Maternal Ethics and Political Violence: The "Betrayal" of Motherhood among the Women of the RAF and June 2 Movement

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> es gibt [...] niemand in der alten gesellschaft, der ent-
> fremdung [...] unmittelbarer erfährt als die frauen. [...]
> damit ist aber auch die dialektik ihrer situation klar – wenn
> sie nach den besonderen brutalitäten ihrer domestitizierung
> [...] überhaupt *sich* wollen, *sich* denken – müssen sie radi-
> kal *und* subversiv denken: ein inhalt und eine form, die
> sie für illegalität prädestiniert. (Ensslin, qtd. in Schut 294;
> emphasis in the original)

> Die Frauen sitzen in einer Klemme, in der Klemme zwischen
> Erwerbsfähigkeit und Familie, genauer: Kindern – vor-
> handenen, zu erwartenden, gehabten. (Meinhof, "Falsches
> Bewußtsein" 126)

In the mid-1970s in West Berlin, a young woman, "R," entered a hospital to terminate her pregnancy.[1] She was able to have the procedure done legally under a recently reformed abortion law, and she left the hospital shortly after. Unlike the average West German woman claiming her right to reproductive freedom, this young woman accessed the medical care with a forged health-insurance card. Fearing arrest by the police, she returned to an illegally rented apartment to recover from the surgery. For her, the decision to terminate her pregnancy was not only personal (she had never wanted children), but also motivated by her political situation: living underground as part of a group that understood itself to be in armed struggle against a repressive state, she did not envision family life as a part of her immediate future. Motherhood, she felt, was strategically incongruent with revolutionary struggle. Other women who participated in political violence reached similar conclusions. However, some had to choose between their existing children and a political life they believed would ultimately better the world. For them, actively rescinding the role of mother was a necessary step in their political development, a choice that counters several assumptions about motherhood,

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[1]   Statements attributed to the women "N," "P," and "R" come from qualitative interviews that the author conducted in 2005 with three former members of the RAF and June 2 Movement – in each case, two formal interviews and at least one additional informal (unrecorded) conversation. All references paraphrase the content of the interviews.

namely that, once pregnant, a woman will embrace her natural identity as mother and that, as a mother, she will foreground her children's needs above all else. Most important, the decisions of these women regarding reproduction and family were framed by actions of political violence that trouble common notions of mothers as nurturing and life-giving.

It appears that because society views women and motherhood as synonymous and motherhood is tied to the assumption of nonviolence, the concepts of terrorism (violence) and women (mothers) can be imagined only as irreconcilable. This article addresses the contradictions that emerge when bringing three connected discourses to the current debate on West German leftist terrorism, namely an existing ideology of motherhood, a set of feminist theories that conceptualize nonviolent feminist politics as growing from "maternal ethics" or "maternal thinking," and the decisions of women in the West German militant groups the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the June 2 Movement to abandon their lives as mothers. These women's decisions either to leave behind their children when going underground or to terminate pregnancies challenge the ideological construction of motherhood as a woman's primary identity, while also decoupling strategic violence from a naturalized masculinity.

The crisis that female terrorists pose to our cultural understanding of political violence builds on a long tradition of dissociating women from (political) violence in German culture and Western thought in general (Eager 1). The contradiction that women's employment of violence poses is usually resolved by declaring these women as "unnatural," a sentiment cemented into German cultural tradition with Friedrich Schiller's famous line from his 1799 ballad "Lied von der Glocke" that describes French revolutionary women as having become crazed, immoral animals ("hyenas"). Underlying the relegation of "natural" women to the private (nonpolitical and implicitly nonviolent) sphere is the definition of women as mothers, since mothers are viewed as those who produce and take care of life rather than destroying it. Because women are excluded from both politics and the deliberate use of violence, those women who claim political space through violence are seen as inhuman. Hanna Hacker traces this phenomenon in the transgressive gender identity inhabited by "women" who committed public violence in fin-de-siècle France and Austria. The female soldiers, duel contestants, and murderers she examines became "inverts" – implying both a sexual and gender transgression – in a culture that ascribed to them "Nicht-Weiblichkeit" (unfemininity) and the status of "Nicht-Frauen" (nonwomen) based on their violent behaviour (10, 17–21). More than simply being declared unfeminine, they were effectively unreadable as women. This "de-gendering" (and "un-mothering") consequence of female public violence manifests itself in the figure of the female terrorist who "represents, perhaps, the ultimate pariah of the modern world. She is viewed as possessing an identity that exists outside the limits of political and moral discourse" (Zwerman 135).

In the 1980s, feminist theorists countered this persistent *naturalized* dissociation of women from violence in their explorations of the connection between

women, motherhood, and nonviolence. The emerging concept of maternal ethics tried to account for women's historical claim of motherhood as the basis for their political participation without resorting to the essentialist arguments of the mainstream ideologies of motherhood. The cultural disassociation of women (as mothers) from political violence in turn is undermined by women in the RAF and further complicated by some women's rejection of their role as caretakers of their families. The RAF women not only challenge patriarchal assumptions about gender and motherhood, but also demand a reevaluation of the claim of maternal ethics as the basis of women's politics.

A high percentage of RAF and June 2 Movement members were women (Diewald-Kerkmann 663, 666), a phenomenon that apparently troubled West Germans' understanding of gender roles and that generated debates (Melzer 36–37; 41–42). As founding members, Ulrike Meinhof and Gudrun Ensslin became synonymous with the brutal actions of the RAF. Their involvement in political violence has been effectively narrated by Stefan Aust in his influential journalistic study *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*, and in recent years it has been the object of an increasing amount of scholarship. Yet very little scholarship addresses gender as a primary variable in the historical understanding of the group (Melzer 41, n17; notable exceptions are Brandhauer-Schöffmann; Grisard, "Selbststilisierungen"; Hensch and Hentschel; Schraut; Vukadinović), including the fact that Meinhof and Ensslin left children behind when they went underground. If this fact is discussed at all, it serves mainly to emphasize the women's "unnatural" (gendered) behaviour (Koenen), or to highlight the pathological group mentality that forced RAF members to sever all external ties, which in the end resulted in personal tragedy (Aust), or to read this choice to abandon their children as a product of a tragic misjudgment and naïveté about the consequences of their political actions (Seifert). Even less discussion occurs about reproduction and revolutionary armed struggle in general – a vision of alternative families is absent not only in RAF ideology, but also in the historical analysis of that ideology. Useful for making sense of the complicated triangular discursive juxtaposition of cultural expectations of motherhood, feminist claims of maternal ethics, and women committing political violence are the examples of women who understood armed struggle as their destiny and who experienced their own motherhood as irreconcilable with this political path. Reading and hearing about the decisions of these particular women invites questions that connect the three discursive strands, namely: Do mainstream notions of motherhood converge with feminist theories on maternal ethics when analyzed in the context of politically violent women, including mothers? If so, can maternal ethics still contribute to progressive feminist political theorizing? Or do these women's political actions and maternal decisions demand an expanded redefinition of motherhood in which primary caregiving is not the behavioural foundation for women's politics?

Both published sources and personal interviews with former members of the RAF and June 2 Movement provide a context for understanding RAF women's experiences regarding gender relations and motherhood while living

underground. This article focusses on the case studies of Meinhof and Ensslin as examples of the clash between theories of maternal politics and the actions of RAF women. It analyzes published letters, interviews, and biographies to convey how these women (as cultural figures and as political agents) resist an automatic association of mothers (i.e. women) as nonviolent and in this way contributes an important missing perspective on the current debate about the decision of RAF members to participate in political violence.

The context of the social politics of motherhood in West Germany forms the backdrop of the analysis of the women's decisions to leave their children for the armed struggle. Women during the 70s decided to go underground following the clashes between a post–World-War-II German state-natalism (and assumed heterosexuality) and a 1960s counterculture that challenged notions of traditional motherhood primarily through a critique of the nuclear family and heterosexuality. The repressive sexual politics of the 1950s that shaped the Federal Republic (FRG) helped establish the conditions for the new generation's pursuit of sexual (and political) revolution that, according to Dagmar Herzog, "demolished the postfascist culture of sexual conservatism" (141). The time of political and social turmoil in the aftermath of 1968 was perceived as a rebellion of youth against conservative family values as much as against a post–World-War-II political system. The role that "family" – and thus women's identity as mother – played in (West) German discourse is indicative of the traditional gender ideologies that prevailed prior to the upheavals of the 60s.

Legislation in the 50s sought to protect the nuclear family and propagated gender roles within a framework of Christian (hetero)sexual morality. As Robert Moeller explains, that decade saw an increased gender polarization that prioritized the nuclear family with a woman's definitive identity as mother and a man's role as breadwinner ("Reconstructing the Family"; see also Heinemann, "Single Motherhood and Maternal Employment," and Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*). Women's role as (married) mothers became central to the rebuilding of the nation and the debate around family policy in West Germany reflected the ce-menting of the ideological positioning of mothers in the home. Despite their economic and social contributions during the final war years and reconstruction, women once again were confined to the private sphere (Heinemann, "The Hour of the Woman"). Conservatives and socialists alike were aiming their family policies at a consolidation of women's role as housewife and mother (Moeller, "Reconstructing the Family" 143–45). While social theorists agreed that women who worked for wages were working a "double-shift" (150), the aim was not to enable mothers to work for competitive wages, but rather to induce them to stay home, thus making the mother a central figure in the debate on family policy. A woman's right should be, as Moeller quotes SPD officials, "to be housewife and mother, [which] is not only a woman's natural obligation but of great social significance" ("Reconstructing the Family" 155). A woman's primary identity is naturally that of mother, and the role of the state is to guarantee her right to exercise that role.

In the course of the debate, any criticism of the concept of the "normal" family disappeared in a climate that understood gender differences (and their implied heterosexual relations) to be "natural" without interfering with the concept of political equality. Middle-class feminists as well as socialists agreed on women's ultimate desire to stay at home (ideally sharing that home with a man) and "endorsed motherhood as the epitome of womanhood" (Moeller, "Reconstructing the Family" 160). Paradoxically, fundamentals of the FRG family policy and ideology that continued to lock women into their reproductive role as mothers resembled Aryan women's social status under the Nazis (Moeller, "Reconstructing the Family" 164; see also Koonz; Rupp; Stephenson). Thus motherhood was (re)constructed in relation to a new nationalism.

The conflict between women's equality as guaranteed in the new West German constitution (*Grundgesetz*) and the notion of her central role in the nuclear family that relegated her to the private sphere remained unresolved in the 50s and dominated women's roles into the 60s. The sexual revolution that began in the mid-60s and lasted until the early 70s, and especially the emerging women's movement with its increasingly visible lesbian contingent, challenged the sexual morals underlying the social institution of the nuclear family and the gender roles on which it relied. Domestic motherhood, as the core of conservative family values that emphasized privacy as a civil right against the state, was challenged in its function of upholding traditional social structures and German nationalism. However, West German feminists never politicized motherhood in a way that forced the state to support alternative families, such as through lobbying for a social policy for public childcare. Instead, feminist activists within the New Left, suspicious of any state interference, launched the *Kinderladen* ('children's store') initiative, starting in 1968 with the *Kinderläden* of the SDS's Aktionsrat zur Befreiung der Frau (Schulz 71–72).

The socialist and autonomous Kinderläden propagated antiauthoritarian childrearing and believed in the dissolution of the patriarchal nuclear family as a major catalyst for social change. By 1969, this initiative had resulted in the founding of parent co-ops throughout more than thirty West German cities (Herzog 162). Initially run by feminists to enable women to leave the home and participate in political work, the movement soon came under the control of men. As a result, its focus shifted from liberating women from the customary responsibilities of motherhood through collective childrearing to a refiguration of parenting in an antiauthoritarian way that – as the theory held – would equip children with psychological skills to resist fascist authoritarian social dynamics (Herzog 163, 165; Naumann 56), this in the belief that resisting authority at home would predispose future generations to resist the authority of nationalism. While the Kinderladen movement generally countered the 50s gender polarization within the nuclear family, its lack of a consistent feminist vision effectively re-instated the mother as primary caregiver.

In the following years, women's mounting resistance to the misogyny and sexism in the sexual revolution and the New Left (Herzog 231–32; Schulz 76–96) resulted in the formation of a separate women's movement that included a lesbian faction that declared heterosexuality to be at the core of patriarchal gender relations. West German women's political organizing never focussed on public childcare (see Naumann 56–57). The focus on alternative – that is, nonfascist, liberated, and feminist – family formations was shaped by women's demand to be able to choose not to have children (the right to abortion) that dominated much feminist organizing on the one hand, and antiauthoritarian childrearing on the other. While abortion rights (and lesbian rejection of heterosexual reproduction) denaturalized motherhood as women's innate identity and the Kinderladen initiative questioned both the nuclear family and state-run childcare as competent parenting models, neither explicitly undermined the role of women as primary caregivers:

> For many feminists, [...] liberation meant freedom not only from the bonds of conservative family and motherhood ideology, but from family and motherhood altogether. For another strand of feminism that emerged at the end of the 1970s, autonomy meant the emancipation of mothers, the social and financial re-cognition of their mothering and caring work. Interestingly, however [...] they seem to have accepted the dominant cultural construction of the incompatibility of motherhood with employment. (Naumann 58–59)

The latter strand – a cultural feminism that reclaimed motherhood as wo-men's primary difference from men – became prevalent in the context of a growing international peace movement in the 70s and 80s that presented peace as a feminine/female realm (see Davis 251, 255; Melzer 39; Zwerman 34). Mothering, the argument went, is central to women's social being and should be understood as the foundation for a peaceful resolution of the tensions of the Cold War: "Wer Leben zur Welt bring, hat zum Frieden ein besonderes Ver-hältnis" (Quistop, back cover). The metaphor of mothering/nurturing became central in the gendered rhetoric of the peace movement (Meyer/Whittier 277), which in turn declared militarism to be masculine and explored the question of how gender shapes political positions in the armed race, how masculinity and militarism are mutually dependent, whereas women's liberation is linked to an effective disarmament and antiwar movement (Quistop 9). This line of argument is explored in a series of writings on "maternal thinking" or "maternal ethics" in the 80s that developed into a more general philosophical school of feminist ethics of care in the 90s.

Unlike traditional patriarchal reasoning that denies women political sub-jectivity, these feminist theories see a mother's identity prioritizing a superior ethics of care that becomes the basis for her politics. Sara Ruddick's concept of a "feminist maternal peace politics" (244) is representative of a body of texts that expand the notion of women's political work as primarily nonviolent.

De-emphasizing the biological process of motherhood, Ruddick establishes the connection between women and nonviolence in terms of social practice. The daily practice of mothering – usually executed by women – creates a predisposition for (or at least an inclination to support) nonviolence, since "the contradiction between violence and maternal work is evident" (220): maternal work sustains life and attempts to protect from harm. Ruddick does not reduce women to mothers, nor does she claim that all mothers are necessarily peaceful. However, she views maternal practice to produce skills – maternal abilities – that enable a peaceful resistance when coupled with a feminist analysis: "[M]others who acquire a feminist consciousness and engage in feminist politics are more likely to become more effectively nonviolent and antimilitarist. By increasing mothers' powers to know, care and act, feminism actualizes the peacefulness latent in maternal practice" (242).

Ruddick takes pains not to essentialize women's bodies or identities and instead focusses on the social practice that produces certain ethics, that enables men to acquire maternal abilities as well, a conceptual move that becomes central to an inclusive ethics of care. Here Ruddick de-essentializes the role of mother and decouples it from women's bodies, a theoretical move that enables inclusive feminist politics – and an appropriation of the historical role of mother by male activists in the peace movement. Feminist philosopher Virginia Held agrees, arguing that "mothering" men are essential to a successful broad adoption of morals of care ("The Obligations of Mothers and Fathers"). Other writers have linked women and their motherhood much more closely to their physical experiences, and hence their claims are more fundamentally (and essentially) tied to women's bodies. Caroline Whitbeck locates women's difference in the experience of pregnancy and childbirth (not in the biological disposition per se) and thus prioritizes biological motherhood in its epistemic singularity. The mother's vulnerability in the moment of birth enables her to identify with the infant in ways that the father cannot and fosters a more powerful attachment (186; 189–91). Thus the peaceful potential is at its most fruitful in biological mothers.

Ruddick's feminist appropriation of the activity of mothering, which historically has reduced women's influence to the private sphere, and the declaration of this practice as a basis for politics catapult motherhood beyond the realm of the private and into the public, politicizing women's identity as mother. Accordingly, Held's insistence that a mother's private relationship to her child forms a more sustainable model for a general moral code than do traditionally public relationships (such as contractual ones) also politicizes motherhood ("Feminism and Moral Theory"). Since Ruddick's formulations of maternal politics, feminist discourse has extrapolated assumptions about maternal ethics to a broader concept of ethics of care (derived from women's occupations/activities of care more generally, of which maternal work is one of several, such as domestic labour, nursing, and childcare provisions etc.). Within this discourse, the figure of the mother still has powerful meaning; it

informs both an understanding of RAF women's actions within a historical moment and of current debates of those actions. So even though the concept of maternal ethics has been challenged and complicated, it provides us with an analytical framework to discuss resistance to normative notions of motherhood and attempts to reconceptualize women's relations to politics. If we accept the idea that the practice of mothering – of actively and consistently caring for another person – develops peace-making skills, then how are we to understand female terrorists' contradictory relationships to motherhood? It could be argued that these relationships represent no more than a failed internalization (and failed political explication) of a maternal ethics. However, it seems necessary to explore whether they do not more substantially challenge our presumptions about women that make maternal ethics a compelling, but idealized, theory on women's affinity with nonviolent politics.

An analysis of the RAF women's decisions enables a critical perspective both on public responses to "terrorist mothers" and on feminist understandings of women's politics. When bringing concepts of motherhood and – by extension – "maternal ethics" to armed struggle, we are faced with familiar discursive contradictions: as women, and especially as mothers, female terrorists counter the logic of a maternal ethics. This contradiction surfaces prominently when focussing on two founding members of the RAF, Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof, and their rejection of their role as mothers. Ensslin left her infant son first with his father and then with a foster family. Meinhof was rumoured to have preferred placing her seven-year-old twin daughters in a Palestinian orphanage camp rather than leaving them with their father. This article's discussion of these cases draws on selective writings on and by Meinhof and Ensslin to elucidate where discursive contradictions around women's militant politics and motherhood occur.

In armed struggle, living underground meant taking up an "illegal" existence: not using one's legal name, leasing apartments with false identities, robbing banks to finance political actions and sustain members of the group, and so on. Although the June 2 Movement allowed members to move between both legal and illegal existences and maintained close ties to the left political scene, the RAF sharply differentiated between those two realms, and declared an underground life as the only way for the revolutionary subject to exist (Wuschnik 556). In fact, the RAF was absolute in their demand that members disconnect from anything "old" (family, friends), while, according to "N," a former member, the doctrine of disconnect was more pragmatic than ideological in the June 2 Movement. The primacy of practice over theory dominated both groups (Wuschnik 538). This ideology foregrounded life underground and acts of political violence and left little room for envisioning alternative families as actively pursued in other cultural and political formations in the New Left, such as the Kinderladen movement. For the RAF and other armed groups, however, much of the motivation to commit political violence was driven by a sense of a failed revolution by the APO – the "Außerparlamentarische Opposition," which was made up of a variety of left-political groups protesting and organizing

against the policies of the Great Coalition between the SPD and the CDU (1966–69) – in the aftermath of 1968. A need for "action," not talk, had shaped much of the violent rhetoric of the student movement and found its conclusion in armed struggle (see Kraushaar on the roots of political violence in the student movement). Confrontation as social change that defined the armed struggle did not include a utopian vision of a new (revolutionary) family. However, the rejection of the nuclear family that reverberated throughout West Germany in the 60s and that potentially offered alternative gender roles was echoed in the RAF's definition of the revolutionary subject as disconnected from conventional social relations: within armed struggle, so the directive, traditional family structures were obsolete, and women's identities (as well as men's) were absorbed into a shared one as revolutionary (Irmgard Möller, qtd. in Tolmein 20; Koenen 288). In fact, as "P," a former member of the RAF, observes, the ratio of women in the RAF "only reflected the ratio of women in the general population." She goes on to point out that the demarcation line the RAF drew to society was total and that this general break with social values made change in gender roles possible. Similarly, "N" states that while the revolution could not be envisioned as gender specific, women's participation in armed struggle was the prerequisite for any liberation from gender roles in the new society.

"R" mentions in her reflections that the political and often personal conviction that a truly revolutionary subjectivity must be achieved through a complete rejection of family and that "bourgeois" traditions of family must have troubled many women going underground. The literature peripherally observes this about Meinhof (Aust 153, 157; Koenen 244), and Alois Prinz discusses how some men were affected by the loss of their families (214–15). "R" recounts that a woman in the June 2 Movement left her children, which was at times painful to her, while her political motivation was so strong that it outweighed considerations for the family. Whereas in the US women and men formed families with children while participating in armed actions (Zwerman), children had no place in the West German underground. The conviction, expressed by Katharina de Fries – a mother of five who was repeatedly arrested for membership in a terrorist organization – that children must be a part of any revolution's vision was rare. De Fries professed her inability to imagine a better world without children, and she found herself unable to understand how Meinhof and Ensslin believed they could change the world without them, the guarantors of any desired utopia becoming something "konkret" (Edschmid 44). Considering the absence of children in the underground scene, a radical political affiliation posed far-reaching questions to women, challenging a primary identity as (potential) mother. "Our visions of the future," "R" recalls, "were dominated by the assumption that we would eventually be arrested, so long-term family plans were not part of our immediate discussions of the future."

Thus the pregnancy of "R" posed more of a logistical than ideological problem, and she solved it with a forged health-insurance card. Reproduction here played a radically different role than in militant groups identifying as

inner colonies of Western countries in the 60s and 70s, most notably the Black Power movement in the United States, which encouraged reproduction as an act against racial genocide: "Babies for the revolution" was the motto that (again) defined women primarily as mothers of the (new) nation. In the context of a postwar conservatism that did not challenge the basic premise of (Aryan) women as domestic guardians of the family championed by National Socialism, revolutionary sentiment in West Germany's armed groups rejected reproduction as the basis for a revolutionary society, in part because of reproduction's racist significance for German nationalism. Instead of viewing the logistical constraints of underground life as limiting to women, "R" views them as having chosen revolutionary life as a real alternative to traditional roles and believes that many of her female comrades decided to join the armed struggle within a broader social context in which women resisted the confines of assigned gender roles. Revolutionary space as experienced by women in the RAF and June 2 Movement appears as a political realm that was separate from identity as mother and thus brought some relief from traditional gender roles.

Political empowerment here – and, according to "R," the sense of effecting change and participating in decisions was attractive to women in armed groups who did not experience this in general society – is conceptualized in opposition to women's role as mothers. This sense of empowerment runs counter both to a maternal ethics that builds on the daily prioritizing of the well-being of those in one's care and to an essentialized ideology of motherhood that defines women's space as the domestic, nonpolitical sphere. If women in radical left political spaces such as "R" define their politics as absence of motherhood, we need to reexamine and denaturalize our understanding of a woman's relationship to the identity of mother, as well as a mother's relationship to political violence. An analysis of Gudrun Ensslin's and Ulrike Meinhof's experiences is part of this reexamination.

In the summer of 1968, Ensslin was in detention in the women's prison in Frankfurt-Preungesheim, awaiting her trial on charges of arson. The trial later that year was to be remembered as a major left-political spectacle, laying the foundation for the formation of the left-wing terrorist group RAF two years later, a group whose militant activity would dominate the FRG's political landscape for years to come. Ensslin and her lover Andreas Baader would become known as the leaders of the terrorists. The violent events in the following years would establish her as a cold-blooded strategist and a woman blindly devoted to her man, who abandoned her fiancé and young son for a life underground. However, letters she wrote to Bernward Vesper, the father of her child, in anticipation of her trial convey complex emotions that surface in her responses to Vesper's attempts to regain her commitment to him by appealing to her responsibility to their child, Felix. Contradicting social conventions that view children as binding their parents together, her love for her child forms the basis for her liberation from Vesper. The intense emotions and expectations around her pregnancy and Felix's existence, she explains, have set into stark

relief the patterns in which she sees their relationship trapped: "Felix ... Ich weiß nur, dass ich ihn vom ersten Augenblick an bedingungslos geliebt habe, und dass er, eh' er geboren war, schon einen Prozess intensiviert hat, Dich und mich entblösst hat [...] und Handlungen und Haltungen losgelöst hat, die uns beide ... über uns selbst die Augen geöffnet hat [sic]" (Koenen 167). Instead of accepting Vesper's claim to her as the father of her child, Ensslin experiences motherhood as transformational in that it exposes a stifling relationship as irreconcilable.

On 14 May 1970 Andreas Baader, incarcerated in Berlin, Tegel, for arson, was granted permission to meet with the well-known journalist Ulrike Meinhof. The meeting was to take place in the research facilities of the German Central Institute for Social Issues. The occasion for the unusual request, so the claim, was to discuss their collaborative project, a book on organizing youth at risk. Instead, Meinhof's visit with Baader was part of a plan devised by several women, including Gudrun Ensslin, to free him from prison by force. The freeing of Baader and Meinhof's subsequent going underground are generally thought to constitute the "founding moment" of the RAF. One week later, on 22 May, a manifesto written by Meinhof that called for the building of a "Red Army" appeared in the left-radical movement publication *Agit 833*. The rest is history: Meinhof, together with the newly formed group, would engage in political violence until their arrests and subsequent incarceration, followed by political hunger strikes, the recruitment of next "generations" of RAF members, and ultimately the suicide death of several founding members in prison.

Rarely mentioned in the recounting of these events are the desperate attempts of Meinhof during the two days after Baader's prison break to find a safe place for her two seven-year-old daughters, Regine and Bettina, while she went underground and to prevent her husband from securing exclusive custody. Generally, Meinhof's decision to go underground is viewed as a rejection of her daughters and as indicative of her failure as a mother by giving in to the group's demands to sever all ties to her "bourgeois" background. Instead, these attempts also lend themselves to the interpretation of a mother trying to ensure the future well-being of her children, when circumstances prevented her from taking care of them herself.

What might appear to be Ensslin's careless dismissal of her son and Meinhof's cowardly surrender to group pressure in her abandonment of her twin girls have invited condemnation as pathological and ultimately as "unmotherly." This is reflected in public debates, as in the media coverage and scholarship on the two women, which offer a predominantly one-dimensional depiction of them as having denied their children and thus betrayed motherhood. This and the absence of any real discussion of the conflict that the loss of their children must have posed to the two terrorists and what this must have meant to their identities as mothers suggests the unease that the association of mothers and political violence evokes. This unease is grounded as much in a conservative gender value system as in a general rejection of political violence.

Ensslin and Meinhof were products of a society coloured by a postwar conservatism and shaped by a protestant faith that mandated political engagement. Ensslin, the daughter of a pastor, grew up in a household with traditional gender roles, with a mother devoted to the upbringing of her seven children and her husband's calling. Meinhof, on the other hand, had lost both parents by the time she reached her early teens. She was influenced by her mother's lover, Renate Riemke, who understood herself to be a substitute mother to the two sisters, Ulrike and Wienke, after their mother's death. Both Ensslin and Meinhof were estranged from their parental figures. However, Ensslin's parents complied with her wishes about her son's care (Koenen 155, 206), while Riemke openly and publicly spoke against Meinhof's explicit provision for her daughters and instead sided with her ex-husband (Ditfurth 272).

The conflict that the two women faced in deciding to go underground and leave their children is evident in their writings. Both cases counter the claim of maternal ethics that motherhood, through its daily practice, positions women politically. Instead, Ensslin's identity as mother shifts from a traditional role to that of a more abstracted, disconnected parent, while Meinhof's actions are grounded in a feminist understanding of how motherhood is a patriarchal ideal, not women's preferred reality. Both saw their motherhood as being in conflict with their political actions and felt compelled to make an "either-or" decision. Motherhood, in both cases, is conceded to a separate world of radical politics.

Early in her incarceration, Ensslin expresses intense love for her son and seems committed to taking care of him after her trial and prison time. Her correspondence with the child's father and her former fiancé, Bernward Vesper, before and after her first trial in 1968–69 (esp. Koenen), shows her to be agonizing over her expected role as mother. Much of the correspondence revolves around the child, with Vesper at times desperately trying to recapture their romantic relationship through the boy. During her first year in prison, Ensslin creates a variety of drawings for Felix and knits and crochets for him a continuous flow of gifts that attest to her constant thoughts of him (Koenen 207). At times she seems overwhelmed by her emotions for the boy and refutes Vesper's doubts about her maternal commitment, emphatically claiming that she never desired to be separated from Felix: "Die Fotos [von Felix] sind wunderschön, jedes Wort dazu bleibt mir im Hals stecken [...] Aber laß es um Gotteswillen, mir Sätze vorzuhalten [...] und nie (ich *schrei* das Wort) wollte ich die Trennung von Felix" (202; emphasis in the original). Initially she seems determined to be united with her son after her release, despite her falling out with Vesper. She emphasizes that she does not want to separate Vesper from Felix, instead aiming for some arrangement of shared custody: "wenn ich rauskomme [...] 'will' ich Felix ganz schrecklich, aber ich will ihn Dir doch dabei und damit nicht wegnehmen, ein- und für allemal, das *ist* Ernst" (202; emphasis in the original). She envisions herself as a part of his future life while resisting Versper's insistence on a (re)union: "bin langsam sicher, daß wir immer einen Weg finden werden, der keinen von Felix trennt; und

irgendwann wird er begreifen, daß er eben zwei Zärtlichkeiten und zwei Welten hat" (Koenen 159).

However, once released from prison she did not seek out her son, and by going underground and subsequently founding the RAF, she risked never seeing him again. This change of plans is already anticipated in her letter of 10 May 1969, written about a month before her provisional release, when she evades a clear answer to what her intentions are regarding Felix and makes those contingent on practical circumstances: "Du hast nicht eine Minute Dir konkret meine Situation vorgestellt [...], wenn ich rauskomme. Was werde ich tun, wie werde ich leben, wie werde ich Geld verdienen etc. Gut, das alles muß ich erst sehen, ehe ich – was ich sehr will – mich Felix werde nähern können" (Koenen 208). This reserved statement comes amidst a heated and bitter argument over Ensslin's refusal to sign an *Ehelichkeitserklärung* (statement of marriage) that would in retrospect declare Felix the child of a legal union (and give him his father's last name), since she feared that with her criminal record any right to Felix would be transferred to the legal father (99–200, 206). Her emerging identity is of a mother who is not the primary caregiver, but who still maintains (legal) rights to her child. Relinquishing her rights as legal mother to Felix never seemed to be an option for her. In 1969, West German law mandated fathers to pay child support for their children with women to whom they were not married without granting them automatic custody, a situation of which Vesper must have been acutely aware (152). Despite his urging, Ensslin never agreed to marry him so he could achieve shared custody because she was worried that he, jealous of her relationship with Baader, would retaliate and, as she put it, use Felix to hurt her (205). In their conflict-ridden letters, Vesper charges Ensslin with showing bourgeois sentiment in her insistence on maintaining legal custody of Felix while not actually taking care of him. He alludes to Brecht's play *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis*, questioning her right to decide the future of her child, based on her refusal to provide daily maternal care. She furiously replies with the charge that his anger really is about her leaving *him*, not about her being a bad mother (a "Rabenmutter") to Felix. She then cynically comments on the fact that his position as exploited proletariat in this drama is backed by his friends in the socialist *Kinderladen* collective, who agree with him that the state, of all entities, should regulate their duties towards Felix through marriage (Koenen 208). That Ensslin then insists on Felix staying with a conservative family seems a paradox, and Koenen reads it not only as the rational attempt to find the most stable environment for the boy, but also as a step towards denying her own feelings for her son by avoiding him and instead sending him away (246). When Vesper again dropped the boy off with the foster family to travel in September 1969, Ensslin ordered the boy to stay with them and denied Vesper the right to retrieve him. Vesper continued his custody battle with the *Jugendämter* until his suicide in May 1971.

Ensslin's letters to her sister Christiane during her 1972–73 incarceration are infused with concern about her son, now permanently placed with foster parents. It is striking that in those letters her worry for her son never ceases, even though

she does not access the conventional identity of mother as primary caregiver. In contrast, her position is that of an absent parent who tries to secure her child's safety through other people. In December of 1972, she asks Christiane to look after her nephew, while in a letter of July of that same year she is unsure whether the sister even knows anything about him: "Außerdem vielleicht 2 [Fotos] von Felix. Felix is kein RAF-Mitglied, Felix ist mein Sohn; weißt Du was von ihm?" (Ensslin 37) – although it is possible that this was written for the benefit of prison authorities censoring her letters. Embattled with the credo of disconnecting from all family ties, she nevertheless expresses the hope that her sister will foster a good relationship with Felix. Worried that Christiane will interact with him only out of duty, her plea is both defensive and urgent: "Aber paß' auf, daß Du nicht in die Fürsorger-Scheiße fällst [...]; was Du nicht *für* Dich tust, laß' sein, wenn Du das richtig verstehst – auf eine caritative Tante kann [Felix] nämlich nur scheißen" (84; emphasis in the original). Committed to the RAF in all her actions and tying her subjectivity to the group's politics, she nevertheless is anxious about the vulnerability of her son and his ability to forge authentic relationships with her family. Meanwhile, the verdict of state officials examining her psychological state while in prison in 1973 was that she simply stopped caring for her son because her politics became more important to her: Ensslin "habe ihre affektive Bindung an das eigene Kind hinter die 'politisch-revolutionäre Zielsetzung' zurückgestellt" (Diewald-Kerkmann 669). Her pathology here is her transference of affection and care from a natural object (her child) to one that not only is outside her ascribed role as mother (politics) but one that also is violent (terrorism).

The underlying implication – that her motherhood could have saved her from becoming a terrorist had Ensslin embraced it – is escalated with Koenen's claim that her obsession in the end was not with politics, but with Andreas Baader. Her rejection of motherhood (and thus a peaceful existence) is further perverted by her supposed overidentification and the desire for union with her lover and his violent project. This erotic – and therefore narcissistic motivation – stifled her original strong wish to reunite with her son (Koenen 219). So Ensslin's alleged identification with her adult lover is read as a loss of authentic subjectivity, her refusal to identify through her son as mother as a rejection of her true subjectivity. Koenen cites the remark by Ensslin's younger sister Ruth that Gudrun's first step to self-assertion, to saying "Ich," should have been her refusal, in the summer of 1969, to participate in the underground activities "without her child" (219). Either way, there is no imagining her subjectivity outside of her relationship to lover or son. Koenen slips into accusatory style when he writes that Ensslin joins Baader to lead a "Bohemian" life, rejecting the banality of everyday life (219). It seems her refusal of motherhood points as much to her transgression as do her violent political means, her narrative becoming the story of a woman misguided by passion, not politics.

This analysis does not account for the criticism of patriarchal expectations of women that Ensslin expressed in some of her writing in *das info* (Schut). She clearly believed that capitalism and patriarchy account for each other (Schut

292) and that women in particular – as she claims in the statement that serves as the first epigraph of this article – are directly affected by alienation (294). She also believed that women's social position creates a specific ability for collective politics that men at times lack, while women exhibit a great capacity to think and act as a group (293). Most striking in this context, though, is that a woman's role in the family – for her the smallest economic unit of capitalist society (294) – is at the centre of her alienation. She comes to the stunning conclusion – expressed in this article's first epigraph – that this predisposes women to be radical thinkers and ultimately to become underground guerrillas if they ever wanted to achieve an authentic self, to want themselves, to think themselves (294). This directly counters the notion of a maternal thinking that enables peacemaking and instead insists that the form women's oppression takes should logically lead to armed resistance. It also counters the streak of tragic passion and misplaced affection that dominates the discourse on her actions, and instead it foregrounds a clear – if controversial – linking of women's social position with the political choices they make.

When following the premise of maternal thinking that daily practice (care-giving) forms an individual's political ethics, one might argue that since Ensslin was separated from her son when he was only eight months old, she did not fully internalize the maternal abilities produced by maternal practice. Meinhof, however, left her twin daughters after being their primary caregiver for seven years. Within the logic of maternal thinking, the obvious conflict she felt over leaving the girls and the fact that she sought contact with them while she was in prison were rooted in her long experience of taking care of her daughters. Her difficulties in separating from them, as well as her reportedly severe depressions during her time underground would then point to an inner turmoil created by the contradiction between violence and her maternal ethics. This turmoil can be traced in the letters of *das info*, in which the group repeatedly demands that Meinhof completely disconnect from her past and ultimately seems to brand her a revolutionary failure (Aust 406–08; 428–30; 518–23).

While Meinhof clearly had difficulties reconciling the demand for complete separation from ties outside the revolutionary struggle with her desire to see her daughters, she did not simply fall prone to the schizophrenic power fantasy and masochistic over-identification that are frequently attributed to her decision to join the armed struggle – and that can easily be associated with a mother leaving her children. Instead, her experiences of motherhood and of the limits primary care-giving set on her political engagements formed the background to her decision. She articulates a feminist analysis of how patriarchal ideology furthers capitalism in her essay "Falsches Bewußtsein," which appeared in a feminist publication in 1968. The text entails a sharp criticism of the gender conservatism of her time and of the Social Democrats' failure to pass progressive legislation. She argues that under the new constitution, bourgeois equality has supplanted socialist liberation, thus weakening women's chances of actual emancipation. Women, she argues, are caught in the dilemma between working for a wage and taking care of their

children, which results in unfair work burdens and an inevitable sense of failure. Industrialization has created the need for female workers without accounting for the reproductive work women are doing. Simultaneously, Meinhof points out, *Mütterarbeit* is defamed by the myth that it destabilizes families and robs children (and husbands) of their domestic centre and thus threatens the social order. Consequently, most West Germans reject women working outside the home. Mothers end up being blackmailed and, without receiving any real social support, accept this rejection. Meinhof emphasizes the emotional work behind these decisions, pointing out that women's compliance is based not on their weakness but on their humanity, their readiness to consider their children's needs a point on which they can be "blackmailed" ("erpreßt") into giving up other goals ("Falsches Bewußtsein" 128). So women find themselves caught in the "bind," the "Klemme," of which Meinhof speaks in this article's second epigraph: between economic realities and the social myth that their absence from their families damages the social fabric.

The ideology of motherhood as a woman's natural destiny makes plausible the myth of social disorder through working mothers. Having internalized the "Ideologisierung ihrer Mutterrolle" ("Falsches Bewußtsein" 129), women are convinced that they work – participate in public life – only for their families, not noticing how they are really following the laws of capitalism that make it impossible for them to stay home and follow their "nature." Since they do not identify as "real" workers, women do not organize the way men do as "bread-winners" and are severely discriminated against as wage earners. Middle-class, well-educated women, on the other hand, while having more resources to afford childcare, find themselves in the same dilemma as working mothers: If they do not find fulfilment (and economic sustainability) through housework and motherhood, they feel social pressure (131). Considering the RAF's Marxist roots, it is significant that Meinhof claims that concepts of motherhood cross class boundaries. Mothers – *all* mothers – must be blamed for working outside the home, so as to conceal the failure of those in power to contribute to a solution to the problem. Meinhof's central feminist argument is that liberation from capitalist exploitation can happen only in conjunction with the liberation of women from patriarchal ideologies. This is prevented by women's internalization of these ideologies, regarding which an irritated Meinhof observes: "Der Protest is fällig. Er findet nicht statt" (131). Motherhood then becomes an identity of irreconcilable contradictions and impossible demands.

Some of this dilemma is reflected in Meinhof's biography: balancing the demands of her two daughters with her career as a journalist, she became in-volved with the student movement in West Berlin (Ditfurth 212). She left her husband, Klaus Röhl, not primarily (as commonly is agreed upon) because he persistently cheated on her, but also because she could not reconcile her political work with his. As Ditfurth quotes Peter Coulmas, the husband of one of Röhl's lovers: "Ihr 'Engagement' [...] also die Betroffenheit und die Aktivität, waren so stark, dass der Mann dazu überhaupt nicht existierte" (215). In a letter to Coul-

mas, Meinhof writes about her move to Berlin without Röhl that she finds the decision liberating (217). She took the girls with her, making them part of her new life in the radical political scene in West Berlin.

However, the conflict between public and private realms recurred in West Berlin. A single mother, Meinhof unsuccessfully sought to live with families with children to share childcare (Ditfurth 234, 257). Sending Regine and Bettina to an anti-authoritarian kindergarten for part of the day, she juggled her journalistic and political work with their care the rest of the time, with the help of friends (260). In an interview with filmmaker Helma Sanders in 1970, months before she went underground, she voiced her criticism of the separation of public and private that renders women apolitical in the traditional sense. There she speaks to the particular dilemma in which women – mothers – find themselves. She acknowledges that children need a stable family and that men have their wives to see to that, whereas a politically active woman does not have a wife to take care of her children and thus is faced with a problem (Aust 151–52). In addition to criticizing the oppressive effect that the separation of public and private exerts on women through their motherhood, she also points to the limits of politics that discount the private realm, and she counters that view with the claim that political work detached from "private life" is in fact not sustainable (Aust 152). While demanding that politics integrate what Ruddick later identifies as maternal thinking, Meinhof's denunciation of maternal practice for keeping women away from the established political sphere might appear to take precedence in her thinking. Yet nothing seems to have prepared her for the emotional conflict that her decision to go underground triggered when her husband initiated a custody battle as soon as there was a warrant for her arrest. Röhl catered to conservative disapproval of the New Left's alternative visions of family in his attempts to gain exclusive custody of the twins. He presented Meinhof's failure as mother as a direct result of her left-political engagement and her rejection of sexual conventions (Ditfurth 270). The courts acted swiftly and granted him temporary custody.

Meinhof had always intended her twins to be raised by her sister in case something should happen to her (Ditfurth 260). While wanted by the police, she took considerable risks during the two days after freeing Baader to meet with her attorneys in order to find a way to convince her ex-husband of this solution. Family members supported her in this, but without success. Her frantic negotiations seemed as much driven by her experience of loss as by an unstated fear of leaving the girls to be raised by their father (Ditfurth 271–72) – a point echoed in the interview with "P." Meinhof confessed in a letter to her attorney that she did not divorce *despite* the children, but *because* of them, to protect them from their father (271). When the courts gave her ex-husband temporary custody, she decided to hide Regine and Bettina until she could secure her sister's custody of the twins through the courts. As a temporary solution, she sent them to a village in Sicily, where they were cared for by left activists. The rumour that she had plans to send the twins to a Palestinian orphanage camp in Jordan remains disputed; it may never have been her intention to have them stay anywhere but with her sister

(291). In case she lost in the courts, the alternatives were friends or in the GDR. Her plan was to retrieve the children from Italy and keep them underground until a solution was found (284). The courts did reverse their initial decision; Meinhof was given custody, and her sister Wienke was preparing for their arrival (290). Before Wienke could organize their return, journalist Stefan Aust learned their whereabouts and brought them to Röhl (Aust 192–95). The courts never rectified that situation – Meinhof still had legal custody – and the daughters were raised by their father (Ditfurth 292). Meinhof's actions point to the fact that the safety of her daughters was very much on her mind and that she attempted to ensure their well-being while also committing to armed struggle. The two goals proved mutually irreconcilable.

After her arrest in 1972, Meinhof was in contact with her daughters, who later that year also began visiting her in prison. Her letters to the twins profess her emotional commitment to them and encourage them to be angry, not sad, about their separation, thus attempting to provide them some agency: "Und denkt nicht, daß Ihr traurig sein müsst, daß Ihr eine Mami habt, die im Gefängnis ist. Es ist überhaupt besser, wütend als traurig zu sein" (Aust 375). At their first visit she was finally face to face with them after two-and-a-half years and seemed overjoyed as well as overwhelmed by her emotions (Aust 380). The contact with the twins cemented her continuous identity as their mother, and it demonstrates that they were at the centre of her thoughts. Her desire to let them know that seemed as strong as her need to feel their presence in her life in prison: she writes that she thinks of them constantly and begs them to visit, write, and send new photos to augment the ones she now knows by heart – "Ich mach' mir jetzt ziemlich viele Gedanken über Euch. Und besucht mich! Und schreibt – los!" (Röhl 106). After her transfer to Stammheim and the ensuing series of extreme hunger strikes, the twins never heard from their mother again. Although she was no longer actively engaged in maternal practice, her identity as mother never ceased, and she clearly recognized the central role of a mother in her twins' life: "Ihr zwei. Eure Mami" (Aust 381). However, as dissatisfying as personal and political relationships were in the context of her revolutionary activity, the act of embracing political violence and her subsequent "betrayal" of motherhood – testifying to a lack of maternal ethics – call for a recasting of feminist assumptions about maternal practices that claim to produce specific politics.

The cultural association of women as mothers is central to the unease that women's participation in political violence evokes, and Ensslin's and Meinhof's roles as mothers are thus crucial to our understanding of them. How much of their decision to leave their children was founded on a (feminist) rejection of the expected role of mother? Meinhof's writing gives a clear indication that she thought about these issues from a feminist perspective. She believed that women's political work affects them directly (unlike much of the political work of the left) and that the private is, in fact, political ("Die Frauen im SDS" 150). While Ensslin's writing avoids an overtly feminist rhetoric, she nevertheless

clearly links socialization and motherhood within capitalism with women's (political) oppression. Reports from a former RAF member, Peter Homann, state that Ensslin responded to his concerns about Meinhof leaving her twins with the challenge that he was hindering women from liberating themselves – that he was preventing the "Fotzen," she says, her usage of the aggressively vulgar term for women itself signalling a break with traditional outlooks, from their "liberation" (Koenen 285). This expresses a clear understanding of the rejection of motherhood as part of women's liberation as revolutionary subjects.

Writings about Ensslin show her frozen into the image of "non-mother"; she is reduced to the enigmatic woman, the sphinx-like icon of the RAF period (Koenen 93), with an underlying sexual devotion to her man that drives her extreme political actions. Armed struggle, so the musing goes, seems to have entailed an erotic component for her (Bressan/Jander 421–22; Koenen 338–39). Her son, some have suggested, was nothing but a burden to her (Bressan/Jander 412). She is "de-mothered" in a particularly gendered way, and the figure of the violent mother fades to make place for a cold and calculated fanatic. Congruent with mainstream notions on motherhood, when evaluated in the context of Ruddick's maternal ethics, Ensslin's behaviour is not maternal, hence she technically does not classify as a mother, or rather, she exemplifies a "bad" mother, and thus her emotional struggle with her decision becomes invisible and irrelevant.

Meinhof, on the other hand, is locked into the image of a tragically misguided intellectual, a "model lefty" gone bad and ultimately bullied into killing herself (Röhl; Seifert). Her major crime was abandoning her daughters for a foolish and violent project when she should have known better. Rarely is her criticism of patriarchal structures taken into account in attempts to understand her actions, even though such criticism offers insight into her relationship to motherhood as an institution. Ultimately, neither woman was able to reconcile this conflict between motherhood as institution and her maternal emotions. Both women committed suicide; they hanged themselves about one-and-a-half years apart in the same cell, at the same window (Herrmann 112). Underneath the political furor and social trauma that their deaths caused lay a final disavowal of their children. They left them not merely without mothers, but without answers. The reading of their suicides as final acts either of political resistance or of personal desperation remains speculative. However, it can be assumed that their experiences as mothers did not provide them with ethics that prohibited violence or the risking of their children's well-being or that their identities as mothers prevented them from ending their lives. Ultimately, women in armed struggle resist the automatic conception of mothers (women) as nonviolent and instead bring into relief a cultural inability to approach the phenomenon of female terrorists outside the context of mothers-gone-bad. Their "betrayal" of motherhood and their claiming of political space through violence destabilize naturalized assumptions about women's primary identity as mother – and of mothers as nonviolent. These acts call for a reconsideration both of women's

politics as founded in maternal thinking and of the forms motherhood can take.

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