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German Studies Association

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism: Language, Violence, and Identity by Sarah Colvin

Review by: JAMIE H. TRNKA

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Sazanjda provides a good basic framework for understanding the complex legal issues involved in the application of retroactive justice against informers in West Germany. Particularly with regard to his explanation of the legal concepts involved, he demonstrates great versatility in navigating the intricate German legal principles and traditions that are fundamental for understanding this subject. His book is therefore a must-read for any specialist interested in German postwar legal history or the issue of Nazi war crimes.

It is unfortunate, however, that most nonspecialist readers will find the study hard to follow for reasons both major and minor. In the first place, *Indirect Perpetrators* lacks a clear thesis. Part of the problem in this regard relates to Sazanjda's treatment of the historiography. While he demonstrates an obvious familiarity in the footnotes and the bibliography with the literature of his subject and of Nazi war crimes more generally, he does little to address the relevant body of historical writing or to delineate his intended historiographical intervention in it. Moreover, Sazanjda does little to go beyond the methodologies and sources used in traditional legal history. Although his subject obviously involves fascinating human stories that could have made the subject come more alive, Sazanjda does little to bring out the effect of retroactive justice on the lives of individual Germans. His use of initials to refer to individuals' names, for instance, while a defensible way of protecting the identities of victims and perpetrators, makes the individual cases he recounts harder to follow than if he had simply employed pseudonyms. Further, a wider usage of sources bringing out the cultural side of this topic as it was understood in the wider German public would have helped greatly to humanize his story. In spite of these flaws, *Indirect Perpetrators* makes enough contributions to our understanding of a fundamental topic in recent German legal history to make it worthwhile reading.

NATHAN N. ORGILL, *Georgia Gwinnett College*

Sarah Colvin. *Ulrike Meinhof and West German Terrorism: Language, Violence, and Identity*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009. Pp. 265. Cloth \$75.

Sarah Colvin approaches terrorist violence as an "identity mode," and argues that language's pivotal role in terrorist identity formation is best understood through a rhetorical and discourse-contextual analysis of written texts. In contrast to biographical accounts of Ulrike Meinhof that too often portray her as having been manipulated or victimized by other RAF group members, Colvin describes Meinhof's active and decisive influence within the RAF, as evidenced by individually and collectively authored texts. Ultimately, she argues, the interrelationship of language, identity, and violence can provide insight into how Meinhof and other members of the RAF made the transition to terrorist violence.

Colvin traces three phases of Meinhof's life as a writer, including her journalistic texts, texts written between 1970 and 1972, and texts written after her arrest and imprisonment. Colvin contends that there is a "clear and demonstrable continuity" (14) across the three phases. Archival work at the *Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung* expands the published source base for her argument and sheds important light on

the editorial practices at play in the publication of Meinhof's and the RAF's prison writings. Colvin's analysis of Meinhof's journalistic writing includes essays not contained in earlier published collections of her writing and that have consequently been less frequently discussed.

A range of rhetorical strategies first developed in the journalistic texts and expanded in Meinhof's film script *Bambule* continued to characterize position papers, communiqués, and prison writings of the RAF. These include implied logics of analogy (particularly to fascism and imperialism); logical fallacies or "useful fictions"; repetition; metaphor; the skillful manipulation of register; dehumanizing language; the vocabulary of war; and the establishment of speaker positions with constitutive in- and outsides. Addressing RAF manifestos as (failed) speech acts, Colvin at times implies that the transition to violence was part and parcel to the failure in establishing a linguistic/communicative consensus on the West German left. The perceived inadequacy of language to effect change or articulate meaningful collective identities is one linchpin in her argument for rhetorical and discursive continuity across the phases of Meinhof's and the RAF's writing.

By far the most compelling and original contribution unfolds in the book's final two chapters on violence, identity, and gender in RAF prison writings. Careful attention to editorial practices surrounding various editions of the RAF's prison writings (e.g., *das info, letzte texte von ulrike*) effectively contests popular accounts of Meinhof's relation to the RAF as a collective. Approaching writing and language as gendered practices, Colvin sheds new light on Meinhof's changing conception of herself as a writer over time, her relentless self-critique, and her use of such group-speak terms as *Vötzenchauvenismus* ("cunt chauvinism"). She argues convincingly that Meinhof continued—perhaps unconsciously—to engage with feminism even as the group rejected feminist critique in favor of the language of class and imperialism. Colvin draws on unpublished archival documents to demonstrate how Meinhof attempted to describe a new, feminine writing of resistance and negotiate the complex relation of individual to collective authorship while in Stammheim prison.

Despite Colvin's attention to this broader cross-section of texts, her analysis of Meinhof's journalistic writing is familiarly embedded in a standard narrative that extends from the earliest days of the student movement to the German Autumn. This will prove helpful to readers unfamiliar with the existing literature on the period; readers already familiar with Meinhof's writing are less likely to find it engaging. In sum, archival materials provide a welcome addition to familiar readings of published texts, particularly insofar as they contribute to a sustained analysis of gender and language.

JAMIE H. TRNKA, *The University of Scranton*

Y. Michal Bodemann and Micha Brumlik, eds. *Juden in Deutschland—Deutschland in den Juden: Neue Perspektiven*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010. Pp. 294. Cloth €19.

In the 20 years since the Jewish *Kontingentflüchtlinge* arrived in Germany from the Soviet Union and its successor states, Jewish life has undergone a significant transformation. This volume of nearly 40 essays, edited by Y. Michal Bodemann