



Julia Albrecht / Corinna Ponto

Patentöchter. Im Schatten der RAF - ein Dialog
*Goddaughters. In the Shadow of German Left Wing
Terrorism – A Dialogue*

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PATENTÖCHTER – GODDAUGHTERS by Julia Albrecht and Corinna Ponto is the story of a convergence – a convergence between culprit and victim.

One fundamental question that arises after any quarrel, war or crime is whether peace and tranquility will ever come to the culprit and victim. Is there such a thing as reconciliation? Do forgiveness and understanding really exist? And if so, when is the time right? And how are the lives of the families of perpetrators and victims impacted by an act of violence?

Picture this: A man, the chairman of the board of a large bank, is murdered in his own home. It was all facilitated by the daughter of his close friend, who had called ahead of time to ask if she could stop by for a visit. She arrived accompanied by two accomplices who shot and killed the defenseless man shortly after entering the house. The three offenders make their escape. Meanwhile the wife of the banker overhears everything from the next room.

Time stands still for the family of the victim. The world as they know it is falling to pieces. Relatives of the perpetrator are shocked when they are informed shortly thereafter of the crime and the involvement of their daughter and sister. Life is also falling apart at the seams for them – there are moments of disbelief, questions about complicity, about whether the crime could have been prevented, and even whether or not they ever really knew their daughter and sister. The crime leaves behind a gaping hole in both families, each of which has lost a family member indefinitely.

The crime in question did actually take place. In 1977, Jürgen Ponto, chairman of the board of the Dresdner Bank, was shot by an RAF commando. Susanne Albrecht, the daughter of his close friend, served as an accomplice. She disappeared for 13 years following the crime.

The assassination of Jürgen Ponto was just one of many terrorist murders committed by the *Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF)* in West Germany in the '70s. The serial murders ended with the thwarted hijacking of a Lufthansa plane that had flown to Mogadishu and the suicides of three leaders of the terrorist group in prison. The RAF was disbanded in 1998.

Now, more than 30 years later, a dialogue unfolds between the daughter of the victim, Corinna Ponto, and the younger sister of the culprit, Julia Albrecht. The two women meet, approaching with caution. They decide to write a book. They describe how the event has influenced their lives and how they are dealing with it to this day, all in a way that is haunting

and very personal, but at the same time analytical. Particularly moving are the passages written by the younger sister about wavering between longing for her missing sister and feeling horrified at the sight of the ubiquitous wanted posters. Also touching are the passages from letters written by the father of the perpetrator and the wife of the victim.

Numerous books have been written on the subject of the RAF, but this one stands alone in that never before has so much attention been paid to the feelings of those close to the victim. For this reason, it also rises above the oft-covered subject of the RAF. It serves as an example of reconciliation and chronicles how acts of violence impact the environment of those directly involved, as well as those indirectly involved. The two authors are impressive in their will to come to terms with the past and in their openness to listen to and understand the other side of the story.

Another unique aspect of the book is its inquiry into the involvement of the Stasi in the workings of the RAF. Specifically, Corinna Ponto cites files that indicate that these connections may have run far deeper than previously assumed. Were the RAF bombers ultimately “puppets of the cold war” (*Die Tagespost*, 08.04.2011)? This political chapter of recent German history still has to be studied in further detail.

It comes as no surprise that this book has garnered a lot of attention in Germany. The two women have presented the book on talk shows and in interviews. Many reviews have given the book high praise, not only for serving as an important contribution and for bringing new facets of the RAF complex to light, but also for providing an example of an open yet cautious convergence of victim and perpetrator.

“Anyone who has ever wanted to understand the psychological depths to which relatives of victims or perpetrators can sink will be served well by this impressive book.” (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 11.04.2011)