

Vigilance, Vigilantism, and the Role of the Citizen in combating German Terror, 1967-1977

Todd Goehle

Synopsis

By closely analyzing the Charles Bronson vehicle *Death Wish* -released to German speaking audiences as *Ein Mann sieht rot*- and the controversies that surrounded its West German debut in November 1974, the essay addresses broader debates about vigilance, *Selbstjustiz* (vigilante justice), and citizenship during the “Red Years.” Conceptualizing *Selbstjustiz* as a discursive site, I reveal how *Ein Mann sieht rot*’s representations of *Selbstjustiz* negotiated broader German anxieties about Americanization, masculinity, urban crime, the fascist past, state power, media effects and sensationalism, constructions of the citizen and the criminalized or terrorist “other,” and the responsibilities of the citizen in combating “terror.”

Biography

Todd Goehle is a Ph.D. candidate in history at SUNY Binghamton. His research interests include modern German and Global History, especially media history. He has contributed to the edited volume *1968. Societies in Crisis: A Global Perspective* (2010) and the forthcoming *The Revolution will not be Televised: Media and Protest Movements*.

Essay

In the immediate aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks on 11 September 2001, American politicians, law enforcement officials, and members of the media called upon citizens to stand against domestic terror threats. Questions soon emerged about the consequences of such pleas. For example, in her assessment of the post-September 11 moment, the social scientist Louise Amoore has noted that institutional discourses encouraging vigilance and mobilization rested on subjective binaries of inclusion and exclusion. According to Amoore, fluid notions of “the citizen” and “the other,” or in post-September 11 America “the terrorist,” precipitated unintentionally volatile effects, especially in specific contexts and conditions.ⁱ Consequently, in Amoore’s estimation, a phenomenon such as the “Minutemen” movement along the United States/Mexican border best exemplifies the unstable discursive boundaries between vigilance and vigilante justice in instances of social and political turmoil.ⁱⁱ Additional questions soon surface from Amoore’s claims. What are the connections between state- and mass

media-inspired calls for mobilization, vigilance, and quite possibly vigilante justice? And what might be the causal links between state- and media-produced discourses about vigilance, vigilante justice, and the instability of the “citizen” and the “other” in moments of “terror?”

Such fluidity is not exclusive to the post-9-11 moment. Indeed, this paper applies a similar line of questioning towards the study of *Selbstjustiz*ⁱⁱⁱ, a topic that has been under-examined in the historiography of 1968 and the *Red Army Faction* (RAF) of West Germany. Typically, the word *Selbstjustiz* appears when scholars either discuss a specific incident of violence or quote a political or social actor of the past. In each instance, *Selbstjustiz* becomes a simple description for an act, rather than a constructed, debated, or purposefully deployed concept in a historical context. Working from this logic, the paper investigates how *Selbstjustiz*, particularly when conceptualized as a discursive site, can help the historian unlock the many power constellations that existed throughout what Gerd Koenen has termed the “Red Years” (1967-1977), or the period in which the West German state and society wrestled with the rise of left-wing student activism and later terrorism. Specifically, I contend that by exploring the issue of *Selbstjustiz*, the historian can gain greater insight into how West Germans thought about a host of often-interconnected issues during the “Red Years,” including Americanization, masculinity, urban crime, the fascist past, media politics, the lengths and limits of state power, and the responsibilities of the citizen in moments of terror.

To accomplish this research program, the essay closely examines the American-produced film *Death Wish* as well as the controversies that surrounded its debut in West Germany on November 1974. Released as *Ein Mann sieht rot*, the film follows the transformation of a liberal, upper middle class pacifist and architect named Paul Kersey who, after the rape of his daughter and the death of his wife at the hands of petty thugs, pursues his own brand of violent justice against a host of urban criminals. In contrast to other crime thrillers of the era such as *Dirty Harry* and *Walking Tall*, films in which ineffective legal institutions lead law enforcement officials to embrace vigilante forms of justice, *Ein Mann sieht Rot* and its depiction of a citizen taking the law into his own hands proved far more controversial, especially after West German moviegoers made the film a box office smash. Through close study of *Ein Mann sieht rot* and the discursive site that was *Selbstjustiz*, the first section of this paper addresses how the representation of *Selbstjustiz* in *Ein Mann sieht rot* negotiated popular ideologies regarding American culture, masculinity, and primitivism. After exploring the reasons for why these narratives were rejected by the majority of West German film critics, the second portion of the essay outlines the ways in which *Selbstjustiz* engaged with complicated memories about German fascism and its origins in the Weimar Republic. Weimar era controversies about criminality, the mobilization of the masses, the instability of the state, media sensation, and the general dangers of urban life found new traction in West Germany’s era of left-wing terrorism. In the paper’s final section, I will address how *Ein Mann sieht rot* became more directly embroiled with this latter issue of terrorism when, nine days after the film’s initial release, left-wing terrorists with links to the student movement past murdered the SPD judge Günter von Drenkmann in West Berlin. In this moment of terror-related angst, *Ein Mann sieht rot* and its depiction of *Selbstjustiz* contributed to broader debates about the responsibilities of the state and the citizen in combating crime and terror.

Given its American origins, *Ein Mann sieht rot* unsurprisingly communicated themes that derived their meanings from a variety of American-based contexts and narratives. Noteworthy was how Kersey's vigilantism consolidated a revised myth of the American frontier and contemporary concerns about rising metropolitan-based crime. Certainly, Kersey's behavior evoked the image of an ennobled western gunfighter, a point made explicitly by Kersey's insistence to "draw" pistols against a Central Park mugger as well as more subtly in his reliance on violence to resolve conflict, to avenge the assault of his family, and to overcome an ineffective legal system. The setting of *Ein Mann sieht rot* -New York City circa 1974- is not the mythical, western frontier of late nineteenth century America, however. For the historian Richard Slotkin, the wealth and corruption associated with late capitalism's city makes the modernist promise of progress unobtainable. In this toxic environment, the vigilante hero is led to "draw energy from the same rage that drives the paranoids, psychopaths, mass murderers, and terrorists of the mean streets." (Slotkin 634) The ability to civilize through force, or the motive for violence in the American frontier myth, no longer is possible against the irreversible evils of the city in decline. Although like the western, violence remains justified, in *Ein Mann sieht rot*, it is distanced from progressive ideals, redefined as defensive, and rationalized as the exclusive vehicle to combat the ills of the metropolis.^{iv}

Kersey's remorseless use of violence is a product of both the city as well as a refocused, westernized myth. Previously described by his co-workers as a "bleeding heart liberal," Kersey accepts a temporary reassignment to Tucson for Ames Jainchill, a real estate mogul and self-styled cowboy who explains to Kersey that "honest men grow into the nation." Bright and sunny, the west becomes something natural and associated with growth, discourses that both contrast and confirm the artificiality of the dark and colorless city. For these reasons, the west ennobles man and his worldview. Kersey "goes wild" and, upon his return to New York, rejects the materiality of the city, remodeling his black and white designer apartment and repainting the walls with colors reminiscent of the Tucson frontier. Emancipated, Kersey develops a lively and honorable new sense of self, a reconstituted individuality that becomes the cornerstone of an emerging and idealized masculinity.

Confirming Marianna Torgovnick's claim that "the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive," Kersey's vigilante acts provide not only an acceptable solution against crime but also a contrast to the flawed masculinities that doom contemporary urban life. (Torgovnick 9) For example, rather than develop the self-reliant "pioneer spirit" expounded by his father-in-law, when faced by crumbling institutions that fail to protect their citizens, Kersey's son-in-law Jack contends that "civilized" citizens "cut and run" to the suburbs. Equally weak is the lead police officer of the "vigilante killer" case, Frank Ochoa, who is aging, overweight, and continually sneezing or wiping his nose. Ochoa's flabby and sickly state, which stands in contrast to the hardened and muscular body of Kersey, further confirms his incompetence as a police officer, allowing Kersey to escape surveillance and later leave New York City without punishment, symbols for the ineffectiveness and general corruption of the city's police. Contrasting masculinities also distinguish Kersey from the muggers of New York City. Kersey's vigilantism takes place under brightly shining streetlights, giving his acts transparency and opposing the tactics of the criminals who, in their darkened shadows,

stalk vulnerable targets of crime, specifically women and the elderly. Victimhood is thus gendered, in turn reasserting the masculine qualities of the mugger. These masculine constructions are ultimately condemnable however, since the criminals, consisting of any number of vaguely defined ethnic and societal stereotypes, are negatively bonded through their targeting of the feminine, their wearing of counterculture or gang-related clothing, and, most importantly, their youth. In this respect, Kersey's rugged and aged masculinity emerges as both a product of and a response to the weak and, with the exception of Ochoa, youthful counter-masculinities that occupy New York City.

Still, the film's perpetrators lack clear motive, leaving one to believe that the conditions of *Ein Mann sieht rot*'s urban jungle could be typical or widespread. Unsurprisingly, the film's depiction of crime and vigilante justice was marketed internationally, with *Ein Mann sieht rot*'s producer Dino De Laurentiis declaring, "Violence is not typical in New York City alone. Singapore, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Detroit, London, Chicago, Paris, and Rome are all plagued by the same problem. All big cities are jungles. New York is the symbol of all metropolitan areas of our planet." (Klemestrud) Here De Laurentiis commits a clever sleight of hand, denying that the increase in urban crime rates is a problem exclusive for New York City while at the same time emphasizing the exceptionalism of the American city. Film historians John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett discover similar traces of American exceptionalism within *Ein Mann sieht rot*'s depiction of the foreign reporters who flock to New York for scoops about the vigilante killer, a migration that communicates "the traditional American sense of being a 'city set upon a hill,' a moral example for the world." (Lawrence and Jewett 116-117) The lesson taken from *Ein Mann sieht rot*: crime and ineffective institutions are universal dilemmas of the late-modern city, problems to which there are uniquely American solutions, Kersey the vigilante.

Upon its West German release, the majority of West German film critics, irrespective of ideology or politics, dismissed *Ein Mann sieht rot* and its depiction of *Selbstjustiz* as American and primitive.^v Such condemnation had precedent. As Uta Poiger notes, "exoticizing" American film, music, and dance was a long-standing tradition among Weimar, Nazi, and post-war cultural critics who feared that the lifestyles portrayed in American cultural products would inspire social deviancy and unrest, especially among German youth. (Poiger 16-17) Regarding *Ein Mann sieht rot*, an unnamed writer for *Der Spiegel* dismissed the film's specter of the western and *Krimi* genres as well as its "Eye for an Eye, Tooth for Tooth' moral." (*Wenn Notwehr* 161) The same critic continued, "The many murders have something ballet-like, something from a Western-Showdown." (*Wenn Notwehr* 161) *Der Spiegel* was not alone in making the rather odd link between the classical art of ballet and frontier-style gun battles, as a film critic for *Die Welt* described the confrontations between Bronson and the film's muggers as "dancing around, like a Ballet about the downfall of Civilization." (Graves) Here the reviewer condemned the vigilante masculinity that was embraced by American film audiences, a masculinity recognized by West German critics as connoting the frontier spirit and reinforcing the notion of New York as an "urban jungle." (Graves) Kersey's vigilantism was thus received as something distinctly American, allowing critics to dismiss the universality of *Ein Mann sieht rot*'s solutions for urban decline.

Moreover, Charles Bronson, the actor who portrayed Paul Kersey, was already a man associated with gendered and racialized discourses of the primitive and the

irrational. Here again, Poiger's research proves useful, as she convincingly recalls how "German commentators harnessed alleged racial characteristics" to criticize American celebrities and their fans in Germany. (Poiger 173-174) As a result of the diverse ethnicities that he often portrayed on the screen as well as real-life rumblings of a violent temperament, Bronson was viewed as a brooding, unpredictable, and yet alluring man by his peers, his critics, and his audiences.^{vi} Such constructions dominated West German reviews of *Ein Mann sieht rot*, as critics compared Bronson to figures recognized for their violence, unpredictability, and exoticism. *Die Welt* described Bronson as "a physiognomic mixture of Genghis Khan and Edward G. Robinson." (Graves) *Der Spiegel*, quoting the French magazine *L'Express*, described the actor as "the little, silent Goliath with the head of Genghis Khan." (*Wenn Notwehr* 160) Refraining from such judgments, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* nonetheless expressed shock in seeing Bronson appear in "a film so middle class." (Roth) Similar constructions were also found in the illustrated magazine *Stern*, which explored Bronson's complex masculinity in a feature article entitled "The Killer with a Sense of Family." Although the story described Bronson as a family man who enjoyed the privacy of his ranch in Vermont, *Stern's* headlines and photographs reaffirmed discourses of danger and unpredictability. For example, in the second and third pages of the story, a photograph collage surrounds the text. Two small photographs, the first a close-up of Bronson's face from a spaghetti western film and the second a portrait of Bronson playing with his young daughter at the dinner table, are contrasted by a third photograph that covers the majority of the third page. In this third photograph, Bronson is seen flying through the air and dropkicking a tackling dummy that hangs from a tree. At the same time, his wife, the actress Jill Ireland, smiles in admiration. (*Ein Killer* 30-31) Here the female gaze directed upon Bronson in a moment of violence reinforces the attractiveness of Bronson's uncontrolled fury, sexuality, and masculinity. Although we will see how this constellation resonated with moviegoers, the portrayal of Bronson "the man" also fed the critics' negative descriptions of Kersey, the character. When providing a synopsis of the film's plot, most negative reviews attributed the movie's vigilante acts to Bronson the man, rather than Kersey the fictional character. Irrespective of the political ideologies or editorial policies of the media outlet, both Bronson and Kersey were portrayed as "salvage others," a label that helped dismiss *Selbstjustiz* as an inappropriate form of self-defense for West Germans.

Both Kersey and Bronson's irrationality reinforced broader claims that *Ein Mann sieht rot* was either fascist or a possible trigger for fascist-like behavior. In a cover story exposé about *Selbstjustiz*, *Der Spiegel* reprinted the remarks of Wolfram Schütte, a critic for the *Frankfurter Rundschau* who proclaimed "new calls from the west, fascism on the silver screen...Here not only dealt with in a film, but also with fascist contraband." (*Wenn Notwehr* 167) Wolf Donner's review for *Die Zeit* linked *Selbstjustiz* to both fascism and irrationality, proclaiming that "he (Bronson) and the remaining civilian killers do not propagate self-defense but rather execution: they consciously look for their prey and murder often with visible favor, often with bloodthirstiness." (Donner) Claiming such ideas were both "dangerous" as well as "fascist" and wondering aloud if the film should be banned, Donner nonetheless concluded that the film was "too stupid and too

coarse...to be taken seriously.” (Donner) Although Donner dismissed the possible social effects of *Ein Mann sieht rot*, other critics took seriously the aggressive messages surrounding *Ein Mann sieht rot* and its representation of *Selbstjustiz*. *Der Spiegel* included the comments of a critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* who saw the film as “the apologies of the strong man (*Die Apologie des starken Mannes*)...a retreat into atavistic forms of human cohabitation.” (*Ein Notwehr* 167) When discussing *Ein Mann sieht rot*, *Der Spiegel* and the *FAZ* were not alone in their concerns about the public and its attraction to an authoritarian, *starker Mann*. On 2 December 1974, the lead report of the television newsmagazine *Panorama* expressed fears that *Ein Mann sieht rot* and *Selbstjustiz* would once again awaken previously dormant, fascist characteristics among the West German citizenry. Particularly stunning were the comments of an unidentified critic who, when interviewed, found the film to be the “realization of the *starker Mann*.” (*Ein Mann*) For the critic, citizens lived in fear of crime and, when encouraged by sensational media, could identify mistakenly with the vigilante actions pursued by Kersey. As a reflection of the *starker Mann*, *Selbstjustiz*, as portrayed in *Ein Mann sieht rot*, was an extralegal activity that awakened the “fascist tendencies” of the public. Thus, *Selbstjustiz* was seen as more than a personal act of violence. It was also the broader mobilization of the masses under irrational pretenses.

The belief that *Selbstjustiz* would revive German fascism was itself a longstanding memory narrative with origins in the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). As the social movements scholar Donatella Della Porta contends, the memories of left-wing and fascist paramilitary organizations “terrorizing” the streets of late Weimar Berlin remained a powerful explanation for the general rise of the Third Reich and a justification for the post-Reich, Federal Republic’s often draconian responses against public protest. (Della Porta 193) Such a memory also drew its energy from a second popular myth of the Weimar era, that the city was a space riddled with violence and criminality. On this point, Sace Elder notes that not just the politicized murder of paramilitary organizations but also “ordinary” urban homicides emerged as useful tropes “for explaining and describing the crises of Weimar society.” (Elder 13) For Elder, “violence and crime were thus central in Weimar society to the construction of citizenship and the gendered order, the perception of social and moral disorder, anxieties about consumer and mass culture, the instability of social identities, and the often contentious relationship between state and society.” (Elder 11)

In her discussion of urban violence, crime, and vigilance in Weimar mass culture, Elder frequently references the Fritz Lang film *M*. Released in 1931, *M* depicts a serial killer whose attacks on children incite panic among the city’s residents. Responding to both the police’s inability to capture the child murderer as well as the subsequent crackdown of the city’s “innocent” crime circles, the criminals of the city mobilize under the guidance of a *starker Mann*, the master criminal Schränker. The serial murderer is cornered, captured, and “tried” in front of Schränker and the other criminals of the city. Convicting the killer and looking for an immediate, “lynch-style” death, the impromptu “court” is stopped by police forces that arrest the child murderer and arraign him in a formal court of law. Following the release of *M*, Lang expressed his critical intentions for the film: to capture Weimar’s fever-pitched obsession with the macabre, to condemn the media’s sensational presentation of violence, to warn his viewers about the consequences of weakened authority, and to advocate for greater vigilance within both

private and public life. (Aurich 139) Although it is unclear if Lang ever intended for *M* to serve as a warning against the rise of Nazism, the film critiqued contemporary criminality and found its meaning when calls for the mobilization of communities to combat urban unrest were high, particularly in Berlin. This context makes the logic of the Schränker-led mobilization campaign all the more dangerous in the mind of film historian Anton Kaes, who contends, “instead of resolving a crime after it is committed, which is the method of the police, the underworld opts for crime prevention. The price, of course, is high: total surveillance and mobilization, a voluntary fascism motivated by fear of violence.” (Kaes 46) Interestingly, Kaes’ claims parallel the sentiments of Lang’s contemporary critics. Notable is Gabriele Tergit and her now oft-cited review from 1931, which expressed alarm that “the state is mocked, the mobsters are heroized ... A hymn of praise to the asocial; a hymn of praise to the violent. Romanticized criminality of the worst sort! Vigilante Justice is represented as true justice.” (Tergit 632) Irrespective of Lang’s motives behind the film, Lang and Tergit similarly defined *Selbstjustiz* as a form of mobilization that was criminal and deviant. Such a view was also promoted by Weimar law enforcement officers who described the mass psychology of the “crowd” as irrational, a discourse that would characterize the radical forms of “justice” pursued by fascists in the streets of Weimar and influence responses to student activism and left-wing terror in the 1960s and 1970s.

These separate yet at times compatible notions of *Selbstjustiz*, as an irrational and criminal form of mobilization as well as a fascist articulation of group ideology and individualized violence, would reemerge immediately after the infamous death of the student Benno Ohnesorg on 2 June 1967. Killed by an undercover police officer at a student movement rally against the visiting Shah of Iran, Ohnesorg served as a rallying cry for student activists and emerged as a symbol for many that West German society had not fully overcome its fascist past. Conversely, concerns about the radicalization of student activism blended with the still vivid memories of the Weimar and Nazi pasts, leading media and state officials to demand greater civic vigilance and allowing the notion of *Selbstjustiz* to reemerge into the public domain.

Striking was the rhetoric used by the conservative publishing house Springer Verlag and its tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*. Specifically, statist discourses demanded citizens rally against those interests that threatened the political stability of the young democracy.^{vii} Still, critics of Springer Verlag, specifically media competitors and the student activists themselves, feared that emotionally charged discourses referencing deviancy and anti-totalitarianism could produce unintended consequences. In particular, alarms were raised after the death of Ohnesorg, when a now infamous *Bild-Zeitung* editorial declared, “We have something against SA methods. Germans want neither brown nor red SA. They don’t want columns of bullies, but peace.” (Quoted in Peifer 198) Readers’ letters also demanded “lynch justice” as an alternative to seemingly ineffective police forces, a view that clouded calls on subsequent pages for “civil courage.” (Davis 216) Constructed dichotomies of citizen and student, vigilant citizen and vigilante, as well as law and terror were blurred. Although Springer publications did not explicitly advocate for *Selbstjustiz* in print, concerns existed that the use of inflammatory language would encourage *Selbstjustiz* in West German society, particularly in instances when citizens actually committed physical acts of violence against left-wing activists.^{viii}

Calls for vigilance, the effects of sensationalism on the citizenry, and memories of Weimar instability continued to crystallize with left-wing terrorism's ascent in the 1970s. In response to the RAF, *the 2 June Movement*, and other urban guerrilla organizations, the ruling Social Party Democrats (SPD) passed legislation that granted police and security forces greater liberties to observe, arrest, and detain suspected terrorists. As noted by the historian Karin Hanshew, policies broadening the power of law enforcement agencies were supplemented by public relations campaigns that, through pamphlets, books, and public television, looked to educate ordinary citizens about the threats posed by left-wing terrorist organizations. The goals of these PR-campaigns were to develop the democratic tendencies of the citizenry, to secure the loyalties of the citizenry, and to reinforce the need for greater state authority. Memories of the past were once again important, since, according to Hanshew, "to prevent further deterioration and potentially a repetition of Weimar, members of the government called for a 'political-spiritual confrontation' with terrorism that would not only wean sympathizers off the RAF but also mobilize the population to defend democracy actively." (Hanshew 129) With the shadow of Weimar looming large, SPD officials believed that information would combat possible sympathy for the RAF's aims and cultivate a vigilant public that, perhaps most importantly, would respect the state's monopoly on both lawmaking and law preserving violence, to evoke Benjamin's terms.

Information was intended to secure the loyalties of an educated citizenry and counter the sensationalized coverage often found in the mainstream press and especially the Springer tabloids. Still, for Hanshew, similarities did exist regarding how state and media publications presented left-wing terrorism as "anarchistic," a discourse that denied "the political nature of terrorism ... defined it as purely criminal and sought its roots in the values of the postwar generation." (Hanshew 129) In this respect, left-wing terrorism was viewed as both a criminal act devoid of political meaning and a byproduct of changing social conditions and cultural norms. These constructions also converged with gendered discourses of deviancy, as critics irrespective of ideology cited an "excess of women's liberation" to explain the large number of women in urban terrorist organizations. (Rosenfeld 356) Transcending traditional notions of femininity, female terrorists were defined as unnaturally aggressive, in turn highlighting the perceived lack of masculinity exhibited by male terrorists such as Andreas Baader. For the gender historian Alan Rosenfeld, these "stories of gender role reversal among urban guerrillas implied that their compulsion towards violence originated in their deviant sexuality." (Rosenfeld 362-363) So while the state sought to expand its police powers by cultivating a cooperative public, the information released by the state, similar to the coverage offered by the mass media, reinforced sensationalized notions of the terrorist as a criminalized and deviant "other" devoid of political purpose. Consequently, as I will now address in the conclusion, the dichotomy of the vigilant and rational citizen versus the deviant, criminalized terrorist proved unstable, as evidenced in the debates about *Ein Mann sieht rot* after the 9 November 1974 death of the incarcerated RAF member Holger Meins and the next day's retaliatory strike by the *2 Juni Movement*, which killed the SPD justice Günter von Drenkmann during an attempted kidnapping.

Occurring 9 days after the debut of *Ein Mann sieht rot*, the death of von Drenkmann

signaled the public reemergence of left-wing terrorism after the arrests of many of the founding members of the RAF in 1972. The strike also marked a shift in tactics for left-wing terrorists, who now targeted vulnerable public figures who possessed degrees of symbolic capital. In the weeks that followed, calls for the expansion of police powers only increased, furthering popular fears that the state was unable to sufficiently protect West German citizens. This emerging crisis of crime prevention provides additional context for why the liberal and left-liberal press was especially alarmed by the popularity of *Ein Mann sieht rot*. Anxieties about *Selbstjustiz*, the attractiveness of the *starker Mann*, and fascist remobilization were thus not merely reflections of Germany's traumatic past but also expressions of skepticism about the democratic credentials of the vigilant West German citizen in moments of "terror." For example, to make sense of the *Ein Mann sieht rot* phenomenon, reporters from *Panorama* interviewed Hamburg moviegoers and, in their commentary, included excerpts from the conversations.^{ix} Middle age or older, the surveyed viewers articulated degrees of approval for Kersey's vigilante acts. Sympathy stemmed from the moviegoer's expressed unease about ineffective police forces and urban youth, specifically the rise of "Rocker" attacks in Hamburg. (*Ein Mann*) Immediately following the interviews, a panel of experts dismissed the public responses and largely blamed moviegoer angst on *Bild-Zeitung*, its serialization of the novel *Death Wish* by Brian Garfield, and its recent news stories, which typically were said to sensationalize local Rocker attacks, urban homicides, and the recent death of von Drenkmann. (*Ein Mann*) Such arguments reinforced *Panorama's* larger concerns that scandalous media products, in this instance *Ein Mann sieht rot* and *Bild-Zeitung*, awakened the public's fascist desires in moments of terror, a claim that we have noted was historically aroused with representations of *Selbstjustiz*. Though heavily edited, there is much to explore, at least circumstantially, in the moviegoers' responses and *Panorama's* rebuttals. Seemingly, both moviegoers with their responses and reporters through their targeting of older subjects constructed the criminal/citizen binary through a generational lens. In other words, there seems to be at least some speculative evidence that ordinary West Germans saw in Paul Kersey a model of middle-aged masculinity, one able to overcome weak law enforcement institutions and combat the criminals who lurked in the street. Additionally, linked to the issue of youth, both viewers' responses and the report's broader narrative at the very least confirm the synthesis of Establishment discourses, that left-wing terrorists from the rebellious generation of "1968" were no different in their goals and objectives than common criminals. Accordingly, it is reasonable to suggest that there were citizens and members of the media who might have drawn connections between *Ein Mann sieht rot*, its depiction of *Selbstjustiz*, and broader concerns about West German terrorism.

Such links were also politically expedient. *Die Zeit* connected *Ein Mann sieht rot* and the issue of *Selbstjustiz* with "Law and Order" politicians, media personalities, and citizens who demanded sweeping new state powers in order to combat crime and terror after von Drenkmann. In a specific instance, the columnist Rolf Zundei equated *Ein Mann sieht rot's* "glorification of a primitive form of vigilantism" to the "irrational" arguments of "law and order" advocates following the death of von Drenkmann. For Zundei, both the film and "law and order" positions escalated public hysteria about the RAF, encouraged verbal and physical attacks against left-wing activists and "sympathizers" of the RAF, and discouraged citizens from discussing "reform,

emancipation, democratization, social liberalism or democratic socialism.” (Zunde) Similar to *Panorama* and the *New York Times* earlier, *Die Zeit* interviewed moviegoers of *Ein Mann sieht rot* and concluded one report with the thoughts of a viewer who feared another round of “Baader-Meinhof hysteria,” a panic that would promote *Selbstjustiz*. (*Warum nicht*) Although *Die Zeit* and its varied coverage sought to deescalate public emotions, its characterization of *Ein Mann sieht rot*, *Selbstjustiz*, and “law and order” discourses as repressive, sensationalistic, or fascistic did little to alleviate the public panic that the liberal outlet originally sought to combat. *Die Zeit* was not alone in this regard. As previously noted, *Der Spiegel*’s special report about *Selbstjustiz* condemned *Ein Mann sieht rot*’s depiction of crime and the emotionally driven tactics of German “law and order” advocates, in particular the editors of *Bild-Zeitung* and the SPD’s parliamentary opposition, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). Throughout *Der Spiegel*’s coverage, crime statistics complimented the opinions of noted criminologists and sought to inform the reader, to dismiss the appropriateness of American “law and order” solutions, and to combat the seemingly exaggerated claims of conservative pundits. Dismissing the latter interests, *Der Spiegel* connected the supposedly irrational “law and order” discourses of the post-von Drenkmann moment with the sensationalism of *Ein Mann sieht rot*. For instance, *Der Spiegel* condemned Baden-Württemberg’s Ministerpräsident Hans Filbinger for evoking “a crime scene that is like a plot with Bronson” when describing the crime faced nightly by urban citizens. (*Wenn Notwehr*) Conversely, *Der Spiegel*’s provocative cover title, “*Terror gegen die Justiz, Terror der Justiz?*” (Terror versus Justice, The Terror of Justice?), was complimented by the image of a smoking handgun barrel, an imagetext that furthered the emotionally charged environment that *Der Spiegel* looked to deescalate with its coverage of *Ein Mann sieht rot*. If “law and order” advocates were guilty of stimulating moral panics through loaded descriptions of crime and terror, then certainly liberal and left-liberal outlets were vulnerable to similar charges with their coverage of *Selbstjustiz*.

Perhaps “*Terror gegen die Justiz, Terror der Justiz*” provides an appropriate means for concluding this discussion about *Ein Mann sieht rot*, *Selbstjustiz*, and the issue of civic vigilance, since its conflation of “terror” and “justice” exposes the arbitrary and ambiguous nature of oppositional binaries in fixed moments of “terror.” Although state- and media-produced discourses demanded that citizens remain vigilant against the “terror” of the “Red Years,” the popular film *Ein Mann sieht rot*, and its presentation of *Selbstjustiz* as a method for combating crime and weak legal institutions, brought to light the fluid definitions surrounding these demands, especially after the death of von Drenkmann. In this respect, *Ein Mann sieht rot* and *Selbstjustiz* provided discursive sites where notions of Americanization, fascism, gender, media sensation, and state power shaped the contentious politics that determined the West German citizen’s role in both crime prevention and the fight against left-wing terrorism.

Endnotes

¹Amoore notes, “The subjectivity of the homeland security citizen is erupting in many different ways, few of them predictable or strictly manageable.” (Amoore 123)

ⁱⁱIn her analysis, Amooore claims, “though the US government professed not to support the actions of the Minutemen, one does not need to look very far to find the elision of vigilance with vigilantism in the Citizen Corps, USAonwatch, and the Freedom Corps.” (Amooore 126)

ⁱⁱⁱ*Selbstjustiz* is the German term for vigilante justice. Depending upon the context, *Selbstjustiz* can also infer “taking the law into one’s own hands.” In this article, I have only examined the instances when the specific term *Selbstjustiz* was used. Terms that can hold equivalent meaning, such as “lynch justice,” were only explored when referenced alongside the term *Selbstjustiz*.

^{iv}For Richard Slotkin, the “urban vigilante” genre drew on many of the narrative devices and discourses found in the westerns of the 1940s and 1950s, even as audiences, confronted with the failure of the Vietnam War and the corruption of Watergate, rejected the western genre’s typical “myth/ideology of liberal progressivism.” (Slotkin 633).

^vThe one exception was the conservative tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*, which serialized the novel *Death Wish* by Brian Garfield and praised the film for its depiction of urban crime.

^{vi}To market Bronson, his handlers often exaggerated rumors of lacking restraint and references to masculine virility. According to Michael Winner, the British born director of *Death Wish*, “The key to Bronson is the repressed fury, the constant feeling that if you don’t watch the screen every minute, you’ll miss the eruption ...coupled with the intense masculine dynamism, there’s also a great tenderness in Bronson which women, in particular, recognize. In real life, he’s the best father in the history of fatherhood and the best husband in the history of husbandry. Women respond sexually to that combination of danger and tenderness in him.” Winner’s references to “fury,” “eruption,” and “husbandry,” or the breeding of livestock and other farm animals, once again elicit the gendered and racial notions associated with primitivism and “going wild.” (Davidson)

^{vii}For example, the Springer-owned *Berliner Morgenpost* encouraged citizens to observe May Day 1968, a day described as “a striking demonstration for Peace, Freedom, and Social Justice.” At the same time, the editorial warned readers to resist the “provocations” of the APO (the leading social movement organization),” which had received “the help of the SED (the East German communist party).” (*Die besseren*)

^{viii}See, the failed assassination of the APO leader Rudi Dutschke by the 23-year-old fascist Josef Bachmann, an attack that triggered the Easter riots of 1968. (Goehle 128)

^{ix}In their coverage, *Panorama* and *Die Zeit* each referenced and borrowed approaches first used by the *New York Times*. For example, stories written by the noted film critic of the *New York Times* Vincent Canby complained about the film’s sensationalized representation of crime in the city. Canby also feared the film would inspire similar responses by urban residents, concerns that were reinforced by another story in which reporters found it “hard to find anyone who was critical of the film,” confirming the approval of Kersey’s masculine acts of vigilantism. (Klemestrud)

Works Consulted

Amooore, Louise. “Consulting, Culture, the Camp: on the economies of the exception.” *Risk and the War on Terror*. Eds. Louise Amooore and Marieke de Goede.

London: Routledge, 2008. 112-130. Print.

Aurich, Rolf, et al., eds. *Fritz Lang. Leben und Werk. Bilder und Dokumente*. Berlin, Jovis, 2001. Print.

Canby, Vincent. “Death Wish Exploits Fear Irresponsibly.” *New York Times* 4 Aug. 1974. Print.

Davidson, Bill. “America discovers a ‘Sacred Monster.’” *New York Times* (NYT) 22 Sept. 1974. Print

Davis, Belinda. “New Leftists and West Germany: Fascism, Violence, and the Public Sphere, 1967-1974.” *Coping with the Nazi Past*. Eds. Phillip Gassert and Alan Steinweis. New York: Berghahn, 2006. 210-237. Print.

“Die besseren Argumente.” *Berliner Morgenpost* 1 May 1968. Print

Donner, Rolf. “Lynchjustiz auf der Leinwand: Jagd auf linke Brüder.” *Die Zeit* 1 Nov.

-
1974. Print.
- Della Porta, Donatella. *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Print.
- “Ein Killer mit Familiensinn.” *Stern* 1 Nov. 1974. 28-34. Print.
- “Ein Mann sieht rot.” *Panorama*, 2 December 1974. Archive for *Panorama*. Web. 11 Aug. 2011. <http://daserste.ndr.de/panorama/archiv/1974/panorama1681.html>
- Elder, Sace. *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin*. Ann Arbor: Uni. of Michigan, 2010. Print.
- Goehle, Todd. “Embracing Revolution to Reinforce Consensus? Uses and Representations of the Prague Spring in the West German Tabloid Press of 1968.” *1968: Societies in Global Crisis: A Global Perspective*. Eds. Patrick Dramé and Jean Lamarre. Montreal: Uni. de Laval, 2010. 123-136. Print.
- Graves, Barry. “Eine Blutspur zieht sich durch New York.” *Die Welt* 1 Nov. 1974. Print.
- Hanshew, Karrin. “Daring More Democracy? Internal Security and the Social Democratic Fight against West German Terrorism.” *Central European History* 43.1 (2010): 117-147. Print.
- Klemestrud, Judy. “What do they see in Death Wish?” *NYT* 1 Sept. 1974. Print.
- Kaes, Anton. *M*. London: BFI Publishing, 1999. Print.
- Lawrence, John Shelton and Robert Jewett. *The Myth of the American Superhero*. Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002. Print.
- Peifer, Elizabeth. “Public Demonstrations of the 1960s: Participatory Democracy or Leftist fascism?” *Coping with the Nazi Past*....194-209. Print.
- Poiger, Uta. *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. Berkeley: Uni. of California, 2000. Print.
- Rosenfeld, Alan. “Anarchist Amazons’: The Gendering of Radicalism in 1970s West Germany.” *Contemporary European History* 19.2 (2010): 351-374.
- Roth, Wilhelm. “Rückkehr zu den alten Untugenden.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 1 Nov. 1974. Print.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America*. New York: Atheneum, 1992. Print.
- Tergit, Gabriele. “Fritz Lang’s *M*: Filmed Sadism.” *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Eds. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg. Berkeley: Uni. of California, 1994. 632-633. Print.
- Torgovnick, Mariana. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: Uni. of Chicago, 1991. Print.
- “Warum nicht Selbstjustiz?” *Die Zeit* (13 December 1974). Print.
- “Wenn Notwehr zum Vergnügen wird.” *Der Spiegel* (18 November 1974). Print.
- Zundei, Rolf. “Tendenzwende-mehr als Einbildung.” *Die Zeit* (13 Dec. 1974). Print