975**

May 1972 marked the high point of the first generation of the RAF’s direct involvement in terrorist attacks, preceding their capture in June of that year. The group issued statements claiming responsibility for and explaining the motive behind the attacks. Of the six statements I have examined in Hoffmann’s volume, only two mention fascism or Nazi history, but where this is mentioned, the RAF references Nazi atrocities and U.S. actions in Vietnam together and intermingled in one dialogue about imperialism. The first place fascism is mentioned is in “Anschläge in Augsburg und München” (“Attacks in Augsburg and Munich”), a statement from May 14, 1972 claiming responsibility for the bombings of
U.S. military bases in those cities. In the brief statement, the authors call police tactics in response to their actions “fascist,” accuse them of using “execution commandos,” and they reference their cause as the “struggle for liberation from fascism.” These accusations are rather tame for RAF standards and mimic language we have seen before justifying their acts of terror.

The most interesting statements the RAF makes regarding Nazi history in these short declarations are found in “Bombenanschlag auf das Hauptquartier der US-Army in Europa in Heidelberg” (“Bomb Attack on the Headquarters of the US-Army in Europe in Heidelberg”) from May 16, 1972. This statement outlines the RAF’s reasons for attacking the U.S. Army Headquarters in Heidelberg, done primarily in protest of the Vietnam War and West Germany’s support of American policies there. The RAF writes, “The American air force has dropped more bombs over Vietnam in the last 7 weeks than in World War II over Germany and Japan combined...It is genocide, the murder of a people, it will be the ‘Final Solution,’ it is Auschwitz.” These statements clearly display what the RAF saw as the egregious nature of the U.S. campaign in Vietnam, with the cruel nature of U.S. attacks at the heart of these accusations of genocide. This time, instead of directly decrying the West German government, America is at the core of the criticism here; German support is still at issue, but the RAF’s attack killed Americans and the declaration places responsibility for this new “Auschwitz” in the hands of the American military. Again here we see the accusation that the Cold War has brought about historical circumstances that mirror those of Nazi Germany, this time with Western powers planning the “Final Solution” for communists around the world. The statement continues with:

The people of the Federal Republic will not support the security forces in their hunt for the bombers, because they want nothing to do with the crimes of American imperialism and endorsement of them by the ruling class here. Because they have not forgotten

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231 “Anschläge,” 145-146.
233 “Bombenanschlag,” 148. The original uses both Genozid and Völkermord, which can be translated as “genocide,” but I have translated the latter here directly as “the murder of a people” to differentiate in English.
Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hamburg because they know that bomb attacks on the mass murderers of Vietnam are justified.\textsuperscript{234}

With this, the focus turns to German support for the American mission and the RAF, speaking as though they represent the interests of all West Germans, justify their actions as both avenging the past and protesting its reappearance in the present. Here, the RAF directly calls the U.S. imperialist, which they see as connected to the German “ruling class” and by extension this capitalistic “ruling class” of the entire Western world. The most interesting part of this statement, however, is the grouping of Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hamburg together in the same context used to illustrate war crimes similar to what the RAF sees in Vietnam. Allied forces bombed Hamburg during World War II similarly to the attack on Dresden, but conditions created an unanticipated firestorm and massive destruction of life and property. Meinhof had already compared German and British war crimes in her \textit{konkret} column “Dresden” from 1965, so this tactic is not new, but here it is directly connected to Vietnam.\textsuperscript{235} Colvin argues that the juxtaposition of Auschwitz with Dresden and Hamburg “implies that all three were situations in which the German people were not perpetrators, but victims,” placing blame only on the leaders of Britain and Germany and not on the citizens.\textsuperscript{236} Colvin claims that the RAF, in exchange for support of their bombing, was “offering ordinary Germans a chance to declare themselves victims of the Nazi past.”\textsuperscript{237}

While the RAF portrays themselves and the public as victims in this declaration, the nature of the perpetrators is important to note: the RAF was using Auschwitz, Hamburg, and Dresden as examples of manipulation and destruction at the hand of capitalist powers. We have already seen that the RAF blamed the Holocaust on the capitalist fascism of the Nazis, and the U.S. and Britain as perpetrators of Dresden and Hamburg are the same countries that continued to exert capitalist influence during the

\textsuperscript{234} “Bombenanschlag,” 148.
\textsuperscript{235} Meinhof, “Dresden,” in \textit{Everybody Talks about the Weather}, 134-137.
\textsuperscript{236} Colvin, \textit{Ulrike Meinhof}, 124.
\textsuperscript{237} Colvin, \textit{Ulrike Meinhof}, 124.
Cold War period. In other words, capitalist powers caused the mass destruction of Auschwitz, Dresden, and Hamburg, and they were now committing the same crimes in Vietnam; thus, these powers deserved any attacks against them in retribution for and memory of the crimes they continued to commit. In this way, the RAF saw Nazi crimes as being in the same category as Allied attacks on the aggressor country, Germany, because they connect both of these examples to the larger picture of capitalism versus communism. While this paradigm may not be an exclusively Cold War creation, it certainly forms the basis of the continuity the RAF sees between conflicts past and present, and thus the basis for condemnation of Nazi and American wrongdoing.

In November 1972, awaiting trial after her arrest in June, Meinhof issued a statement on behalf of the RAF entitled “Die Aktion des ‘Schwarzen September’ in München” (“The Action of ‘Black September’ in Munich”), expressing her support for the Palestinian terrorists that murdered eleven Israeli Olympic athletes. Meinhof and Baader had been on the list of prisoners Black September demanded released in exchange for their hostages. Meinhof’s statement delves into the incredibly sensitive territory of anti-Zionism and left-wing anti-Semitism, calling Israel not only fascist but a Nazi country. At the same time, this piece maintains the RAF’s general trend of claiming to fight fascism and imperialism worldwide, supporting the mission of Black September which Meinhof argues is congruent with their own fight for liberation.

Section three of this declaration is entitled “Fascism,” dealing with the author’s interpretation of the rise of National Socialism in Germany in terms of capitalism and imperialism. Meinhof writes that Black September was “anti-fascist” and that the group “saw the connection between the old NS-fascism and the imperialism that has unfolded.” The Munich Olympics, she argues, were “supposed to erase the memory of 1936 [Berlin Olympics], Auschwitz and Reichskristallnacht,” but they failed to address

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238 “Die Aktion des ‘Schwarzen September’ in München,” in Hoffmann, Texte und Materialen, pp. 151-177. See 159 for reference to Israel’s “Nazi-fascism” and “capitalist National Socialism.”
“what [was] currently going on in Vietnam, Palestine, Israel’s prisons, Turkey, Uruguay, Brazil, Greece, [and] Persia.”

This statement further emphasizes West Germany’s quest to exonerate themselves from past mistakes but at the same time ignoring what the RAF saw as similar instances of wrongdoing in the present. Instead of holding a successful Olympic games to make up for the Nazi-hosted games of 1936 and the subsequent scourge of Nazi genocide, the focus of the Munich games became the Palestinian struggle against Israel’s Nazi-inspired imperialist policies. Auschwitz, the Nazi Olympics, and the pogrom of Kristallnacht serve as historical examples that Meinhof portrays as comparable to Third World struggles happening in the 1970s.

In an aside, Meinhof calls out the BILD newspaper for its coverage of the Olympics and the Black September incident, writing:

“GOLD-GOLD-GOLD,” gossips, badgers, whistles, nags Bild in the first days of the Olympics – “I saw them die at eleven at night, as the games go on,” was the Bild headline on September 7 – Do you want total victory? – Yes!

The question in the last line, written in the original as “Wollt Ihr den totalen Sieg?,” is a reference to a famous 1943 speech by Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, in which he emphatically asked the crowd at the Berlin Sportpalast (Sport Palace), “Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?” (“Do you want total war?”). In the speech, Goebbels conveyed the importance of dedicating all resources to the war effort in order to turn German luck around after Stalingrad and beat the Allies. The RAF hinted at the connection between BILD and the Nazi propaganda machine before, especially in the declaration “Dem Volk dienen,” but now the accusation was overtly clear. Meinhof portrays the newspaper here as riling up the German public for victory at the Olympics, then continues to encourage a “total victory” as the games continue in the wake of the attacks. BILD’s question garners the response in the original “Jaaaaa!,” reminiscent of the sound of Goebbels’ audience screaming and applauding in agreement with the Nazi Minister. BILD takes on the role here of master manipulator, absent a parallel structure in West

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241 “Aktion des Schwarzen September,” 167. I have preserved the original formatting here. Original ends with “Jaaaaa!”
Germany, inciting the German public who responds resoundingly to the conservative propaganda. While the phrase “GOLD-GOLD-GOLD” would most evidently refer to Olympic gold medals, another possibility is that Meinhof deliberately capitalizes these words to emphasize conservative greed for money, a factor in her theory of capitalist subjugation of the masses. The words jump out immediately at the reader, implying perhaps that greed continues to be the top priority of BILD and the establishment it symbolizes, even in the face of the deaths in Munich.

Next, Meinhof theorizes about the source of National Socialism in Germany, which she deduces to a partnership between corporations and the Nazi Party to win back the support of the petty bourgeoisie, giving rise to the anti-fascist resistance in the process. She writes that the “Flick-, Thyssen-, Krupp-, [and] IG-Farben-corporations...entered, horny, into a deal with the old, dying off petty bourgeoisie” and in turn, into a deal with the “shrewdly ideologically backwards Nazi Party.” The companies she lists were all in some way tied to Nazi industrial production: Flick refers to a powerful German industrial family; Thyssen and Krupp were both steel companies; and IG Farben was a chemical conglomerate that held the patent for the Zyklon-B gas used in the gas chambers of death camps.

Meinhof sees the rise of National Socialism as being directly tied to support from multinational corporations, making the Nazi Party an entity that, with the support of the bourgeoisie, manipulated the German masses. Some Germans, however, saw the “ruling class” as “exposed” for the anti-Semitic and warmongering entity it was, which “made possible the alliance of communists and parts of the bourgeoisie in anti-fascism.”

Meinhof’s argument that the rise of National Socialism originated in corporate, capitalist interests that perpetuated the class struggle in Germany shows her conviction that capitalism truly drove Germany’s and Europe’s past conflicts. The force of capitalism was still thriving in West Germany,

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244. “Aktion des Schwarzen September,” 168.
and Meinhof believed it held as much potential for destruction during the Cold War as it did in 1933.

Criticizing one of her regular targets, former Finance Minister and conservative politician Franz Josef Strauss, Meinhof writes:

[H]e still has the rattling appearance of colonial and Nazi-imperialism, but not yet the fitting etiquette of the corporate executives, he still has the horny relationship to power like Thyssen, Flick, Krupp 1933, still not the developed self-confidence of the multinational corporations.  

She sees Strauss as a holdover from the old order of the capitalists of the 1930s rather than as a contemporary, clean-cut businessman. This makes him, as Meinhof says, “easier” for the “anti-imperialist Left,” presumably meaning that he is easier to identify as a threat because he so clearly represents a destructive era that spawned National Socialism. In this passage, Meinhof identifies two main current dangers: those leftover Nazis, like Strauss, who remain in power, and the modern business executives who perpetuate capitalist class warfare in a more sophisticated way. She implies that at least those like Strauss were visibly part of the old order, whereas the more insidious threat to the present were those capitalists who are camouflaged as executives while still exploiting the people like the old imperialists. In her description of corporate interests tied to National Socialism and to the Cold War, it becomes clear that Meinhof saw the element of overarching international capitalism as orchestrating all of the issues she criticizes in society. Capitalist forces, represented by businesses and conservative politicians old and new, exploited the class struggle to cause National Socialism and the Holocaust, and were doing it again to cause conflict and the eventual destruction of the communist opposition during the Cold War.

The final important theme in the piece Aktion des Schwarzen September is Meinhof’s equation of Israel with a Nazi state in response to its persecution of the Palestinians, justifying the Munich attacks and proclaiming the RAF’s solidarity with the Palestinian cause—which she defines as a part of the

245 “Aktion des Schwarzen September,” 172.
246 “Aktion des Schwarzen September,” 172.
international struggle against imperialism. Meinhof also employed this strategy of equating Israel with Nazis in her *konkret* column “Three Friends of Israel,” that time in response to the Six Day War. Here, Meinhof calls Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan the “Himmler of Israel,” referring to Nazi SS leader Heinrich Himmler. Later, on the German handling of the attacks and Israel, Meinhof writes:

> The imperialist countries abroad were appalled only at the incompetence of the Germans, having once again liquidated not only the communists, but also the Jews...Israel sheds crocodile tears. It burned its athletes like the Nazis did the Jews—fuel for imperialist extermination politics.

The first part of this quote, referencing Nazi murder of communists and Jews, argues that West Germany’s capitalist allies are chastising it for handling the incident badly because it showed their cause in a bad light, just as the Nazis did when they shamed capitalism by carrying out the Holocaust.

Germans, “incompetent” at running their own capitalist system, made other “imperialist” countries look bad again because of murdered Jews. In claiming that Israel “sheds crocodile tears,” Meinhof places blame on Israel for the Munich attacks: Israel feigned grief in spite of its culpability for policies against Palestine, and it also was able to claim even more legitimacy because of the attacks. Meinhof continues with a direct charge comparing the Israeli government to Nazis for “burning” its athletes as “fuel” for their “imperialism;” she claims that Israel sacrificed its athletes in the larger pursuit of subjugating the Palestinians and maintaining a relationship with Western powers. Meinhof is alleging that Israel both brought on and would benefit from the murder of its athletes by Black September, casting both the athletes and the terrorists as pawns in the imperialist capitalists’ game of bidding for dominance. With her statements against Israel, Kundnani argues that Meinhof was now toeing the line dangerously close to anti-Semitism by excusing the murder of Jews. Meinhof’s statements in *Aktion des Schwarzen September* represented her most blatantly anti-Jewish sentiments to date, thinly veiled by the claim of anti-Imperialism and supporting a liberation struggle.

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249 Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz*, 113.
The themes that emerge in the declaration *Aktion des Schwarzen September* are representative of the RAF’s worldview as a whole. They believed that the contemporary conflict between capitalism and communism mirrored the past in many ways, in that the capitalist powers were murderous, destructive, and perpetuated class warfare between the lower classes and the bourgeoisie, who were in line with the “fascism” of the West German government. Israel, in its conflicts with the Palestinians, also fell into this role of imperialism and fascism, which Black September protested by committing the attacks at the Olympics. The RAF saw this incident, along with the rise of the Nazi Party, the Holocaust, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as all resulting from the overarching structure of international capitalist powers vying for power when confronted with internal and external threats. In the 1930s the threat was communism and the Jews within Germany, and in the early 1970s the threat was international communism, which manifested itself in conflicts such as Israel-Palestine and, by extension, the Black September attack. The RAF describes Black September as being in solidarity with its own mission to defeat these capitalist powers, which included both Israel and West Germany. By invoking the Nazi period and connecting Nazi crimes to perceived Israeli crimes, the RAF again focuses directly on a contemporary, Cold War struggle of the Third World, with the Nazi period only as supporting evidence for its larger argument about economic systems and imperialism.

A hallmark of the RAF’s strategy from inside prison was to go on hunger strikes, which they did five times over the course of their incarceration. In the *Hungerstreikerklärung vom 8. Mai 1973* (Hunger Strike Declaration of May 8, 1973), the RAF states that its hunger strike is in protest of prison conditions and overall, of imprisonment as an instrument of a so-called authoritarian state.  

The RAF accuses the government of attempting to “openly terrorize a part of the Proletariat” and even “to exterminate—in the extreme: Treblinka, Ma[j]danek, Sobibor…” The authors allege that the intent behind their and other “political prisoners’” imprisonment is the same as the Nazis’ intent behind the three

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251 “*Hunger Strike*,” 188. The original spells “Majdanek” as “Maidanek.”
extermination camps they list. Referring to the conditions of solitary confinement, the RAF goes on to say, “Our isolation now and soon the concentration camps – extermination camps – Reformtreblinka – Reformbuchenwald – the ‘Final Solution.’ That’s how it looks.” The authors see their own incarceration, which they portray as persecution for their political beliefs, as a precursor to further police terror and detention of political prisoners in Nazi-like extermination camps. They place “Reform” in front of the names Treblinka and Buchenwald, creating a conglomeration that implies concentration camps to correct or “re-educate” political dissidents.

Comparisons between a Western prison and Nazi death camps are exaggerated to say the least, but as Jeremy Varon emphasizes, conditions were actually extreme and unusually harsh for RAF members during the early years of their incarceration. Meinhof, especially, was subjected to isolation in a so-called “dead tract” (toter Trakt), a prison wing “almost entirely lacking in stimuli and on which [she was] the only inmate.” Although the psychological effects of isolation are not entirely clear, Varon concludes that Meinhof’s diary from her eight months in isolation (1972–73) shows the “sensory confusion, dementia, and consuming rage that isolation wrought.” The prison officials’ response to the RAF’s hunger strikes was also controversial, implementing a policy of force feeding inmates who refused to eat. Varon describes the gruesome process of force-feeding thus: “doctors strapped inmates to their beds, pried their mouths open with painful clamps, and pumped nutrients into them through tubes running through their nostrils and down their throats.” As Varon shows, these extreme methods of isolation and forced feeding, among other more subtle forms of deprivation, gave some credence to the RAF’s idea that the state sought to exterminate the prisoners through torture. While a comparison to concentration camps is still a stretch, conditions for the RAF before they transferred to

252 “Hunger Strike,” 189.
253 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 216.
254 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 217.
255 Varon, Bringing the War Home, 223.
Stammheim were trying and the prisoners’ mental conditions at the time of some of these writings was not ideal.\textsuperscript{256}

The RAF’s sense of victimization appears in the Hunger Strike Declaration from 1973 in a strong sense: they believed that the West German government and the capitalist system as a whole had formulated a “Final Solution” meant to eradicate their ideas and silence their protests. They believed that their government aims to exterminate them, to the point where it is comparable to the death camps of the Holocaust. Whether or not accusations of torture were valid, it is clear that the RAF viewed itself as victimized by political persecution and its members viewed their conditions of imprisonment as unbearable, mirroring those of their anti-fascist communist predecessors under the Third Reich. The RAF’s primary concern was their position as prisoners for a political cause and the perceived repressive nature of the West German government and prison system. Their references to the Holocaust served only to bolster their own claims of suffering by presenting an unquestionably horrific example in the past as a parallel to their situation in the present.

**Stammheim and the Last Days, January 1976 – October 1977**

The official declarations of the RAF during the later years are not incredibly useful for the purposes of this paper. In generation, the RAF used these documents to take responsibility for the attacks and kidnapping during the period of escalation in 1977 leading up to the group’s suicide in October. One declaration worth looking at briefly is “\textit{Auszüge aus der ‘Erklärung zur Sache’}” (“Excerpts from the ‘Declaration on the Matter’”) from January 13, 1976, written by Meinhof, Ensslin, Baader, and Raspe.\textsuperscript{257} This piece is a lengthy exposition on West Germany’s position in the international system,

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\textsuperscript{256} On the subject of incarceration conditions for the RAF, see further: Martin Jander, “\textit{Isolation: Zu den Haftbedingungen der RAF-Gefangenen},” in Kraushaar, ed., \textit{Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus}, vol. 2, 973-993. For an inside (and possibly more biased) perspective, see RAF lawyer Pieter Bakker Schut’s account of the trial and incarceration, \textit{Stammheim: Der Prozeß gegen die Rote Armee Fraktion} (Kiel: 1989).

\textsuperscript{257} Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, Andreas Baader, and Jan-Carl Raspe, “\textit{Auszüge aus der ‘Erklärung zur Sache’},” in Hoffmann, \textit{Texte und Materialien}, 198-265.
which they saw as a manipulative capitalist entity, and the influence of the United States, portrayed as a controlling, imperialist power that funded West Germany’s descent into fascism. While the entire article reinforces the overall worldview of the RAF that we have seen in many other pieces—based on economics, class warfare, and the genocidal and imperialist tendencies of capitalist powers especially in the Third World—some different iterations of these ideas emerge here. One important claim found in this piece is a connection between American influence and the re-emergence of a fascist state in Germany. Throughout the article, the RAF refers to West Germany’s government as “Nazi-fascist” or a “Nazi-state” many times, which is nothing new to readers of other RAF texts. Explaining German history and contemporary German politics, however, the authors write that they view West Germany “[a]s a continuum of the fascist Nazi-state now under the rule of US capital and totally integrated into the state system of US imperialism...” The West German state, now fueled by American capital, is in this example the modern form of the Nazi regime, which the RAF views as also funded by capital of the bourgeois class. The spirit of capitalism tied these two systems of government and time periods together for the RAF.

Further condemning American involvement in West Germany, later in the declaration the authors state:

The military conquest and occupation of West Germany in 1945 meant for the workers that after 12 years of fascism, the Gestapo and KZs [concentration camps], their needs were once again repressed—now by the ‘occupier-bayonets and the weapons of terror’ of US-imperialism.”

Here, the U.S. becomes the replacement for the Nazi occupation of Germany, bringing a continuation of suffering for German workers, who the RAF seem to believe were the victims of Nazism and then of American intervention. This Marxist analysis of the Nazi period leaves out the significant fact of anti-Semitism and Nazi racial ideology, which drove entities such as the Gestapo and the concentration

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258 “Auszüge,” 204.
259 “Auszüge,” 212-213.
camps to a large extent. In addition, portraying the Nazi regime as implemented from controlling powers at the top obscures the idea of the complicity of everyday Germans, absolving the “people” of guilt in some way.\textsuperscript{260} The implication that American imperialism and desire for “conquest” and expansion was the motivating force behind the United States entering West Germany is inaccurate, but it is also a telling revisionist view of post-war German history. The RAF says that the American solution to German expansionism under the Nazis was to exert the U.S.’s own imperialist influence on West Germany, which resulted in a system that was, to the RAF, the same for the working class as the Nazi regime was. By equating the U.S. with Nazi Germany, the RAF again argues for capitalism as the overarching principle uniting evil regimes, obscuring the distinctions of Nazi ideology and placing West Germans, as victims of manipulation by American capital, in a contemporary parallel to the Nazis’ victims.

This declaration shows the fervor with which the imprisoned members of the RAF continued to think and write theoretically while in Stammheim, never relenting on their ideals or their mission although they were powerless members of their group at the time. Although RAF actions continued on the outside, the First Generation remained only as figureheads; the struggle for their release justified and gave meaning to the Second Generation’s further attacks. This characteristic of persistence and deep commitment to their cause is reflected in the next set of writings I will examine as well—those not meant for publication, but instead as personal correspondence in prison.

\textit{das info and letzte texte von ulrike: Personal writings and correspondences, 1973-1977}

The texts presented in this chapter so far have been declarations of the RAF intended for publication, clarifying the members’ political positions and justifying their actions to the West German public. The following texts, taken from Pieter Bakker Schut’s compilation \textit{das info} and the volume \textit{letzte texte von ulrike} (last texts of ulrike), contain correspondences in the form of letters of political doctrine between imprisoned RAF members as well as Ulrike Meinhof’s personal diary in her last days in

\footnote{Jeremy Varon also recognizes these problems with the Marxist analysis of Nazism in \textit{Bringing the War Home}, 18.}
Stammheim. The intended audiences of these texts differed from those of official RAF declarations, resulting in content that is much less organized, much more difficult to decipher, and much more rambling in nature. Sarah Colvin raises the cautionary point that *letzte texte von ulrike* was compiled by a group with an agenda highly sympathetic to the RAF, and she suspects that some letters and texts were deliberately not reprinted to maintain a certain image of Meinhof.  

The texts of the RAF were written and published in these volumes using all lower-case letters, possibly emphasizing an egalitarian writing system that does not capitalize some letters and not others. This formatting can be distracting, especially in German where all nouns are normally capitalized, but I will preserve the original formatting here (except where embedded in quotes) in order to stay as true as possible to the sources.

In general, the private writings tend to be more extreme and vulgar than the published works; for example, Irmgard Möller under the name “gabi” calls prison officials “gestapo-cunts.” Although many aspects of the RAF’s published works strike the reader as extreme, this type of language is never used in those documents. References to fascism, extermination plans, and class warfare are found throughout the texts of *das info*, and each letter is filled with rhetoric and often nonsensical argumentative constructions that lay out the RAF’s worldview in a much less coherent way than in the public declarations. Holger Meins delivers the most in-depth analysis of Nazi history and the origins of the contemporary West German Cold War situation in these Stammheim correspondences in a piece from July 4, 1974.

Meins addresses the Nazi period at first by describing the organs of the Nazi Party in the familiar language of class differences, calling the “storm troops, the rank and file and the kz-henchmen” part of

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261 Colvin, *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism*, 7-8.
264 Holger Meins, “ein oder gibts es nichts / holger, 4.7.,” pp. 83-100
“historical class guilt.” Meins’s descriptions of the actual Holocaust and persecution of victims are disjointed, incomplete sentences that contain no real argument. He writes:

on the crime of fascism. the gassing of the jews. extermination, annihilation, dismemberment, ‘pure rationality.’ the horror of the gas chamber...confiscation, subjugation, enslavement, exploited-to-death, slain, hanged, bombed, burned, exterminated.

This style is common to much of this piece and many of the Stammheim writings in general.

One notable aspect of this passage is the attribution of all of these crimes to fascism, and not to Nazism. The actions of the Nazis in carrying out the Holocaust were unprecedented by any government, fascist or otherwise, yet Meins accuses the entire system of fascism of these actions, consistent with the general Marxist theory of fascism. Meins also acknowledges the Jewish identity of the victims here, which tends to be conspicuously absent from many RAF writings in favor of the general term “victims” or of emphasizing the persecution of communists and dissidents. The use of the term “exploited” is consistent with other RAF writings about the exploitative nature of capitalism in general. In this passage, though Meins does not mention capitalism explicitly, some of these clues and the RAF’s overall view point to a capitalist-critical stance on the Holocaust.

Later in the piece, Meins fleshes out his ideas about the rise of the Nazi Party in more depth. He reasons that anti-Semitism was a product of the petty bourgeoisie in Germany because it was funded by imperial financial capital and Hitler recruited followers from the petty bourgeois class, meaning that the Nazi Party, the SA, and the SS “were class organizations of the petty bourgeoisie.” He describes the bourgeoisie as believing in “the delusion of total annihilation of the Jews, the gassing of the Jews, and the delusion of total war,” which also had to do with the economic ideas of this class, producing “racial extermination by manual labor.” Meins implies that the capitalist idea of work for profit influenced

265 He uses the word Schuld, which could also mean fault, culpability, or debt. It does not necessarily mean that the class feels guilty. Meins, 88.
266 Meins, 88.
267 Meins, 91.
268 Meins, 91.
the Nazis to implement hard labor in concentration camps, combining the desire for racial purity with core capitalist exploitative ideals. He writes that the systematic extermination of the Jews functioned toward the “enforcement and conditioning of the subjugation and enslavement of the subjected peoples,” which also included Poles and others in Eastern occupied territories. Meins advances that the Holocaust was both a result of and a lead up to further bourgeois control of the lower classes, funded by bourgeois capital and exploiting the underlings, which this time were the Jews and Eastern Europeans.

Meins injects these experiences of the Holocaust into his argument about contemporary politics, specifically an idea of capitalist colonialism and ideological imperialism in the Third World, writing:

the method of a war of the people, vietcong, nigger, human: fascism is the enemy – and nothing else. between us and the enemy lies the fire-free-zone – nothing else. they killed us – we kill them.

The “method” Meins references connects back to his idea of the Nazis’ method of inciting a war of the people, which he parallels with the struggles going on in Vietnam and presumably the African American struggle for civil rights. His use of the epithet for African-descended people could also refer to colonial legacies in Africa, which Meins references elsewhere in the piece. Either way, Meins presents all of these groups as being united in a fight against forces of fascism, exacting some kind of revenge on the powers that had occupied and subjugated them. The phrase “fire-free-zone” is written in English in the original, but it is probably a direct translation of the German “Feuer frei!” meaning, “Fire at will!” So, the “zone” Meins refers to is not free of crossfire, but rather one of open conflict, which is important to his narrative. His use of the term “us” emphasizes his idea of these peoples and the RAF on a united front, with RAF attacks speaking also for the other exploited peoples in retaliation against fascist policies.

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269 Meins, 92.
270 Meins, 89. Meins uses the word Volkskrieg, which is not a real word but is most closely translated as a “war of the people.”
Meins also presents a periodization of fascism, with World War II as the “first period,” post-1945 as the “second period,” and the colonization of Europe by US imperialism as the “third period,” implementing what Meins calls “Rechtsstaats-fascism.” Meins lists the contemporary examples of fascism he sees all over the world, calling fascism “the hard-as-iron tiger of the counterrevolution.” He claims that fascism exists in Brazil and Chile; that Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia are colonies of metropolitan Japan; that “racist South Africa,” Spain, Portugal, Greece, Turkey, Italy, and Northern Ireland all represent fascist governments. Meins calls South Korea, South Vietnam, and Thailand “the last toeholds [of fascism], finished or enclosed or besieged.” Finally, Meins levels the accusation of Israel as an “imperialist toehold” and Iran as on “the same path” towards fascism. Earlier in the piece Meins criticized Israel as well, stating that “in occupied Palestine, for example, the Jews are themselves fascist, using methods similar to those of [NS]-fascism in the occupied eastern territories.” This type of allegation against Israel is not new to the RAF and Meins emphasizes it here once again.

In this piece, Meins clearly has a strong idea of continuity of fascism throughout recent history, which includes the Nazi period as the “kick-off” of sorts to the pattern and stages of fascism he identifies up to his present day. The Nazi Party itself was carrying on a tradition similar to that of French and British colonialism of previous centuries, which Meins also mentions in this piece. The overarching narrative of capitalist exploitation and bourgeois control of society connects Meins’s examples from the past up to the Cold War period. His arguments, hard as they may be to follow and digest, clearly present ideas of capitalism, fascism, Nazism, imperialism, and contemporary examples of class struggle and oppression as interconnected and sometimes causally related. This fits with the arguments made by RAF members elsewhere, but the execution of the argument is much more sloppy and disjointed than in the official declarations. The events of the Nazi period were present to Meins here in as far as they

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271 Meins, 93.
272 Meins, 97.
273 Meins, 97.
274 Meins, 97.
275 Meins, 91.
represented an example of capitalist exploitation, which was and continued to be the motivation of other oppressive regimes around the world. The Holocaust seems to be, to Meins, but one example of capitalist exploitation that continued to occur in the Third World especially but also in his own society.

In the compilation _letzte texte von ulrike_, Ulrike Meinhof’s writings from prison during the first half of 1976 before her death stand in stark contrast to her early works in _konkret_ and also her works writing on behalf on the RAF. While she does not offer any new arguments, the major shift is in her tone—from the theorist with confidence and conviction to an extremely paranoid and likely, mentally ill, prisoner. Her reasoning is considerably more conspiratorial and nonsensical than in her earlier works. She uses the word “extermination” to describe the prison’s intention toward her and the RAF, particularly in reference to the solitary confinement she endured at Cologne-Ossendorf prison: “that is shit: ‘psychiatry yard.’ the line in ossendorf is overall like extermination.”

As previously discussed, Meinhof’s mental state was increasingly fragile after months spent in isolation and sensory deprivation. Meinhof also believed there was a conspiracy in which the Social Democrats were undertaking a “fascism project” of “inner security,” which entailed “the integration of the repressive state apparatuses in [W]estern [E]urope under the command of the information monopoly,” in league with NATO and the Pentagon and comprising the “new fascism.” Continuing with the theme of West German NATO involvement, Meinhof ties the state’s role “as the second-strongest member” of NATO and its having “the most expansive concept of imperialist politics” to “continuity with the [T]hird [R]eich.” In Meinhof’s opinion, American influence and West Germany’s “imperialism” as a NATO member constituted a similarity between present politics and politics under the Nazi Party.

In a clear display of Meinhof’s level of paranoia and her conspiracy theories, she references over and over the idea of “psychological warfare” waged by state authorities. Describing the position of the

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276 Meinhof, _letzte texte_, 9.
277 Meinhof, _letzte texte_, 30.
278 Meinhof, _letzte texte_, 39.
RAF in society, Meinhof writes, “that is the milieu in which we are fighting – post-fascist state, consumer culture, metropolitan chauvinism, mass manipulation by the media, psychological warfare, social democracy...” This style of listing things with little to no attached analysis continues throughout Meinhof’s writings in this period. At one point, Meinhof claims that the structure of the West Germany government is “organized and functions...as the [K]u-[K]lux-[K]lan, as the mafia, as the [CIA].” She describes the “psychological warfare” of the “pigs” (Bullen) as including:

...anti-communism, anti-semitism, sexual repression, repression by religion, by the authoritarian school system, racism, the brainwashing by consumer culture and imperialist media, by reeducation and the ‘economic miracle.’

These ideas were always part of what Meinhof railed against, but in her writing here she simply lists problem after problem with none of the coherence of her earlier works. She saw all of these factors as out to destroy the RAF and others like them, and as being orchestrated by the West German government, which was connected to some kind of international capitalist conspiracy. Meinhof believed that at every level of daily functioning, she and others in West Germany and the Western world were being subject to government control and these elements of “psychological warfare.” Perhaps it is not surprising that Meinhof’s writings from the months and weeks leading up to her suicide evidence a decline in her state of mind in contrast to her earlier theoretical writings. While less and less of a coherent argument exists in these later entries, Meinhof still references the Nazi period as a point of comparison to express discontent with the West German government.

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279 Meinhof, letzte texte, 7.
280 Meinhof, letzte texte, 55.
281 Meinhof, letzte texte, 55.
Conclusion

In 1967 after the death of Benno Ohnesorg, Gudrun Ensslin allegedly said “This is the generation of Auschwitz—you cannot argue with them.” Instead of arguing with the people who made Auschwitz, the RAF moved from words to action and attacked the establishment they saw as the successor to the Nazi regime before it could attack them. The actions of the RAF are undoubtedly important to understanding the group, but their words contain the keys to understanding the terrorists’ own view of their nation’s past. The First Generation of the RAF left historians with no shortage of material containing their analyses of the Nazi period, and upon examination of each mention of the Holocaust, Auschwitz, fascism, and the Nazis, it is clear that the RAF related to the Nazi period in the context of Cold War West Germany. To the RAF, events of the 1960s and 1970s like the war in Vietnam, the plight of Palestinians, and the repression of communists in West Germany provided contemporary examples of the same international capital-driven manipulation and warmongering that had caused the rise of the Nazi party and the attempted destruction of the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s.

Ulrike Meinhof began her career as a respected journalist and intellectual figure of the West German Left, writing for konkret on subjects she cared deeply about, such as justice for former Nazis and issues of free speech and civil disobedience. In the 1960s, Meinhof’s society was still recovering from the enormous and unprecedented rupture of the Second World War and the Nazi crimes. Many of the issues Meinhof saw and wrote about were very real—many former Nazis, for instance, actually did occupy positions of power in the West Germany government, legal system, and at universities. As the student protest movement began to wane, however, and more radical groups began to emerge, Meinhof was not ready to abandon her causes and instead joined the RAF, a group that continued to fight for some kind of undefined justice in the face of the perceived oppression of the capitalist system. Meinhof, along with Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, dove into the world of vigilante justice,

282 Quoted in Klimke, The Other Alliance, 129.
swapping activism for terrorism; along the way, she also lost her credibility as an intellectual figure. Losing her intellectual credibility along the way. For the members of the RAF, their political philosophy based on fighting oppression became a delusion used to justify murder and terror; waging an imagined war against the establishment on behalf of the downtrodden became a paranoid obsession for Meinhof and her cohorts, although she succumbed to the delusion more quickly and more fully than the others.

The primary sources presented here chronicle the RAF’s transition from well-intended, left-wing activists to vengeful, paranoid murderers. In her *konkret* columns written throughout the 1960s, Meinhof argued cogently about societal issues, especially focusing on political freedoms and the student movement. Towards the end of her tenure as a journalist, Meinhof strayed slightly into the territory of conspiracy theories, postulating things like government control mechanisms played out in a television show. After the formation of the RAF, whose ideology was based largely on Meinhof’s theoretical foundation, the group published articles laying out their mission and strategy to subvert the state with urban guerilla warfare. During the May Offensive of 1972, the height of the First Generation’s activity, the RAF issued statements claiming responsibility for bombing attacks and other crimes, justifying their violence on the basis of political protest against the war in Vietnam and West German support for American capitalist causes. In 1972 Meinhof, Ensslin, Baader and other main figures were arrested, but their writings continued during their trial and imprisonment until their deaths in 1977, amounting to a large collection of intra-group communiques, letters, theoretical expositions, and diary entries. Throughout all of these sources, from *konkret* to Meinhof’s last diary entries, the RAF invoked the example of the Nazis and the Holocaust to speak out against their opponents in government and society.

The RAF’s references to the Nazi period imposed an anachronistic set of roles on Cold War West German society, pushing complex domestic and international conflicts into the simplified molds of victims, perpetrators, and resistance fighters, which Germans already understood in the context of Nazi
rule and the Holocaust. The use of this pre-existing framework to describe contemporary events fed the RAF’s already black and white outlook, dividing the world starkly into fascists and communists, oppressors and the oppressed, Nazis and the resistance, despicable and righteous. The RAF used these distinctions and roles both to understand their own actions and to garner support from others, rallying around shared hatred of a mutually agreeable enemy: the Nazis and anyone who resembled them. With the justification of preventing another Holocaust at the hands of a Nazi-like West German government, the RAF placed themselves and their actions in a historical context that removed their own culpability, projecting the lessons of the past onto conflicts of the present and declaring a moral imperative to carry out justice. The paradigm of the Nazi period was a convenient and poignant framework through which the RAF viewed its role in society and those of its adversaries, making the Cold War a continuation of World War II and placing new faces on the same old enemies of fascism, capitalist greed, and subjugation of the masses.

My analysis of the writings of the RAF does not speak necessarily to the motivations of the group members, and it does not prove that the memory of the Nazi period drove or did not drive them to commit attacks against the state. What it does do, however, is place a frame of reference on the RAF’s understanding of the Nazi period, an interpretation which cannot be viewed adequately independent of the context of the Cold War. The RAF’s goal was not to avenge Nazi crimes as such, but rather to protest contemporary wars and repression—especially in the colonial context in the Third World—that resembled the conflicts and destruction wrought by the Nazis. The RAF saw the Cold War struggles around them as a modern manifestation of the same, ongoing, struggle of the lower classes against the oppressive capitalist hegemony, of which the Nazi regime had been a part. The Jews and the communists were the victims the first time around, but the Jews in Israel, along with the capitalists in the United States and West Germany, acted as the oppressors during the RAF’s period, limiting political
freedom and manipulating the masses into participating in ideological and physical warfare in the Cold War.

The debate surrounding the nature of the relationship between the generation of the student movement and the so-called “generation of Auschwitz” is certainly not settled and may never be. By examining one small and exceptionally committed group of participants in the 1968 revolt, however, I hope to bring some clarity to the nature of at least the most extreme faction’s view of the Nazi past. That the RAF constantly intertwined distinctively Cold War events and ideals with references to the Nazi period and very seldom, if ever, wrote about the Nazi period in its own right shows how crucial the RAF’s present surroundings were to their conception of the past. The discourses of West German politics and almost every facet of society in the post-war period were rife with references to the cataclysmic war and genocide that preceded the Federal Republic. For the RAF, these references came from a position firmly rooted in the 1960s and 1970s; the RAF’s primary concern was justice and accountability for alleged contemporary crimes of capitalism, with the Nazi period functioning as a culturally unquestionable example of past precedent that gave credence to the RAF’s mission.
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