PROLOGUE
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Armed Innocence, or ‘Hitler’s Children’ Revisited

In this chapter, I will argue that the main reasons for left-wing radicalism, especially for terrorism, are found in mental rather than social economical history. The story of the Red Army Faction, and other armed groups, has more to do with existentialist ‘reality-games’. For these reasons, the ideological arguments of the armed organisations and leftist extremists alike seem obscure. This is particularly the case when it comes to the currently much debated ‘anti-Zionism’ of the German New Left and left-wing terrorists, and especially the extremely tight relations between German and Palestinian militants. The question must be raised whether this phenomenon should be understood as a revival of a deeply rooted anti-Semitism in contemporary Germany.

Why are we still dealing with the West German terrorism of the 1970s and 80s? Why has such an infamous and rather volatile phenomenon as the Red Army Faction (RAF) found such a long lasting echo? And why are the events surrounding them still so deeply entrenched in collective and cultural memory – to the extent that an entire exhibition on the subject was organised in Berlin in 2005, for example, with works of art from over a dozen countries?¹

These questions already lead to the very heart of the problem since from its early beginnings the symbolic significance of left-wing terrorism in Germany has largely outweighed any actual political impact. The West German post-war Republic was never in any real danger, as opposed to the Italian Republic in the time of the Red Brigades, for example. If society as a whole had in fact been deeply shaken, mainly during the showdown of the so-called German Autumn in 1977, then this was due to the sequence of events touching the most sensitive point of its coherence: a deep distrust or suspicion of itself, or, more precisely, of one part of the society about the other.

It was a British / South-African author, Jillian Becker, who in 1977 published a quite informed and colourful book with the striking title *Hitler’s Children*.² Unsurprisingly, this book became an international bestseller. Becker’s argument was very straightforward. In the same way that their fathers had followed Hitler, a new generation of young Germans was again denouncing and fighting the democratic order, above all a free and liberal society, which had finally been installed in the Federal Republic of Germany under the supervision of the Western allies after 1945. So the RAF members were ‘Hitler’s children’, because, although using a different ideology, they were