Introduction

This book addresses the political dimension of consumption and violence in postwar West Germany and historically pinpoints criticism of “regimes of provision,” a key analytical term that will be defined subsequently. The focus is on political articulations among the Left between the late 1950s and the unification of Germany in 1990, and these articulations are related to social practices of radical and militant protest. The analysis draws on sources by people who, in theory and practice, criticised their contemporary “regimes of provision” and sought to develop alternative semantics of consumption. This includes philosophers working on a critical theory of affluent society, inhabitants of communes or squats, and political activists involved in protest campaigns on a wide array of issues from public transport fare increases to the institutions of global governance as well as prominent militants commonly labelled as terrorists. The book is thus not about the average consumer or about those who chose the label of consumer to organise themselves but about discourses, ideas, and practices of consumption, about their impact and implementation in left-wing political protest, and about the ensuing confrontations with the state authorities seeking to uphold not only law and order but also the realities and ideals of existing “regimes of provision,” especially in the context of the Cold War system confrontation. The following chapters provide ample evidence of how those involved in discourses over “regimes of provision” and militant protest transferred their perceptions of complex economic developments into emotive and confrontational acts of political communication. It makes sense to ask where narratives were constituted that not only made political violence possible but also made it appear advisable. Drawing on extensive archival material on new social movements and militant groups—so far never analysed with respect to issues of consumption—it will become clear that post–World War II debates about consumption were historically interlinked with discourse on the state’s monopoly on violence, terrorism, war, revolution, and genocide.

It is therefore necessary to ask more fundamental questions about the con-
Consumption and Violence

Connections between consumption, on the one hand, and conflict, destruction, and violence, on the other. The etymology of the word to consume suggests an intrinsic connection. The transitive verb combines “senses relating to physical destruction” (such as “to burn with fire” or “to kill or destroy”) and “senses relating to the use or exploitation of resources” (such as “to eat or drink,” “to use up” a commodity or resource; “to purchase or use” goods or services; “to spend” money or “to squander” goods).\(^1\) Although in the German language the sense relating to physical destruction has been largely obsolete since the nineteenth century,\(^2\) it is easy to see that this semantic field can turn into a battlefield when social and political meanings of the concept are contested.

Consumption in a Field of Tension

The construction of a modern consumer economy is commonly seen as an integral part of the Bonn Republic’s successful modernisation process. A recent study of “the consumer” in postwar West German history offers a four-phase periodisation of this process characterised by specific images of the consumer. For the present enquiry, the latter two periods are of special interest. Between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, consumption was no longer predominantly regarded as an agent of social levelling, as had been the case in the previous period, but emerged as a means of constructing new social distinctions. Critics spread the idea of the strong manipulative powers of advertisement. This was followed by a period of “postmodern consumers” between the mid-1970s and 1989 when older models, including the manipulation thesis, were qualified and responsibility for the consequences of consumption was shifted onto the consumers, who were increasingly characterised as self-determined, critical, and free.\(^3\) Such an approach to the West German development can be embedded in larger narratives of American-inspired consumer societies driving a process of democratisation via the dismantling of hierarchies and class differences in lifestyles. Most studies dedicated to this interpretation highlight the contrasts between postwar affluent societies and the misery and destruction of the age of the world wars, but their analysis usually does not go significantly beyond the early 1970s.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Schrage, Verfügbarkeit der Dinge, 50.
\(^3\) Gasteiger, Konsument, 11.
\(^4\) See Grazia, Irresistible Empire; Maase, Grenzenloses Vergnügen.
The late 1960s, and especially the early 1970s were a period when the immense economic optimism of the postwar boom period began to show cracks. Strong social contrasts reappeared, and they ultimately proved the beginning of what Eric Hobsbawm called “the crisis decades.” The early 1970s constituted a veritable turning point in West German history, with growing unemployment and the crisis of the welfare state reintroducing social hierarchies and undermining the integrating effects of the earlier expansion of consumer markets.

At the same time, contemporaries displayed a tendency to downplay the extent of the crisis against the backdrop of the collective memory of an infinitely more terrible crisis: the violence and destruction of war. Victoria de Grazia insightfully addresses the specific historical relativity of European perceptions of what she calls the American “Market Empire”: “Born as an alternative to European militarism, it progressed as a model of governing the good life in a century beset by successive decades of total war, fratricidal civil conflict, nuclear holocaust, and genocidal murder.” Its “winning weapons came from the arsenal of a super-rich consumer culture,” which obscured the fact that “the Market Empire advanced rapidly in times of war and that its many military victories—and occasional defeats—were always accompanied by significant breakthroughs to the benefit of its consumer industries and values.” The underlying soft-power strategy required the constant radiation of images of affluence and magnetism and highlighted the long-standing ideological competition over the superior way of providing for the needs of the people. A diffuse transatlantic Cold War consumption debate provided the ground for a far-reaching and lasting link between issues of consumption and scenarios of violent conflict. Discourse on consumption was inherently connected with East-West tensions and the nuclear arms race. The so-called Kitchen Debate between American vice president Richard Nixon and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev at the American exhibition in Moscow in 1959 is the most prominent example of this amalgamation: a remarkable blend of discussion on colour television, the Captive Nations Resolution, rockets, washing machines, gadgets, the good life, and army bases in foreign lands.

Austrian American psychologist and marketing expert Ernest Dichter emphasized in 1960 that the most important weapon in the Western camp’s “arse-

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5. See Fourastié, Trentes glorieuses; Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 403–4.
7. Grazia, Irresistible Empire, 8–9.
nal” was desire and thus consumption. This contained the key to more successful Cold War weapons that had the power to transcend material objects: “We are fighting a sham battle with rockets and hydrogen bombs while underneath the real struggle, the silent war, is for the possession of men’s minds.” In a German context, such ideas smacked of propaganda and violent abuse, as Aldous Huxley had already observed in 1958: “Twenty years before Madison Avenue embarked upon ‘Motivational Research,’ Hitler was systematically exploring and exploiting the secret fears and hopes, the cravings, anxieties and frustrations of the German masses. It is by manipulating ‘hidden forces’ that the advertising experts induce us to buy their wares—a toothpaste, a brand of cigarettes, a political candidate. And it is by appealing to the same hidden forces . . . that Hitler induced the German masses to buy themselves a Fuehrer, an insane philosophy and the Second World War.”

Huxley acknowledged that he was inspired by Vance Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders*. While Packard did not mention Hitler, his exploration of consumer motivational research triggered a wave of critical attitudes towards advertisement. Since the late 1950s, critical accounts of the “affluent society” and its social manipulations by American scholars—next to Packard John Kenneth Galbraith and David Riesman—became best sellers in West Germany. Market researchers and critics shared the assumption that the consumer was manipulable. The most influential critical account of advanced industrial society and a key text for the developments analysed in this book—Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*—also originated in the Cold War intellectual debate over well-being. Marcuse’s original draft for a study on mentality change in industrial societies included both the capitalist West and the Soviet Union. He shifted focus in favour of a study solely of the Soviet Union commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation. He continued to work with the Rockefeller Foundation, and *One-Dimensional Man* became in many ways a counterpart to *Soviet Marxism*.

More broadly, there was a tendency to introduce the vocabulary of vio-

lence into the discourse on consumption. In a much-discussed 1957 book, Viennese writer Karl Bednarik reported from the “war zone of the consumer front,” where the “man of the masses struggled for survival.” Der Spiegel thought that “Dichter’s laboratory of soul manipulation prepared the most serious assassination attempt on the Western idea of man.” An advertisement lobbyist even identified Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders* as a “nuclear bomb against advertisement.” Philosophers Günther Anders decried the “soft terrorism” of conformist popular entertainment. Prominent sociologist Helmut Schelsky referred to road traffic as “the carnage of guerrilla warfare.” In 1977, a study of 330 textbooks found that advertisement was depicted as militant using expressions such as *Werbefeldzug* (advertising campaign), *Werbeschlacht* (advertising battle), *Werbeeschosse* (advertisement shells), *Marken-Offensive* (brand campaign), *Überraschungsangriffe* (surprise attacks), *Massenbombardement* (massed bombardment), and *Dauerfeuer* (sustained fire). The survey also concluded that more than 70 percent of schoolbooks depicted advertisement as manipulative. Beginning in the late 1960s, many West German leftists came to see a repressive totality rooted in diffuse *Konsumterror*. This curious compound literally means “consumption terror,” but it also refers to pressure to buy. In response to critical attitudes, the advertising industry, substantially supported by the Axel Springer publishing house, resorted to a veritable image campaign in the 1970s.

In Cold War Germany, ideas about consumption and ideas about political conflict and crises were deeply intertwined, starting with the currency reform in 1948, which triggered the Berlin Blockade and the airlift food relief by the Western Allies when Germans saw military planes dropping food packages rather than bombs. The 17 June uprising in East Germany was preceded by the authorities’ promise to abolish food rationing by 1953. In this context, commodities and food packages again emerged as weapons of American psychological warfare. Ultimately, the products of the cultural industries became

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21. See ibid., 189.
more important than food. Up to around 1955, East and West German officials still shared a certain consensus in their culturally conservative, sceptical attitudes towards the products of American mass culture. In the West, this attitude was increasingly superseded by the fervid forging of consumption into an effective Cold War weapon accompanied by an ostentatious depoliticisation of consumption in the realm of rhetoric. East German officials counted seven million West Berlin visits per year and increasingly viewed Western consumer culture as threatening to the socialist youth and—not entirely without reason—to be the work of American agents.22 West Berlin was carefully built up both as an indicator of West Germany’s successful “economic miracle” and as a real and metaphorical showcase in the Cold War competition. Khrushchev’s November 1958 Berlin ultimatum was announced against the backdrop of a larger programme of surpassing the West in per capita consumption of food and other commodities until 1961. The well-being of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was central to the Soviet Union’s competitive Cold War strategy. Anastas Mikoyan, first deputy chair of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, assured his East German counterparts in 1961 that their country was the place where the socialist system had to prove itself “right and superior.”23 With an eye to economic aid from the Soviet Union, Ulbricht explained to Khrushchev in January 1961 that “the economic competition between the socialist camp and the capitalist states” remained the central issue. Adenauer was leading the battle against the GDR “mainly with economic weapons.” The East German leader made it unequivocally clear that the GDR was increasingly falling behind its high-powered West German competitors. Domestic considerations had already moved the East German leadership to allocate more resources to consumption than was economically justifiable.24 What Ulbricht did not stress to his Moscow allies was the fact that the East German government’s second wave of enforced collectivisations had decreased productivity. This contributed to a worsening food situation and thus to ever more people taking flight to the West. The Berlin Wall was erected when the magnetism of West Germany’s elaborately staged “economic miracle” had forced the East’s competitive programme onto the defensive.

Relying on heavy subsidies and tax incentives, a retail boom became a tangible reality in West Berlin despite the Wall and the industrial drain it triggered. The governments of both East and West Berlin as well as of the United

States and Soviet Union continued to use images of affluence and prosperity to bolster their political legitimacy. Large department stores played a significant role in these endeavours. In the summer of 1963, Egon Bahr outlined the famous concept “change through rapprochement” that described West Germany’s relationship with its eastern rival and became very influential in the Brandt government’s subsequent Ostpolitik. Bahr explicitly introduced the aim of a “broader spectrum of consumer goods in the East,” fostering rising demand among the population, as one of the central planks of this ingenious competitive strategy. Commodity flow across the not-so-impermeable Iron Curtain was never completely hindered. The Berlin Wall was a violent but porous separation of two regimes of provision. Ultimately, more intensely articulated consumer demand among populations in the entire Soviet sphere of influence played a definite role in its demise.

This brief sketch of historical developments highlights how entangled the themes of consumption and violence had become in the lives of Germans during the Cold War. In the following chapters, divided Germany appears as a central battleground of system confrontation against the backdrop of affluence where rival economic systems clashed and competing ideologies confronted each other, reflecting various dimensions of political and social division. The West German experience emerges as in some ways distinctive (as a consequence of the two German states competing against a peculiar historical backdrop) but also as in some ways typical of affluent societies subject to broader developments. Crucially, the intense competition to outdo each other also meant that in terms of consumerism, Soviet communism increasingly ceased to constitute a fundamental alternative. Both sides came to share the ideal of ostentative nonpolitical affluence, as Khrushchev famously remarked at the Kitchen Debate: “When we catch you up, in passing you by, we will wave to you.” When it became clear that Khrushchev had bitten off more than he could chew and that the USSR and its allies had increasingly fallen behind but nevertheless managed to uphold the brittle equilibrium between economic and nuclear competition, it exacerbated the impression that the Eastern bloc “was becoming irrelevant as offering an alternative vision of collective well-being.”

The vacuum that this development left in the political imagination of the German Left, coupled with the continued amalgamation of issues of consumption

27. Grazia, Irresistible Empire, 456.
with political and violent conflict in the Cold War context, forms a crucial precondition for the emergence of the radical attitudes towards issues of consumption that are analysed in this book.

Against the backdrop of Nazi boycotts of shops owned by Jews during the 1930s, the boycott as a form of protest was largely dormant in West Germany during the 1950s. When it increasingly appeared after the erection of the Berlin Wall, it was mostly directed against East Germany and occasionally used against the cultural products of individuals associated with the Nazi past. This constellation led to two boycotts that triggered landmark cases of constitutional law: the director of the Hamburg government’s press office called for a boycott of Veit Harlan’s first post–World War II film, which occupied the courts throughout the 1950s and became known as the Lüth case; the Springer company’s boycott against a communist weekly for printing the East German television programme similarly occupied the courts throughout the 1960s and became known as the Blinkfüer case. Both cases went all the way up to the Federal Constitutional Court, which determined that boycotts were protected under the basic right of freedom of expression but only to the point that the economic pressure exerted did not stifle the targeted party’s freedom of expression. This formulation subsequently proved important when the new social movements embraced boycott, coupled with direct action, in the late 1960s in the context of protests against public transport fare increases and the Springer press. A variety of boycott campaigns directed against specific companies and also against entire countries only emerged from 1973–74 onwards. Analysing such campaigns and their roots requires identifying a suitable methodological approach.

**Method**

Recent historiography has begun to look more closely at the political implications of consumption where practical everyday issues gave rise to broader considerations and abstract theories; as Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton put it, “The specificity of commodity purchasing often crystallizes other general political concerns.”

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28. On antisemitic boycotts during the 1920s and 1930s, see Hannah Ahlheim, “Deutsche, kauft nicht bei Juden!”: Antisemitismus und politischer Boykott in Deutschland 1924 bis 1935 (Göttingen, 2011); Avraham Barkai, Vom Boykott zur “Entjudung”: Der wirtschaftliche Existenzkampf der Juden im Dritten Reich, 1933–1943 (Frankfurt, 1988).

29. Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton, “Material Politics: An Introduction,” in *Politics of...*
Consuming individual has become an essential element of the modern liberal state. Detlef Siegfried has demonstrated how consumption and politics did by no means exclude each other in the West German youth culture of the 1960s. On the contrary, the differentiation and pluralisation of consumption and lifestyle options were closely linked with the articulation of critical and political concerns. For the more recent period, interdisciplinary work has examined boycotts, ad busting, and political consumerism.

Matthew Hilton’s *Prosperity for All* shows that the organisations of consumers and their diverse networks are central agents of global civil society and “the institutional expression of a grassroots social movement,” which he grants the capacity to integrate the political spectrum across ideological divides in favour of one-issue campaigns. He points out that consumer movements, especially in the developing world during the 1970s and 1980s, used “consumption as the entry point to criticize the whole society,” taking account of “the concerns of those seemingly excluded from consumer society.” While his account of the international networks of consumer movements is indeed a valuable addition to scholarship, Hilton’s restriction of the new social movements to just the 1960s induces him to de-emphasise the role of other social movements that were not explicitly organised around consumption during the 1970s and 1980s and their legacy for more recent global protest movements. He repeatedly dismisses any theoretical position that mounts a more radical critique of consumer society as reducing consumers “to a homogenous number of self-gratifying mall dwellers awaiting the zombified numbness of their own inevi-
table consumption.”35 He diagnoses an “oppositional logic of little relevance to liberal capitalist democracy” and, without any empirical research on the topic, associates radical social movements with anti-Americanism and anti-Western sentiments. He even claims that “the problems arising from too little” have “been excluded from the discussion of consumer society” as a consequence of the “moralistic critique of consumption,” which allegedly ignored the “demands of consumers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.” As a result, he presents the comparative testing movement and the consumer cooperative movement as the true origins of an integrative perspective that addresses both problems of too little and of too much. With all due respect to the valuable work done by the groups analysed by Hilton, it seems equally problematic to overlook the impact that more radical positions towards issues of consumption have had on the emergence of global protest networks. A more impartial perspective will discover that radicals did not simply embrace the reductive positions against which Hilton polemises but—rather like the organised consumers—wrestled with the ambivalences and contradictions arising from concrete problems of provision, which led to a keen awareness of the dilemmas of those excluded from the blessings of affluence both in developing countries and among the marginalised in highly industrialised societies. The ideological front is regrettable since Hilton’s consumer activists in developing countries and his critique of “an impoverished notion of choice” do point the way to conflicts over public goods—such as the supply of water, electricity, education, or transport—raising questions concerning the “systems of provision that enable the consumer to have access to key goods and services.”36

What is needed is a method that allows for an empirical study of the moral, social, and political conflicts arising from systems of provision. Such a method can hardly succeed without addressing the relations of power and violence that provide the background for any system of provision. However, the dimension of political violence has not featured prominently in the literature on the politics of consumption despite the fact that commodity purchasing has also crystallised discourses on violence. To grasp the connection between consumers and the power relations that define the conditions and meanings of consumption, the following analysis will utilise the concept of “regimes of provision.” It is a further development of the system-of-provision perspective employed by social scientists to highlight the vertical connection between consumption and production. In analogy to Ben Fine’s definition of

35. Ibid., 243.
36. Ibid., 250, 252–54.
a “system of provision,” a *regime of provision* defined as the network of activities that attaches consumption to the power relations that make it possible and at the same time hinders other forms of consumption and production. What a society deems consumable under what circumstances and for whom is a result of social and political contests and struggles that invoke visions or images of past, future, and ideal regimes of provision. Contentious claims to the fruits of production have been central to such debates. Political violence—proactive and reactive—often accompanied and influenced these processes of definition. The term *regime of provision* thus seeks to examine the arguments of those who embraced militant action as a response to either the inability of “the system” to ensure collective well-being or to the violence inherent in regimes of provision. Moreover, it makes visible a distinct set of imperatives upholding a cluster of systems of provision in a zone of influence of a political power and the resistance they trigger. Resistance may be successful in partly realising alternative regimes of provision. This means that there is a plurality of regimes of provision and that competing regimes of provision may overlap and become tangled. Depending on perspective, a regime of provision can be either specific (for example, housing or media provision in a specific area) or broad and general (pertaining to entire nations or even the global economy).

The term *regime of consumption,* aimed at similar connections, has been altered to avoid inclusion of the word *consumption* because ways of consumption are never fully determined since consumers always enjoy a certain degree of creativity and freedom in how they act—for example, whether to read a tabloid newspaper, to fold it into paper airplanes, or to use it as toilet paper—while what is contested is the regime of provision that sets the parameters and conditions under which goods or services are placed at the disposal of the consumers. The “regime of provision” perspective also supersedes that associated with the common German term *Konsumkritik* (literally, criticism of consumption). This term rather misleadingly suggests a critique of consumption as such—a fundamental category of human existence—while in reality, critiques were always directed against concrete manifestations of certain regimes of provision.

In common parlance, the term *Konsum* acquired the sense of consumer

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38. The term is used but not stringently defined in Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*, 5. See also Confino and Koshar, “Régimes of Consumer Culture”; Hazel Kyrk, *A Theory of Consumption* (Boston, 1923), 41. Kyrk introduces American consumer society as “a régime of individualism in consumption.”
society, defined as a concrete historical period characterised by a vastly increased significance of the realm of consumption compared to previous epochs. This meant that production and earning lost significance relative to consumption and spending, but—contrary to what is sometimes suggested—it by no means followed that work and industrial production ceased to be central categories of human experience. Such shifts in socioeconomic semantics led critics to see the rhetoric of consumption as an ideological tool that the ruling classes employed to control society. Critical perspectives on consumer society are often vehemently embraced or rejected, but as a historical phenomenon, they remain thoroughly understudied. They were prominent in Germany, but radical positions were also embraced by French and Italian thinkers such as Pier Paolo Pasolini and Henri Lefebvre; the latter has a chapter, “Terrorism and Everyday Life.” In postwar West Germany, consumer critique was usually associated with the Frankfurt School and was thus embedded in a more fundamental critique of domination in the context of “late capitalism.”

In recent research on the history of consumption, it has become fashionable to flatly dismiss the classical positions of consumer critique, arguing that these accounts were elitist, normative, and totalising, depicting consumers as too passive while simplifying their motives. This viewpoint is frequently based on a decontextualising interpretation of isolated quotations. In a recent essay on political legitimisations of consumption, Claudius Torp goes so far as to claim that the tradition of Konsumkritik—which he equally associates with conservative thinkers such as Hans Freyer and Arnold Gehlen and with the neo-Marxist Left from Horkheimer to Habermas—was responsible for a belated moralisation of consumption. He even claims that the “protest forms of the 68ers” led to arson and hunger strikes as a consequence of a “fundamental opposition to consumption.” Similar to Hilton’s reasoning, this allows for a wholesale exclusion of the New Left—trapped “in the dead end of radical refusal”—from the moralisation of consumption. It remains to be seen whether this


41. E.g. Hecken, Versagen der Intellektuellen.

42. Torp, Wachstum, Sicherheit, Moral, 122–23.
far-reaching claim for the exclusion of the New Left from its very own project—the creation of international solidarity—can be supported empirically.

Juliet Schor has shown that the “critique of consumer critique” often fails to go into sufficient depth because the questions asked and the methods employed by critical intellectuals such as Veblen, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Galbraith are not obsolete just because they are no longer shared by the academic mainstream, especially concerning their political implications. She points out that an integrated perspective on the spheres of consumption and production as pioneered by these thinkers has been largely abandoned by a depoliticising mode of scholarly enquiry that treats the dimension of consumption as if it were sufficient in itself to access the entire spectrum of social relations. In a similar vein, Andreas Wirsching reflects on the limits of the current scholarly paradigm concerning the consumer society, pointing out that because of its utilitarian focus on “the crude sum total of accrued enjoyment,” it “is less interested in the frustration of those who lack the means to attain . . . distinction, or the freedoms that are denied to them.” Teleological accounts that hail the “victorious progression” of Western consumer society run the danger of neglecting social inequality. Wirsching’s uneasiness fails to take into account recent authors who have gone in this direction—for example, Matthew Hilton and Avner Offer—but he is right in pointing out that a methodological approach that addresses the history of consumption as part of a more comprehensive social theory still needs to be developed.

Drawing on Niklas Luhmann, sociologist Dominik Schrage proposes to introduce a “generalising definition of the relationship between the economic system and the consumer by means of the concept of structural coupling.” This also seeks to overcome the perspective of Frankfurt School Konsumkritik because of its normative assumptions concerning the manipulative powers of the economic system over the consumer. However, Schrage’s solution seems to be throwing out the baby with the bathwater: while Luhmann demonstrates how large social systems like the political system, the legal system, and the economic system are structurally coupled, Schrage collapses this complexity into what appears to be a preestablished harmony between just the economic system and the consumer on an equal footing. Even if the problematic assumption is granted that consumption or the consumers constitute a system in Luh-

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44. Wirsching, “From Work to Consumption,” 24–26. See also Sedlmaier, “Consumerism—cui bono?”
45. Offer, Challenge of Affluence.
mann’s sense, this assumption ignores the asymmetry of power between consumers, who are individualised and difficult to organise politically, and the vast organisational networks and legal structures that constitute the framework for the functioning of the economic system. Schrage’s perspective is different. He assumes an all-embracing power of mass consumption permeating all forms of human interaction. While this undoubtedly holds true for many aspects of the highly industrialised societies of the second half of the twentieth century, Schrage’s generalising and depoliticising perspective on consumption does not leave much room for the politics of regimes of provision, for the contingent decisions that societies make—decisions that do not concern some illusionary withdrawal from consumption as such but rather concern what and how they produce and consume.

Classical social history has dealt with consumption under conditions of scarcity and with the dimension of violence in subsistence protests. However, this approach is usually applied only up to the mid-nineteenth century. For subsequent periods, most researchers assume a rationalisation of consumption and consumerism that resulted in civil and peaceful processes of commercial and political negotiation superseding more violent forms of intercourse.\(^47\) The newer research paradigm of the history of consumption, conversely, has tended to focus on the implications of abundance, where episodes of violence seem like relics of a bygone age no longer relevant to modern civil society. Undermining such a perspective are frequent pictures of burnt-out cars, looted display windows, and young people throwing stones in different cities of industrially advanced societies. Collective violence, especially looting, is obviously not “a remnant of the past but part and parcel of life in contemporary societies . . . intricately tied to the very ways in which class . . . and ethnic inequities are structured and reproduced.”\(^48\) An integrative approach that would show how scarcity and abundance as well as peaceful and violent conflict complemented each other and developed in parallel throughout the twentieth century is still in its infancy.

By going beyond the traditions of generalising critiques or affirmations of consumption, the present approach looks at the intellectual, social, and political history of regimes of provision. It avoids reducing the phenomenon to violent anticonsumerism, which is only one possible relationship in the discursive field between consumption and violence. Addressing the destructive potential

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\(^{47}\) For a critical overview, see Gailus, *Contentious Food Politics*, 36–43. Assuming a rationalization of consumption during the second half of the nineteenth century are Nonn, *Verbraucherprotest und Parteiensystem*; Blessing, “Konsumentenprotest und Arbeitskampf.”

inherent in certain patterns of consumption is another. The question of cause and effect between regimes of provision and the accompanying debates, critiques, and attacks is assessed at different stages. In many respects, critiques of regimes of provision were inversions of contemporary ideological positions that claimed beneficial consequences of consumerism, self-interest, and market settings. *Doux commerce* arguments attributed to particular historical or idealised regimes of provision invited criticism. Historically, critiques of capitalism have focused on aspects of production as well as consumption. The “regime of provision” perspective allows the integration of both angles. Regimes of provision could appear as sources of (1) disenchantment and a perception of inauthenticity of things and ways of life; (2) oppression that impairs freedom, autonomy, and creativity, subjects people to the rules of the market anonymously, arbitrarily fixes prices, and/or decides which goods and services are commodified; (3) poverty and inequality or social exclusion; or (4) opportunism and egoism, fostering individual interest that corrupts social cohesion and mutual solidarity, especially between rich and poor. An important dimension of regimes of provision and their critiques is that of gender equality. While gender is not a principal category in the present approach, due attention will be given to feminist impulses. This aspect became more prominent with the underresearched emergence of militant feminism in the 1980s, when solidarity campaigns with female labourers in the developing world were among the first to revive radical traditions of labour dispute in a global dimension. Finally, critiques of regimes of provision could vary in scope from the desire of excluded groups to merely participate in a successful regime of provision without wanting to overthrow its fundamental principles to violent resistance to the commodification of ever more aspects of human life.

While recent research on consumption has acknowledged its political dimension largely without the aspect of violence, new research on violence has not exactly focused on the dimension of consumption. The decision to analyse militant forms of protest against regimes of provision leads to the question of a definition of political violence. Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth suggest succinctly and convincingly that political violence should connote “all forms of violence enacted pursuant to aims of decisive socio-political control or change.” Their inclusion of state-sponsored violence is sensible. However, this approach comes with a number of normative qualifications: “the regular functions of the police and justice systems and the intelligence services” are included only insofar as “they contributed to squeezing out the possibility of

49. This typology is a further development of one by Boltanski and Chiapello, *New Spirit*, 37.
transformative, anti-systemic violence,” and organized labour violence is excluded altogether because it generally aimed “at reform within the accepted context of the socio-political system.”\(^50\) While this might be helpful on the macro level of analysing political violence for entire centuries and continents, it does raise questions about the limits of the regular and the accepted and runs the danger of putting the focus only on large-scale and exceptional events of violence, such as international terrorism.

At a more quotidian level, Donatella Della Porta looks at political violence within social movements. She emphasises its relative illegitimacy when addressing political violence “as a particular repertoire of collective action that involved physical force, considered at that time as illegitimate in the dominant culture.”\(^51\) This seems problematic since it immediately relegates the use of force by the authorities under the state’s monopoly of violence into a different, nonpolitical realm. Moreover, by assuming a fixed sense of legitimacy within a dominant culture, it does not do sufficient justice to the communicative interaction within society over what can be considered legitimate because both the authorities and their challengers in political and social movements have to discursively legitimise and communicate the acts of violence to which they resort. The monopoly on violence structures the political space and, via the legal system of property ownership, the regimes of provision. As a result of a negotiating process about its application, the scope of political debate and/or action—that is, the limits of the political space—can be either restricted or extended.\(^52\)

However, on the level of different forms of violence—for it seems unproductive to speculate about violence as such—Della Porta’s definition is helpful because it includes violence against objects, such as attacks on property, rioting, or disorder leading to damage to property.\(^53\) A definition restricting political violence to violence against persons would hardly do justice to the theme of this book. It would, as is frequently the case in the literature on terrorism, divorce political violence from its origins in social and political struggles over material realities.

This aspect can be framed effectively by drawing on David Apter, for whom the “key to political violence is its legitimacy.” He hypothesises that social movements develop power if they draw “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu)

\(^{50}\) Donald Bloxham and Robert Gerwarth, introduction to *Political Violence*, ed. Bloxham and Gerwarth, 2.

\(^{51}\) Della Porta, *Social Movements*, 3–4.

\(^{52}\) This is indebted to the approach that conceptualises “The Political as Communicative Space” pioneered at the University of Bielefeld. Cf. Neithard Bulst, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Einleitung,” in *Gewalt im politischen Raum*, ed. Bulst, Gilcher-Holtey, and Haupt, 8–10.

from their interpretation of disjunctive events. Assuming political violence to be a ubiquitous phenomenon that aims at a power shift (or at preserving a status quo) and in doing so requires legitimisation, it appears that the legitimisation and delegitimisation of violence can in turn hardly do without reference to supraindividual units. An essential factor for the emergence of political violence is the transformation, mediated by political entrepreneurs, of such narratives into discourses—reconstructions of reality in their own right—that have gained a certain degree of acceptance. Apter is not alone in highlighting the idea that “violence cannot be understood without the discourses that accompany, limit, and expand it.” Political violence thus becomes a way of challenging hegemonic discourse, because discourses on legitimacy and legality are entangled, as the works of Freia Anders have shown for the conflicts between autonomists and state authorities during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Apter, political violence is not random but occurs in pursuit of a “designated and reordering purpose”—for example, justice and equality. Consequently, “boundary smashing goes together with boundary resetting.” If such an “inversion of meaning” is sought, political violence constitutes an inversionary discourse bent on symbolic capital rather than a mere exchange of power over economic capital by armed force, although in reality, movements combine both elements in changing combination ratios. This should not be misunderstood as a mere apology for acts of political violence but rather as a pointer to the complexity and moral ambiguity of political violence, which can be a rational phenomenon. Confrontation can thus function as a mobilisation resource. Moreover, Apter reminds us that reallocations of wealth, visions of human betterment, and political violence have been inseparable from the evolution of democracy. The English, American, and French Revolutions were all marked by political violence and its discourses—by translations of violent events into social text—not least concerning clashing regimes of provision.

59. Ibid., 15.
60. Ibid., 2–22.
In a global perspective, Apter’s approach helps to understand political violence as a crucial interface between political and economic development: “Modern developmentalism is based on the premise of unlimited growth, the universalization of the market, and more and more effective access to and participation in economic, social and political institutions.” If one assumes political development to be partly violence-driven—by wars, by the exercise of the domestic monopoly of power, and by challenges to the latter, which trigger reform—the systems of politics and economics seem “mutually linked within a double market.” Critics and challengers of regimes of provision are entrepreneurs on this double market.

An approach inspired by Apter’s theory of inversionary discourse is in no position to claim, like E. P. Thompson, that protest action was based on a broad “popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices.” Quite the contrary, what was considered legitimate in conflicts over regimes of provision during the second half of the twentieth century was very much in flux and was hotly contested by a multitude of actors drawing on a plurality of intellectual traditions. Rather than backward-looking, moral economies were utopian in their efforts to systematically reorganise the economic system in accordance with moral or political convictions that rejected the free-market ethos of capitalist economies. What remains of value in Thompson’s analysis of eighteenth-century crowd action is the focus on the notion of legitimation and the insight that his angry consumers had a far more complex motivation than just hunger or riotousness. Also transferable is Thompson’s observation that a moral economy, while not political in the sense of advanced forms of organisation, “nevertheless . . . cannot be described as unpolitical either since it supposed . . . passionately held notions of the common weal.” Late-twentieth-century conflicts over moral economies gained their explosiveness by virtue of their position at the margins of the political, where questions of the limits of the legitimate and the definition of the political were negotiated. This also applied to the authorities, who similarly legitimised their repression with implicit or explicit recourse to ideologies of political economy.

Javier Auyero’s scholarship on more recent phenomena of collective violence has demonstrated that looting is not best described as anarchic outbursts

61. Ibid., 22.
62. Thompson, “Moral Economy,” 79. See also Trentmann, “Before ‘Fair Trade’”; Gailus, Contentious Food Politics, 7; Bouton, Flour War.
63. Thompson, “Moral Economy,” 79.
64. Cf. ibid., 129.
as a consequence of its relational underpinnings and the selectivity of looters’ actions: usually, though not always, the people carrying out riots or lootings are connected through social ties and selectively target particular kinds of stores. This can even amount to “coordinated destruction”—that is, an entire programme of targeted damage to objects.65 Actors using the “threat of disruption” can thus gain considerable political leverage.66

Violence is itself a type of communication; more importantly, however, political violence is both the result and starting point of political communication. In the case of postwar Germany, initially the only “specialists in violence”67 in this interaction were law enforcement officers who confronted student protesters and artistic or intellectual critics who consciously overstepped the established conventions and rules of political communication focusing on quotidian manifestations of violence. The idea of a challenge to established authorities via civil disobedience and performative rule breaking—as expressed in Rudi Dutschke’s vision of a “countermilieu”—lay at the heart of the political strategies practiced by the “1968” movement and its successors in alternative, feminist, and environmentalist movements. Eventually, the field of participants in this interaction diversified with militant groups such as the Red Army Faction (RAF), Movement 2 June, the Revolutionary Cells, and later autonomist activists seeking to combine the role of political entrepreneurs with that of specialists in violence.

It is important to focus on two interrelated types of political discourse: the reciprocal exchange between challengers and forces of order, and the internal communication in both camps—for example, when security measures and their justifications became detached from the reality of threats emanating from protest movements, or when the critical thinking harboured by the latter collapsed into hollow enemy images and self-referential worldviews. However, historians cannot label the objects of enquiry with such categories from the outset. The pondering and weighing of the interaction—or lack thereof—between competing regimes of provision must result from empirical analysis. This study is therefore primarily concerned with describing and explaining the genesis and the political consequences of theoretical frameworks and social practices that brought the realms of violence and consumption into contact. Using Quentin Skinner’s vocabulary, the task is to recover illocutionary acts: “We need to situate the texts [or other performative acts] we study within such intellectual contexts and frameworks of discourse as enable us to recognize

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what their authors were doing in writing [or performing] them.” According to Skinner, such a method based on extensive research will show that ideas were intertwined with claims for power. Texts (and other performative acts) position themselves in relation to their contemporary discourses and the status quo they seek to change: “We need to understand why a certain proposition has been put forward if we wish to understand the proposition itself.”

As Max Weber pointed out, political or other value judgments on the part of the author will inevitably contribute to the complex genesis of any conceptual approach. However, the outright application or imposition of value judgments on the material is hardly beneficial to the gaining of knowledge. This is also true for widely shared value judgments that dominate mainstream approaches to contemporary history, which often originate in contemporary discourse. While the remainder of this book explores the economic and political thought of radical leftists in considerable detail and with a certain degree of empathy—the English word derives from the German Einfühlungsvermögen—the idea is not to prove that they were right but instead to show that their thinking and acting were meticulously embedded in intellectual traditions, social structures, and political power relations and that they eventually influenced further developments, often indirectly and against their original motivations. Such an analysis transcends existing perceptions or categorizations of their activities and thereby adds to our knowledge of the period. The gains from this endeavour should be accessible to all readers irrespective of their political values or convictions.

Consequently, the economic and political thought of the individuals and groups analysed cannot function as an analytical tool. The conceptual framework invoked here—that is, the decision to ask for connections between the realms of consumption and violence and the idea of capturing those connections under the concept of “regimes of provision”—has been developed independently through reflection on the existing historiography and theoretical literature on the history of consumption and the history of political violence. It should be applicable to other scenarios of violence in the sphere of consumption, such as Nazi violence against shops owned by Jews, the Canadian pot-latch ban, or the Bonfires of the Vanities in the course of Girolamo Savonarola’s campaign for reform.

69. Ibid., 115.
Aims and Structure

The central hypothesis of this volume is that even in an age of affluence, militant protest and political violence can essentially be traced back to competing concepts of moral economy. The book addresses three guiding research questions: (1) How did regimes of provision and political protest interrelate? (2) How, when, and why did militant forms of protest against regimes of provision emerge? (3) In what ways were intellectual critique, militant practice, economic interest, and the use of the governmental monopoly of violence interlocked in such developments? Notions of social solidarity and equality were often core values in radical critiques and protests, and they were easily entrapped in escalations of violence and counterviolence. We need to reconstruct the role of narratives of social protest and revolutionary politics adopted and adapted by protesters, by the intellectual commentators who offered themselves as their spokespersons—or as their critics—and by the government institutions they confronted. Political talk thus serves “as a window into people’s moral universes.”

The volume covers the time period from the late 1950s to the late 1980s in an integrated manner, an approach taken by very few previous studies of protest politics and the Left. The book is organized into seven chapters, all of which treat two themes in conjunction: instances where commodities were symbolically destroyed by acts of political violence, and political thought reflecting the symbolic and manifest violence emanating from regimes of provision. The chapters are arranged to optimally explore these thematic considerations, while chronological considerations are subordinate but still influence the internal composition of the chapters. Chapters 1–3 depart from an examination of a relatively well-known April 1968 incident of department store arson in Frankfurt but go much further than the existing literature in contextualizing and explaining this and similar events, expanding the topic of consumption and violence up to the 1980s.

Chapter 1 focuses on the prehistory of the Frankfurt firebombings in the protest praxis of the famous Kommune I and its provocative leaflets satirizing public responses to a Brussels fire disaster. Due attention is given to forerunners—in particular, to the artist groups Spur and Subversive Aktion, which played a central role in establishing the commercial sphere as a prime focus of protest beginning in the early 1960s. In the second half of the decade, political happenings at department stores were a well-established form of student pro-

test. The chapter ends with the highly publicized trial of the Frankfurt arsonists and how they evaded the sentence, which eventually resulted in the creation of the RAF.

Before pursuing this development further, chapter 2 traces contemporary theoretical understandings of regimes of provision, drawing on a close reading of pertinent sources in the intellectual history of consumption-related protest, especially the work of Herbert Marcuse as it developed over several decades. Departing from a Freudian perspective on needs, Marcuse’s subsequent differentiation of true and false needs and his theory of repressive tolerance offered sufficient points of contact with other thinkers who analysed material progress critically and influenced the protest movement. An analysis of a theory paper by members of the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS), “Warenhausaktionen” (Department Store Campaigns), broaches the issue of how these sources came to be reflected in the cognitive orientation of the activists analysed in the other chapters. A radical interpretation of Marx’s realm of freedom inspired many critics of capitalist regimes of provision. An analysis of Marcuse’s *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972) highlights a remarkable radicalisation of his critique that needs to be understood in the context of his exchange with rebellious students.

Chapter 3 then resumes the narrative of militant acts against representations of consumer society with the Tupamaros West-Berlin and their 1969 arson attacks. The radical alternative milieu’s widespread indulgence in drugs and theft was a crucial backdrop for this development, as was the relatively conciliatory approach vis-à-vis the protest movement adopted by the coalition government of Social Democrats and Free Democrats, which, in the eyes of the radicals, threatened to stifle the movement’s revolutionary impetus. The latter attitude increasingly manifested itself in the “politics of broken glass.” The chapter then embarks on a systematic analysis of the statements and writings of the RAF, which emerged from this context. In its desperate quest for a revolutionary subject, the RAF sought to address those excluded from consumer society. Existing research more or less ignores this central aspect of social-revolutionary militancy. Drawing on Ulrike Meinhof’s theoretical writings, the chapter demonstrates how a notion of “consumer terror” had already been present in her journalistic work. However, she eventually undertook a significant departure from the student movement’s broader theories of manipulation and depoliticisation in favour of an emphasis on various forms of illegal disobedience as a process of moral emancipation, especially in a draft for a major strategy paper, “Die Massen und der Konsum” (The Masses and Consumption), which was not made available to the public after the authorities confis-
cation from her cell. Consumer politics emerges as a central plank in the cognitive orientation of the first generation of the RAF. After Meinhof’s death, this focus receded, but Movement 2 June, a related but independent group, continued a militant focus on consumer society. This tradition eventually was revived, with different means, by the autonomist groups of the 1980s.

Chapters 4–6 then analyse the complex nature of debates and conflicts over specific public commodities (public transport, media, and housing). Although these chapters occasionally come back to the famous activists of Kommune I and the RAF, they address critiques of regimes of provision that were rooted in much wider social movements. This approach not only provides an essential backdrop for a better understanding of the famous militants but goes beyond them in terms of primary source basis, analytical depth, and chronological scope. These chapters show that violence entered protest scenarios very quickly and largely independent of the famous provocateurs, simultaneously calling the protests’ legitimacy into question and challenging the measures to which the authorities resorted. This development initiated far-reaching legal debates leading to a differentiation of the concept of violence in criminal law as well as to discussions regarding the relationship between basic rights and the state’s monopoly on violence.

The politics of public transport fares between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s serve as the central issue of chapter 4. An analysis of the so-called Laeppele case—named after a rather moderate student functionary—demonstrates the crucial role of legal discourse in the genesis of political violence. This particular kind of protest, which peaked in the Red Spot Campaign in Hanover in 1969, has never been investigated in depth. It emerges as a remarkably widespread and vibrant area of everyday protest that was eventually radicalized by groups such as the Frankfurt Spontis—including Joschka Fischer and Daniel Cohn-Bendit—and the Revolutionäre Zellen (Revolutionary Cells).

Chapter 5 examines the anti-Springer campaign, which focused on a specific critique of a regime of provision: an alleged manipulative monopoly on information. Emerging from the SDS campaign against one of Europe’s largest publishing houses, the protests initially leaned on intellectual impulses, such as Jörg Huffschmid’s Habermasian critique of press concentration, while some activists resorted to the direct action of broken glass. The protests culminated after the near-fatal shooting of Rudi Dutschke in April 1968, when activists engaged in large-scale protest rallies and blockades against Springer. The activists’ attempt to differentiate between violence against things and violence against people was quickly overtaken by the intensification of political antagonism in the aftermath of the riots. The dimension of consumption has not fea-
tured prominently in existing accounts of the anti-Springer campaign. Moreover, most treatments hardly go beyond Easter 1968. This volume, in contrast, analyses both the long-term repercussions of the legal interpretation of violence during blockades, which necessitated a reformulation of the notion of violence, and the revival of the campaign in the context of the peace movement of the early 1980s. Rather remarkably, Springer had embraced politically motivated boycotts in the media sector long before the extraparliamentary opposition seized the method and militants targeted the press baron.

Political violence arising from conflict over the public commodities of housing and urban space is the subject of chapter 6, which focuses on the Frankfurt and West Berlin squatters’ movements. A challenging search for alternative lifestyles, concepts of well-being, and regimes of provision constantly faced the threat of being criminalised and the possibility of violent escalations. The chapter examines the case of the Weisbecker-Haus, named after a member of Movement 2 June shot by police. However, squatting was ultimately a socio-economic phenomenon. In many respects, squatters were alternative consumers who attempted to give voice to the economic, social, and cultural interests of consumers of housing space and urban infrastructure and to lend them political weight vis-à-vis the seemingly purely economic concerns of commercial entrepreneurs and their destructive powers.

The final chapter adds the global dimension and takes the narrative up to the late 1980s by examining political campaigns that sought to establish solidarity between consumers in highly industrialised countries and producers in developing countries. Various campaigns against international regimes of provision are treated: against the apartheid regime in South Africa; in support of the Palestinians’ anti-Zionist struggle; against multinational companies such as Nestlé and various coffee roasters; and supporting female low-wage workers for the textile manufacturer Adler in South Korea. These protests reached their peak during the 1988 meeting of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in West Berlin. Complementing the treatment of the autonomists and the RAF’s campaigns against global governance, the chapter presents an unprecedented analysis of the theoretical writings of the Revolutionary Cells and their feminist branch, Rote Zora, which explicitly sought to operate in the grey zone between the social movements, consumer solidarity, and militant action.