Women, Global Protest Movements, and Political Agency
Rethinking the Legacy of 1968

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7 Coherence in contradiction

The spectacle of the female terrorist

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In this chapter the phenomenon of 1970s left-wing terrorism is considered as a product of the increasing amalgamation of media, political, and social reality. The mass media of the 1970s enabled people to participate in the spectacle of terror without having to witness a terrorist attack on the ground. Terrorist events greeted media consumers as soon as they opened their newspapers or turned on the television; they had an effect on the social-cultural climate and were visible in the practices of the courts, police, and politics. According to Jean Baudrillard (2003), terrorism’s mediatisation and the terrorist imagination together turn disinterested civilians (that is, ‘us’) into accomplices of terrorism (Puar 2007: 61). In other words, if the significance of terrorism emerges through its mediatised articulation with the local and national knowledge of media consumers in the seeming privacy of their homes, then it seems crucial to consider the private sphere as a site of construction of the terrorist phenomenon. Terrorist acts do not exist independent of gender discourses and media representations, and turning a blind eye to gendered media representations supports the gendered logic that constructs the contradictory figure of (in particular) the female terrorist.

I therefore propose to direct attention away from the public sphere of left-wing terrorist action, and towards what to date have been considered minor or secondary, private arenas. By considering the private sphere as a constitutive part of the phenomenon of terrorism, I offer a critique of the historical research on terrorism that has focused on public events rather than their privately consumed representations. The epistemological interest of this chapter lies, therefore, less in the terrorist attacks per se than in the way in which both popular and expert publications constructed terrorism, and how the public and private sphere changed as a result. In this context it seems important to acknowledge the gendered logic of the private and the public, the former coded as a feminine, intimate place for women and children, and the latter coded as the masculine, rough world of (men’s) work and politics.¹

Theories of the gendered gaze add an additional layer to theorising the spectacle of the female terrorist. The film theorist Laura Mulvey (1992: 55) has argued that, in the bourgeois imaginary, the so-called masculine sphere is where the action is, where decisions are made and shots are called, whereas the feminine sphere is a place of emotion, intimacy, and presentation, essentially a refuge from masculine
action. Much like a trophy, the feminine serves to display men’s success in the public sphere. In this logic, masculine characters in mass-mediated stories tend to be portrayed as active (Mulvey 1999: 837; Berger 1972: 46). Their gaze, and less overtly the director’s gaze through the camera lens, directs the narrative and propels it forward. In contrast, the role of women characters is to be looked at by the other characters in the story and by media consumers (Berger 1972: 47). The function of the feminine body in representation is to halt the narrative and allow the senses to linger and take pleasure in its spectacle. As objects of desire, feminine figures divert the observers’ attention from potential inconsistencies in the story (Berger 1972: 46). Indeed, the spectacle of woman allows for contradictions to remain in place unquestioned, ‘for the sake of visual show’ (Polan 1986: 59; also Hall 1997).

In Writing and Difference, Derrida (1978: 279) theorised the act of signification as a ‘coherence in contradiction’ (also Polan 1986: 58; Wood 2009: 144), which ‘expresses the force of a desire’ for conflicting messages to magically cohere (Derrida 1978: 279). Derrida underscores that ‘signification is potentially and finally an infinite polysemy but that a historical sedimentation, an institution of particular ways of meaning-making, closes off this potentiality’ (Polan 1986: 58). He thus concedes that meaning is shaped by a ‘desire for coherence in spite of the contradictions that make coherence impossible’ (DuBois and Lentricchia 2003: 175).

From a gender perspective, I am particularly interested in the ways in which the figure of the female terrorist is shaped and contained by a historically sedimented and institutionalised gender order, but also in how the same figure also keeps calling the same order into question. My thesis is that the spectacle of the female terrorist and the naturalisation of messy gender as coherent sex follow a heteronormative, binary script of continuous display. Arguably the naturalised process of meaning-making (the masculine gaze surveying feminine bodies, thereby governing what women do and defining what women are) is key to understanding representations of terrorist phenomena, in the 1970s and today (Grisard 2008). At the same time the inconclusive representations of bodies of women terrorists trouble the body politic of the nation (Grisard 2014: 140–1).2 The dominant gender order and media rationalities contribute to rendering the figure of the female terrorist in/coherent, and thus keep terror on the agenda. Terrorist women’s contentious relationship to what is deemed ‘female nature’, I argue – drawing on examples of debates about female anarchists in Russia of the late nineteenth century as well as female members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), the 2nd June Movement, and smaller groups in West Germany and Switzerland of the 1970s – has fuelled a seemingly endless interest in terrorism stories.

Mediatised terrorism and coherence in contradiction

Much like the existence of female suicide bombers today, women’s participation in the left-wing terrorist groups of the 1970s baffled, disturbed, and fascinated journalists, scholars, and the general public alike (Fetscher 1978; Jäger, Schmidtchen, and Stüsswold 1981; Baeyer-Katte et al. 1982; Matz and Schmidtchen 1983; Gipser
et al. 1984). The discussion was fraught with contradictions. A prominent thesis was that women’s political violence was a natural consequence of their (unnatural) liberation (Fabricius-Brand 1978: 62–4; Einsele and Löw-Beer 1978: 26–8), and in that vein female terrorists were frequently depicted as tough, fearless, and masculine, and as foreign bodies, alien to the body politic of the nation. At the same time, however, they were characterised as victims of dysfunctional families and portrayed as inconspicuous, delicate, fragile, and harmless – no different from the ‘girl next door’. Many terrorism experts compared them to nineteenth-century Russian anarchists, but simultaneously they were presented as a new phenomenon, unique to the 1970s. Why did such a blatant contradiction go unquestioned so much of the time? I shall argue that such incoherence is not coincidental, but methodical.

Both popular and specialised texts helped decisively shape discussions about terrorist organisations and women’s roles in them. Analyses attached weight to the action on the ground, yet rarely reflected on how that action owed its event character to the way the media relayed it. While terrorism experts such as Walter Laqueur (1977: 3) noted long ago that terrorism is particularly fascinating to those who view it from a safe distance, the role of those at a safe distance – mass media, scholars, the general public – in constructing terrorist phenomena has only recently been taken seriously by terrorism scholars (Steinseifer 2006; Balz 2008; Bielby 2012). Feminist scholarship has been at the forefront of analysing the ‘perfect symbiosis between terror and television’ (Vowinckel 2007). Most notably it has shed light on the ways in which representational and mass media rationalities gender our perception of female terrorists and terrorism more generally (Meinhof 1986; Colvin 2009; Grisard 2011; Bielby 2012; Melzer 2015; Karcher 2017).

‘The flipside of women’s liberation’: women’s terrorist violence as new

In their discussion of left-wing terrorism in the 1970s, terrorism experts and the mass media regularly expressed surprise that women would turn to terrorism. They presented it as a curiosity that female terrorists acted in a way that was ‘cooler’, ‘calmer’, ‘more calculating’ and ‘controlled’ than their male counterparts (Der Spiegel 1977a: 25). Journalists and terrorism experts frequently treated women’s participation in the RAF and 2nd June Movement as unprecedented and one of a kind. The West German weekly Der Spiegel, for example, was keen to establish that female participation in 1970s terrorism demonstrated a ‘new quality of female criminality’ (Der Spiegel 1977b: 28). Indeed, when journalists and scholars in the 1970s tried to account for women’s participation in the terrorist cells, they often established a direct connection between their radicalisation and women’s liberation (Colvin 2009; Vukadinović 2010; Bielby 2012).

Criminologist Freda Adler’s study Sisters in Crime (1975) is considered the basis of what is now known as the emancipation theory, an explanatory approach for criminality among women. The emancipation theory gained credence through the media’s frequent portrayal of violent women in the 1970s. In Europe women
terrorists were making headlines, in America prominent criminal cases like that of Angela Davis\textsuperscript{6} and Patty Hearst\textsuperscript{7} were being hotly debated. Adler’s study was used to substantiate theories about the connection between female terrorism and women’s emancipation (\textit{Der Spiegel} 1977a: 22–33). In its cover story from 8 August 1977, titled ‘Women in the Underground. An Irrational Phenomenon’ (\textit{Der Spiegel} 1977a: 22),\textsuperscript{8} the magazine notoriously quoted Günter Nollau, head of the domestic intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany (\textit{Bundesverfassungsschutz}): ‘These days West German women are committing more than half of all terrorist offences’, Nollau observed, attributing the phenomenon to an ‘excess of women’s liberation’ (ibid.).\textsuperscript{9} The message was that ‘girls here had forgotten their traditional role. Their actions did not accord with the traditional image of the sex which in English is called the “fair sex”: the gender of beauty, of decency, of light’ (ibid.: 23; see also Colvin 2009: 194).\textsuperscript{10} Female terrorists, then, were defined by their lack of traditional feminine qualities such as beauty and subservience (Colvin 2009: 194). The article in the 1977 issue of \textit{Der Spiegel} then turned its focus from women’s participation in left-wing terrorist acts to women’s criminality more generally: ‘In any case, secondary and concomitant effects of emancipation can be seen in traditional, everyday crime in places where women are more and more frequently doing men’s work’ (\textit{Der Spiegel} 1977a: 23).

Adler established a causal link between a supposed increase in criminality among women since 1960 and the feminist movement’s struggle for the legal and economic emancipation of women. She argued that this positive development also had its drawbacks:

If present social trends continue women will be sharing with men not only ulcers, coronaries, hypertension, and lung cancer (until recently considered almost exclusively masculine diseases) but will also compete increasingly in such traditionally male criminal activities as crimes against the person, more aggressive property offences, and especially white-collar crime.

(Adler 1975: 252)

The American criminologist based her hypothesis on a comparison of the criminal statistics from England, Germany, Norway, India, Japan, and the US, on the basis of which she arrived at the conclusion that economic motives were still chiefly behind women’s criminality, though violent criminality played an increasingly important role.\textsuperscript{11} In Switzerland, similar prognoses about the increase in women’s criminality were made after the publication of Adler’s work. The lawyer Henryka Veillard-Cybulskia (1982: 198) claimed that an alleged increase in the female crime rate in 1973 ran parallel to the ‘liberation of women, which is now manifesting itself in illegal acts, too’. Although in her view women’s criminality remained less ‘bloody’ than men’s, she admonished her readers: ‘let us not forget the increasing number of female terrorists’ (ibid.).

Adler’s theory was the subject of controversial debate in feminist circles (Chesney-Lind 1986: 80; Theurer 1996: 69–76). Feminist criminologist Carol Smart pointed out that conservative and reactionary voices used the emancipation
theory as ammunition in their mission to impede equal rights for women and men and produce an all-around ‘inculpation’ of the feminist movement (Smart 1979: 56). It is one reason that many feminists at the time were adamant in dissociating themselves from terrorists. One similarity that another feminist criminologist, Marlis Dürkop (1978: 277), conceded was that upper- and upper middle-class women were overrepresented in both the feminist movement and terrorist groups. The proponents of the emancipation theory, however, tended to ignore the class differences which meant that the achievements of the feminist movement primarily benefited women from the socially privileged classes, who rarely became ‘common’ criminals. Susanne von Paczensky (1978: 10), a feminist journalist who published a collection of essays on women and terror, opposed the emancipation theory speculations with a rhetorical question: why is the influence of gender only debated when the violent criminal happens to be female? Nobody asks which type of masculinity leads to terrorism.12

Feminist critiques of the emancipation theory did not unsettle influential penologists and criminologists, however. For the most part they remained persuaded by the emancipation theory, possibly because it had been in circulation for almost a century (Lamott 1992: 33). At the turn of the twentieth century, as the women’s suffrage movement gained traction and the field of criminology underwent a process of scientification, criminologists claimed that women’s liberation not only led to their masculinisation, loss of refinement and beauty, but was also the root cause of criminality among women. The criminologist Alexander Jassny (1911: 93), for instance, thought he could observe the fusion of the criminal female with the ‘masculine type’ (also Lamott 1992: 33).

Similar arguments had been made after World War II. Women’s new role as family providers during the war, it was claimed, gave them ample opportunities to become ‘bandit chiefs’ well versed in wielding weapons (Amelunxen 1958: 15). The threat posed by female criminals was closely associated with the newly perceived self-confidence and sexual self-determination of women, and criminal women became scapegoats for the decline in the birth rate and further social changes (Lamott 1992; Voegeli 2006).

The emancipation theory resurfaced in the course of the 1960s as a reaction to the demands of second-wave feminism and other new social movements. For one, the increasing participation of women in (feminist) politics garnered media attention. The media figure of the women’s libber was feared, derided, and ridiculed (Karcher 2017). In addition, the popularity of an alternative political practice allowed women to participate more readily in politics. Traditional political institutions were called into question, at times even displaced by protests in the streets or debates around the kitchen table. So-called kitchen table politics challenged the carefully guarded separation of public politics and the privacy of the everyday, thereby lowering the threshold for political participation as well as threatening traditional balances of power (Davis 2006: 182; Grisard 2011: 205). The emancipation theory thus collapsed caricatures of the publicly vocal women’s libber with the figure of the female terrorist to stir fears of changing gender relations. The threat of an increasing and more violent type of criminality among
women in the 1970s must therefore be considered against the backdrop of a history of uneasiness about sexual self-determination, economic independence, and women's enfranchisement.

‘Irrational elements’: women’s terrorist violence as an age-old question

Female terrorists were not just portrayed as self-determined women’s libbers, however. They were always also perceived as ‘an irrational phenomenon’ (*Der Spiegel* 1977a: 22). Women were generally imagined as morally superior beings: Ulrike Meinhof, for example, a devout Catholic in her youth, was on numerous occasions likened to a ‘fallen angel’ (see Colvin 2009: 4; also *Der Spiegel* 1976: 14, 1986: 162, 165). When they participated in terrorism, however, they became ‘shrieking’ and ‘hysterical’, and their liberation, indeed all women’s liberation, ‘excessive’ and ‘irrational’ (*Der Spiegel* 1977a: 23; *Der Spiegel* 26 June 1972: 62). An article in the *St. Galler Tagblatt* (1977) even suggested that terrorist women had turned into ‘hyenas’. The newspaper loosely quoted a line from the celebrated (and notoriously masculinist) poem *Song of the Bell* (1799) by Friedrich Schiller. The line refers to incidences during the French Revolution where ‘women to hyenas growing/Do make with horror jester’s art/Still quiv’ring, panther’s teeth employing/They rip apart the en’my’s heart’ (Wertz 2005: 45). It is (still) a familiar trope: when women turn to violence, their brutality is inhuman or animalistic and knows no bounds. The particular choice of quotation indicates that, rather than likening the women terrorists of the 1970s to the heroines of the French Revolution, the newspaper article is appealing to the cultural authority of Schiller to underscore the irrational, instinctual, and monstrous nature of women when they abandon their true calling.

Not only journalists but terrorism experts looked to cultural beliefs about women’s nature and history to shed light on the root causes of women’s political violence. They swiftly identified prehistoric Amazons and nineteenth-century women revolutionaries in Russia as historic predecessors of the terrorists of the 1970s (Alpern Engel and Rosenthal 1975; Middendorff 1976; Whittaker 1976; Becker and Becker 1977; Knight 1979; Schmieding 1979). ‘The participation of the female sex in terrorism is older than commonly assumed’, the lawyer and psychologist Susi Thürer-Reber stated in a local Swiss newspaper *Luzerner Tagblatt* (1978). She then referred to the anarchist women of Czarist Russia. The *St. Galler Tagblatt* likewise situated the roots of terrorism in turn-of-the-century Russia:

> Women have been in the vanguard wherever there has since been a fight against a social and national injustice, be it perceived or real. A century ago, Vera Zasulich, Vera Figner, and the aristocrat Sophia Perovskaya spread revolutionary terror throughout Czarist Russia – terror whose ingenuity, sangfroid, and intelligence put the revolutionary comrades to shame.
>
>(*St. Galler Tagblatt* 1977)¹³
Amid the renewed interest in Russia’s prerevolutionary history during the 1970s, the figures of Vera Figner and Sophia Perovskaya are perceived to foreshadow the modern female terrorist, ‘for whom the terrorist struggle also meant at the same time a struggle for their own emancipation’ (Schmieding 1978; also Schmieding 1979). Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner classified them with the female members of the RAF as ‘terrorist Amazons’ who represented ‘a gruesome caricature of decadent and destructive masculinity’ (Kaltenbrunner 1978: 17), but also stressed that 1970s female terrorists exhibited an unprecedented ‘irrational will to destruction’ (ibid.; see also Hildebrandt 1978).

The journalist Walter Schmieding found similarities between the masculine appearance of the Russian women anarchists and West German women terrorists, pointing to dysfunctional father/daughter relationships and their alleged lack of (sexual) interest in men. He asserted that both groups only had relationships with men if and when it served the greater cause. Likewise, only when their feminine charms promised to be useful for the organisation would the women terrorists cast off their standardly masculine self-presentation: short hair, dark glasses, and ‘an endless consumption of cigarettes’ (Schmieding 1979: 109; also Becker and Becker 1977: 687). Schmieding appears to have consulted Vera Figner’s memoirs in which she describes how, while living in a secret apartment under an alias, she disguised herself as a ‘lady-doll from high society’ in order to carry out a secret mission, but immediately cast off her disguise after her mission had been completed (Figner 1985: 94). Terrorism experts seized on the narrative that the Russian female anarchists were well versed in disguising themselves, as aristocratic ladies, farmers’ wives, or men (Schmieding 1979: 125–7; also Schmieding 22 April 1978; Middendorff 1976; Knight 1979; Fauré 1978; Alpern Engel and Rosenthal 1975). Their double life or ‘passing’ was likened to the practises of the women in the RAF who were ready to throw on an ‘elegant dress’ and perform the role of the ‘well bred daughter’ (Der Spiegel 1977a: 27).

When 1970s terrorism experts pointed out that women’s involvement in political acts of violence was neither a ‘new nor a West German phenomenon’ (Diewald-Kerkmann 2006: 657), they established a continuity and, in many cases, even transformed women’s pronounced tendency to radicalism into an anthropological constant. Moreover, rooting women terrorists in Czarist Russia was essential for creating a coherent understanding of terrorism:

History in this sense is characterized by the production of the origins of events, by the production of continuities that fuse the events into a uniform, coherent narrative, and by pretending to reveal an extra-discursive truth instead of producing a discourse about knowledge and power.

(Fiske 2003: 148)

Seen in this light, the knowledge about the origins of women’s participation in terrorist action enabled its classification, which was necessary to symbolically ‘master’ it. Thus the transhistorical comparisons of women terrorists in the RAF and 2nd June Movement with Russian female anarchists must be read as an effort on
the part of terrorism experts and journalists discursively and narratively to control the intractability of terror: the phenomenon was explained as a supra-historical effect of women’s irrational nature.

A frail victim’s body: women’s terrorist violence as trauma

However: contrary to the images of the militant women as unsettlingly masterful with a dangerously irrational agency, the women terrorists were also portrayed as victims of dysfunctional families. In a way that resonates with portrayals of female suicide bombers today (Brunner 2011; Grisard 2008), it was claimed that they were driven to commit these acts by family members, lovers, or the state, and that women students ‘slipped into’ terror more easily than less educated women (Der Spiegel 1977a: 25). Men, as lovers or radical thinkers, paved women’s way into terrorism (Der Spiegel 1977a: 25). Female terrorists were rarely credited with acting of their own free will. The RAF terrorist Susanne Albrecht’s ‘long march into militancy’ was presented as the direct result of her acquaintance with a man, Karl-Heinz Dellwo (Der Spiegel 1977a: 26). The tendency to refer to the female terrorists as ‘girls’ and ‘daughters’ offers an insight into how adult women were perceived (Der Spiegel 1977a: 33).

After Meinhof’s arrest in 1972 and again after her death in 1976, Der Spiegel tracked her transformation from (desirable) ‘long-haired’, full-figured pacifist to (undesirable) ‘haggard’ terrorist fighter (Der Spiegel 1976: 14; also Der Spiegel 1972: 62). The theories of Friedrich Hacker, an American psychoanalyst and terrorism expert were cited. Hacker maintained that Meinhof had been deeply troubled by her father’s severe depression and subsequent death, allegedly over his wife’s infidelities, when she was only six. Hacker believed that this childhood trauma triggered Meinhof’s divorce and subsequent radicalisation (Der Spiegel 1976: 14). While the journalists cast doubt on Hacker’s theories, they willingly espoused the idea that Meinhof was a casualty of childhood trauma.

In the same way, the Swiss federal prosecutor’s office described Gabriele Kröcher-Tiedemann, a member of the 2nd June Movement, as a casualty of her family upbringing. A suspect in the OPEC siege in Vienna, Kröcher-Tiedemann was arrested at the French-Swiss border in 1977 for injuring two Swiss customs officers.

All her life Gabriele Kröcher-Tiedemann had been given orders and she gave her all to carry them out as it was expected of her, hungry for praise and acknowledgment. Clearly she received the recognition in the anarchist scene that her family had denied her.

(IISG 1978; also Bundespolizei 1977)19

The report noted that Kröcher-Tiedemann’s relationship with her alcoholic father was distant, and that she had not received much love from either parent. The federal prosecutors underscored how her loveless family had pushed her straight into the arms of Norbert Kröcher and his terrorist ties.
Likewise, the Swiss court that tried the Italian-German terrorist Petra Krause was convinced that her turn to terrorism was heavily influenced by childhood trauma and her love for an older man (Obergericht des Kantons Zürich 9 March 1981: 1151). According to the court’s reconstruction of her biography, Krause was born to Jewish upper-class parents in Germany in 1939, and later deported to a concentration camp. One of the only survivors in her family, the young Krause was liberated in 1945, sent to an internment camp and from there to an orphanage and eventually a foster family. A year before graduating from high school, the court noted, she ran away to marry an Italian doctor. Without relativising Krause’s trauma, it is worth noticing the court’s strong focus on family and sexual attraction to a man when assessing her turn to violence.

Krause went on three hunger strikes during her two-and-a-half-year detention and managed to create a huge wave of solidarity in Switzerland, Italy, and beyond. Italian female members of parliament even decided to inspect the conditions in the Swiss women’s prison that housed Krause. They were convinced that Krause was being punished by the state for being a woman. Krause explicitly called attention to women’s discrimination in Swiss prisons, observations that must be seen within the larger context of 1970s Swiss gender politics. Only recently (in 1971, to be precise) had Swiss (male) citizens granted women the right to vote. Their participation in public life, however, remained contested throughout the 1970s. After Petra Krause was arrested in March 1975, the media frequently used her as the foil against which women’s ‘natural’ role as docile mothers and wives was reaffirmed (Grisard 2014: 147; Grisard 2011: 270).

The binary of the liberated, irrational terrorist and the contained, restrained ‘good’ woman was, however, called into question by the image of the female terrorist as wounded victim (Grisard 2014; for West Germany, see Schraut 2007). As I have shown elsewhere, the spectacle of the feminised hunger-stricken body in prison destabilised the Swiss body politic (Grisard 2014). The Italian women deputies’ reaction to Krause’s emaciated body shows that representations of the self-starving female body triggered feelings of empathy and solidarity that a man’s body would arguably not have elicited. Krause’s emaciated body managed to mobilise against women’s oppression. The reception of Krause’s hunger strikes was shaped by dominant gender norms, notably the commonly held notion that the small body of a woman is more susceptible to suffering than the strong body of a man (Groebner 2007). Depictions of Krause’s petite figure were informed by dominant ideas about the objectivity of the camera capturing the bodily and facial truth of the surveyed, thereby offering the surveyor a glimpse into the soul of the surveyed. Krause’s hunger-stricken body blurred the lines between victim and perpetrator (Meinhof 1986: 143). Her feminised body raised questions about the state’s abuse of its powers.

Effectively the bodies of Krause, Kröcher-Tiedemann, and even Meinhof, because they were coded as female, were readily imagined as frail victims’ bodies. Particularly representations of Krause’s hunger-stricken body underscored the slipperiness of the female terrorist’s embodied gender (Bielby 2007). Her shrunken body left surveyors with the uncertainty as to the terrorists’ status: was
this the body of an enemy of the state, the body of a victim of state violence, or both? (Grisard 2011: 154).

**Girls next door: women’s terrorist violence as strangely familiar**

Kröcher-Tiedemann’s and Krause’s constant presence in the Swiss media turned them into household figures. The daily media coverage of Krause’s hunger-stricken body located terrorism in the body of a woman who ostensibly looked no different from the girl next door (*Der Bund* 1977). At the same time, her German-Jewish heritage and her Italian citizenship gave reasons enough to distrust her (national) loyalties. The mention of her mysterious past in a Nazi concentration camp reinforced the image of the terrorist as foreign and alien (*Libération* 1975). Krause remained both inside and outside of the Swiss body politic; nonetheless, the daily recording of her health shook the public’s confidence in the state’s right doings, which tied in with a more general lack of trust in the state in central Europe at the time (Pekelder 2011: 64, 79).

At Kröcher-Tiedemann’s trial in June 1978, which incited the severest security measures that the small town of Porrentruy, Switzerland, had ever known, the media used gender stereotypes similar to those used in the case of Krause. The image of the ‘cold-blooded’ terrorist who would not shy away from committing the worst terrorist acts imaginable was juxtaposed with expressed surprise at her delicate appearance in court. One journalist had a hard time imagining that the petite defendant was the same ‘shotgun moll’ (*Flintenweib*) who had unflinchingly fired at police officers; Kröcher-Tiedemann did not match his idea of what a terrorist looked like (Keiser 14 June 1978). The unassuming girl next door, it seemed, could at any moment turn out to be a terrorist. Such characterisations implied that the terrorist threat was slumbering within ‘us’. Female terrorists tended to be represented as duplicitous gender criminals: women who knew how to play the girl next door as well as the strategically operating agent. Those tropes made the figure of the female terrorists seem familiar and alien at the same time (Foucault 1994: 324–5). The Swiss media constructed the terrorist phenomenon as a sexualised and foreign, mostly West German, problem. They painted the picture of alien female terrorists penetrating the Swiss nation, thereby unhinging the notion of a secure(d) and securely gendered Switzerland.

Foucault observed how society produces an extraordinary amount of crime stories in which crime appears to be both extremely close, a constant threat to the everyday, and as fundamentally alien in its origins, motivations, and milieu (Foucault 1994: 370). The tension between the familiar and the unknown produced fears about the ubiquitous nature of the terrorist threat (Hartnett 2011: 257; Foucault 1994: 369).

**In/coherence: the spectacle of the violent woman and the production of terror**

Making use of the widely accepted social practice of gazing at, anatomising, and assessing the female body, journalists and terrorism experts projected a myriad
of conflicting gender stereotypes on to Meinhof, Krause, Kröcher-Tiedemann, and others. Some journalists acknowledged the contradictory images of terrorist women circulating in the cultural imaginary, but attributed the phenomenon to differing political positions: Meinhof (for example) was a ‘witch’ for some, while for others, mostly left-wing sympathisers, she symbolised a ‘fearless and self-sacrificing Joan of Arc’ (Der Spiegel 1972: 62; also Colvin 2009: 5, 15). They did not, however, concede that one and the same piece could contain divergent representations of the female terrorist.

Gendered media rationalities created an ambiguous figure of the female terrorist that merged stereotypically masculine action with feminine spectacle. Moreover, the female terrorist body in representation pointed to the instability of dominant binaries such as the state and the terrorist, the perpetrator and the victim, and this was exploited with particular fervour by the mass media. That ambiguity helped to produce the terrorist threat. On the one hand female terrorists were portrayed as masculine perpetrators in action; on the other they fulfilled the role of spectacle by allowing the gaze to linger, and the roots of terrorism to be deliberated. Seeing the roots of 1970s female terrorism in nineteenth-century Czarist Russia deprived the occurrences of the 1970s of their historic uniqueness, thus taming the terrorist threat. It also deflected attention from the fact that there was not a lot of action to focus on. The spectacle of the female terrorists compensated for the thin narrative of their ostensible crimes.

Conclusions

The contradictory representations of female terrorists, I have argued, must be seen as an effect of gendered ways of seeing in order to channel the terrorist threat. The fact that female terrorists were considered the flipside or the excess of women’s liberation was intricately tied to a will to knowledge: that is, a desire to identify, understand, and ultimately control the terrorist phenomenon. But as Schraut (2007: 116) and Vukadinović (2010) have demonstrated, connecting women’s political violence to their political and sexual liberation was also about reaffirming traditional gender roles. Short, unkempt hair, nervous smoking, and (sexual) assertiveness—all were masculine codes used in different eras to characterise gender-defying women (Schraut 2007: 114). Their intrusion into spaces traditionally reserved for men was difficult to reconcile with their ‘biopolitical function as heteronormative births’ (Lorey 2007: 284). The representation of women terrorists thus strongly tied masculinity to violence while linking femininity to placidity, domesticity, and dependence. By extension, all women who deviated from bourgeois gender roles could be suspected of terrorism (Meinhof 1986). The recurrent portrayal of terrorist acts as new, exceptional, and foreign/alien were ordering and organising principles of the terrorism discourse, constructing the (female) terrorist as the polar opposite of the docile wife and mother figure, or at least attempting to.

In her book Women Who Kill (1996: 5), Ann Jones addresses the question why criminologists have been trying to prove for over 100 years that the rise in criminality among women runs parallel to women obtaining the same social status as men.
According to her, there is indeed a connection between the feminist movement and criminality among women: namely, that women’s criminality only becomes an issue in times of pervasive anxiety about women’s emancipation. Schraut (2007: 119–20) makes a similar argument for terrorism, because ‘whenever terrorism is debated with gender-specific dimensions, women’s participation in politics and society will also be on trial’. Indeed, not just political violence, but criminality more generally was treated as a political question in and of itself. Women who committed crimes for political reasons were not perceived very differently from so-called socially criminal women; at best, the political dimension of the violence piqued the media’s fascination with ‘shotgun molls’. One could thus rightly speak of an ‘excess’, although not an ‘excess of women’s liberation’, as head of West German intelligence Günter Nollau would have it, but of surplus meaning such as is frequently produced by the mass media’s representations of women. John Fiske (2003: 114–15, 1996: 50–2) refers to the exaggeration, vague statements, ambiguities, or gaps that allow manifold associations as ‘semiotic excess’. This polysemy of the figure of the female terrorist is especially evident in media discourses. It is on the basis of this surplus meaning that the ambiguous figure of the female terrorist could be used at different times to explain different troubling social phenomena such as feminism, all the while keeping the terrorist threat alive.

Notes

1 For more on the concepts of the public and private sphere from a gender studies perspective, see Appelt (1999).
2 The metaphor of the body politic seems a particularly salient lens to get a better understanding of the relationship between the governing bodies and the individual bodies subsumed to it (Canning 1999: 504; Hull 1995: 5).
3 Depending on the source one consults, the number of women participants in left-wing terrorist organisations in the 1970s varies considerably. According to Hans Josef Horchem (1975: 16), president of the Hamburg Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the percentage of women involved in ‘traditional crime’ was 20 percent, while in terrorism it was 60 percent. The Zurich sociology professor Gerhard Schmidtchen (1981: 23), by contrast, professed that women only made up about 33 percent of terrorist groups until around 1980. A more recent study by the Bielefeld historian Gisela Diewald-Kerkmann (2009: 58) states that 48 percent of participants in left-wing terrorist organisations were women (See also Colvin 2009: 194–5).
4 All translations are the author’s unless otherwise stated.
5 According to this perception, women ‘act like men and engage in a fierce competition with men’ (Kahl 1977: 290).
6 Angela Davis is an American civil rights activist and intellectual. She belonged to the Black Panthers for a short time in the 1970s. During her incarceration she became the symbolic figure of the movement for the rights of political prisoners (Davis 1974).
7 Patty Hearst, the media tycoon William R. Hearst’s granddaughter, was first abducted by — and then later joined — the Symbionese Liberation Army, a left-wing revolutionary group. See Isenberg (2000).
8 ‘Frauen im Untergrund: “Etwas Irrationales”’.
10 ‘Klar war Männern wie Frauen, dass hier Mädchen tief aus ihrer angestammten Rolle gefallen waren. Ihre Tat fügt sich nicht ins herkömmliche Bild von jenem Geschlecht, das im Englischen ‘the fair sex’ genannt wird, das schöne, das anständige, das helle’.

11 With her emancipation theory, Adler distanced herself from the American Otto Pollok’s criminological theories (1961), which had been influential in the 1950s and early 1960s (Chesney-Lind 1986: 79). While he used women’s biological otherness to explain criminality among women, Adler emphasised the influence of socio-economic developments and socialisation. On the one hand, the emancipation theory broke with deterministic explanations rooted in female nature, on the other hand the theory played into the hands of conservative forces advocating against gender equality.

12 It is only since the 1990s that the field of criminology has started to investigate the influence of social conceptions of masculinity on men’s criminality (Meuser 1999).


14 ‘[F]ür die der terroristische Kampf auch gleichzeitig den Kampf für die eigene Emanzipation bedeutete’.


16 ‘Puppen-Dame der hoheren Gesellschaft’.

17 The term ‘passing’ describes the discursive constellation in which a person gains access to the field of the ‘normal’ because he or she shows none of the visual or habitual markers of marginalised social groups (Halberstam 1998: 21).

18 This did not stop him, however, from speculating that Meinhof might be one of these women who needed ‘a gun in their hands’ to feel truly liberated (Der Spiegel 1976: 14).

19 ‘Gabriele Kröcher-Tiedemann war ihr Leben lang Befehlsempfängerin und hat nichts unterlassen, um Befehle so auszuführen, wie es von ihr erwartet wurde, um Lob und Anerkennung zu erhalten. Offensichtlich hat sie die Anerkennung, die ihr in der Familie versagt war, in der Anarcho-Szene gefunden’.

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