Introduction: West Germany in the world

In early 2009, researchers digging through the files of the former East German state security ministry (the Stasi) unearthed a political bombshell: The police officer whose fatal shooting of a West German student on June 2, 1967, helped launch the West German student movement on a fatal collision course with the authorities was not simply a West German police officer – he was also an East German spy.[1] Commentators were quick to declare that the revelation of the shooter's real identity discredited, once and for all, left-wing claims about the repressive nature of West German society; the "fascist cop" had been a Communist all along! This response, notable for its attempt to reimpose the very Cold War boundaries that the "68ers" sought to challenge, suggests the extent to which the 1960s are still a sore spot in Germany; far from being a dead letter, they remain central to the politics of memory. For the historian, the events of June 2, once again in the news, are of critical importance; Karl-Heinz Kurras's shooting of the unarmed Benno Ohnesorg during the protest against the state visit of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran helped spread the radicalism of the West Berlin student movement to the rest of the country and played a major role in the radicalization of the left, leading to the formation of terrorist groups such as the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF; Red Army Faction). That Ohnesorg's killer was working for East Germany reinforces the extent to which the West German "1968" must be considered in the broader context of German–German relations, not just at the level of state policy but also, as we will see, in the minds of both the 68ers and the establishment.[2]

[1] Helmut Müller-Enbergs and Cornelia Jabs, "Der 2 Juni 1967 und die Staatssicherheit," *Deutschland-archiv: Zeitschrift für das vereinigte Deutschland*, March 2009.

[2] On the killing of Ohnesorg, see Uwe Soukup, *Wie starb Benno Ohnesorg? Der 2 Juni 1967* (Berlin: Verlag 1900, 2007). See also the interview with Soukup about the Kurras revelation, available online at www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/interview_dlf/969932 (accessed June 1, 2009).

Yet in the media storm over the revelation of the identity of Ohnesorg's killer, the events of June 2 – and the ideological either/or position with which they are so easily connected – are made to bear too much heuristic weight. The reduction of the West German "1968" to this single frozen tableau – a decontextualized confrontation between university students and police – precludes any meaningful attempt to assess its nature and legacy. Not only does it erase the motivations and goals of the events' myriad actors – not just students, after all, but bohemians and artists, apprentices and young workers, established intellectuals and average citizens – but it ignores the multilayered causes and consequences of their actions. This reductionist tendency has been exaggerated by the overrepresentation, among historians of the events, of veterans of the student movement, whose lack of critical distance from events readily results in a mixing up of historical events and personal biographies. In the most egregious cases (one thinks here of the attempt by a certain ex-Maoist to cast his entire generation as latter-day Nazis), this process results in a kind of historiographical psychotherapy in which personal crimes of conscience are projected onto others and used as the basis of historical interpretation.[3] Stilted and fruitless debates about whether "1968" was good or bad (Was the French Revolution good or bad?) hinder, rather than facilitate, genuine historical inquiry. A new perspective requires a new approach, one that captures more fully the breadth of "1968" (rendered hereafter without quotation marks) as an event driven by participants of widely different backgrounds, orientations, and experiences.

The very complexity and richness of 1968 has contributed to making it a major area of scholarly activity in disciplines ranging from history to art history, from media and cultural studies to literature, from film studies to linguistics, sociology, and musicology.[4] The forty-year anniversary of 1968 brought with it a major surge in scholarly activity, producing a veritable explosion of scholarly conferences and publications. Equally important has been a growing sense that the time has come to historicize the 1960s, freeing them from the grip of partisan polemicists and opening up perspectives missing in the work of the participant-historians who have largely dominated the historiography. The West German 1968, for obvious

[3] Götz Aly, *Unser Kampf: 1968* (Frankfurt: Fischer-Verlag, 2008).
[4] See, for example, the essays in Timothy Brown and Lorena Anton, eds., *Between the Avant-garde and the Everyday: Subversive Politics in Europe, 1957 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

reasons a much-treated topic in the German literature, has only recently begun to figure in the anglophone literature.[5] The faint outlines of a future consensus interpretation, around the key importance of the global and transnational, the interpenetration of the cultural and the political, and so on, is only now beginning to emerge on the horizon.[6]

The designation 1968 is, of course, a terminological convention, one that enfolds certain analytic assumptions. It is aimed at suggesting a world-historic conjuncture, centered roughly around the year 1968, which took place over a sufficiently large expanse of the globe – from Paris to Mexico City, from Berkeley to Dhaka, from Prague to Tokyo – so as to figure as a "global" event. The actual content of this globality – inscribed as much by its participants as by historians – is a point to which we shall return momentarily. Important here is that 1968 operates not merely as a temporal designation but as a spatial one; through the combined weight of similar events taking place across the world around the same time, the date 1968, or the decade of the 1960s, are transformed into the world-historical event "1968." Increasingly, scholars have adopted the term "global sixties" (or "global 1960s") to capture the breadth of this conjuncture. In this work, the terms "global sixties" and "1968" will be used interchangeably, with the understanding that "1968" in West Germany refers to the German case in a larger event understood as "1968" or the "global sixties."

It should go without saying that the term "global" in these formulations is not be taken literally to suggest that student or countercultural uprisings took place in every quarter of the globe in the 1960s. Nevertheless, scholarship is demonstrating, the uprisings of the decade, if not literally global, did in fact encompass much of the globe, certainly much more than has previously been thought.[7] Moreover, radicals in West Germany and elsewhere believed themselves, with some justification, to be actors in a global uprising that shaped both their self-conception and their activism.

[5] To date, the only dedicated English-language monographs are those by Nick Thomas and Martin Klimke, the latter a comparative-transnational treatment of West Germany and the USA; see Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A Social History of Dissent and Democracy* (New York: Berg, 2003); Martin Klimke, *The "Other Alliance": Global Protest and Student Unrest in West Germany and the US, 1962–72* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

[6] See, for example, the essays in the two-part forum on 1968 in the *American Historical Review*; AHR Forum, *The International 1968*, Parts I and II, vol. 114, no. 1 (February 2009) and vol. 114, no. 2 (April 2011).

[7] Samantha Christiansen and Zachary Scarlett, *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011).

"Global" here thus refers to both literal (i.e. geographic) space and to conceptual space. "Global" is also occasionally used in a third way, as one half of the global/local antinomy common to cultural-and-media-studies approaches to cultural globalization. "Global/local intersections," in this sense, refer to moments in which transnational exchanges result in actors in one local terrain (e.g. West Germany, West Berlin, etc.) coming into contact with, adopting, rejecting, or otherwise responding to, exogenous influences. In these instances, "global" refers not to a literal condition but to a theoretical model useful in conceptualizing the transnational.

In terms of historical periodization, it is obvious that terms such as "1968" or "the global sixties" can only be imprecise; not only did main events often take place before or after the year 1968 – in West Germany, for example, the first ten-year anniversary commemorated not the protests of the year 1968 but the killing of Benno Ohnesorg in 1967 – but they often unfolded over a period of a decade or more, a fact that accounts for the widespread adoption of the "long sixties" periodization proposed by the British historian Arthur Marwick.[8] Marwick's model is not unproblematic, for reasons that will become clear in due time; here it is sufficient to call attention to an unresolved tension encoded in the choice of nomenclature. Whereas the term "1968" suggests the importance of big events, the notion of the (long) 1960s connotes process; and, indeed, there has developed in the historiography something of a split between scholars emphasizing the importance of longer-term social and cultural developments and those insisting on the importance of ideology, volition, and the power of the revolutionary moment. Obviously, these positions hardly need be mutually exclusive, and one goal of this study is to reconcile two sides of what has perhaps become an unnecessarily schematic distinction.

In the historiography on West Germany, 1968 is clearly established as a watershed event. Rebelling against a stifling atmosphere of cultural conformity, challenging anti-Communist Cold War hysteria, and demanding an accounting with the crimes of the Nazi era, young West Germans demanded nothing less than a democratic renewal of society from the ground up. Such demands, explosive wherever they were made, acquired a special potency in a West Germany poised precipitously on the front line of the Cold War and struggling with the legacy of a recent past marked by fascism, war, and genocide. In challenging the older generation about its complicity in the crimes of the Nazi era, the 68ers helped

[8] Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958–c. 1974* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

spur a dialogue on democratization that profoundly affects German society to the present day.[9]

Yet, if the importance of 1968 as a national event/process is firmly established (even if commentators and scholars differ on both its content and legacy), the relationship between the West German 1968 and the global 1968 of which it is understood to be a part – that is, of the content of its globality – remains unsatisfactorily resolved. Our very use of the term "1968" is, after all, bound up with the idea that something of worldwide scope occurred in the late 1960s; it is the status of 1968 as a *global* event that organizes and confers meaning on the individual *national* events. The concept of a global sixties has informed a number of works written from either a European/transatlantic or a worldwide perspective.[10] All of these works pay greater or lesser attention to transnational factors, as indeed they must, given the nature of the topic; but each nevertheless approaches the global primarily through the multiplication of individual national cases, whether these are inserted into some sort of meta-framework (e.g. the Cold War) or treated in broadly comparative terms (normally in terms of connections between Europe and North America).

This book takes a different approach. It seeks to capture the globality of 1968 not in the multiplication of individual national scenarios but in the intersection of global vectors across one local terrain.[11] One advantage of this approach is that it enables us to write the history of an individual national 1968 (with all the detail and historiographic specificity this implies) without falling victim to the limitations of purely national history. In the West German case, the latter approach would leave critically important factors – the presence of the Third World student diaspora in the Federal Republic, for example, or the importation of American protest

[9] See Ingo Cornils, "Successful Failure? The Impact of the German Student Movement on the Federal Republic of Germany," in Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay, eds., *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics and Literature in the Berlin Republic* (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), pp. 107–126.

[10] See Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Schmidtke, *Der Aufbruch der jungen Intelligenz: Die 68er Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und den USA* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2003); Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004); Klimke, *The "Other Alliance"*; Jeremy Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1987).

[11] See Timothy S. Brown, "1968 East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History," *American Historical Review*, 114 (1) (2009); AHR Forum on the "International 1968."

repertoires – out of the picture. A second advantage is that it allows us to add historical specificity and concreteness to theoretical talk about transnational flows and cultural globalization. Critical raw material of the 1960s cultural revolution – the writings of the Beat poets, for example, or the music of Bob Dylan – did not appear in West Germany or anywhere else by magic, nor because the agentless mechanisms of transnational consumer capitalism increasingly made everything available everywhere; they appeared in many cases for highly contingent reasons, often through the actions of key individuals who made choices about what was important (to import, to translate, to recreate) and thus played a crucial role in mediating transnational interactions.

This study pays careful attention to the role of these individuals, and not only for reasons of narrative interest. In recent years, scholars working in cultural and media studies, history and other disciplines, have emphasized the importance of an "active" model of cultural reception in which local actors employ globalized culture in ways that empower them.[12] This is a part of the story in the West German 1968, to be sure; but even more telling and characteristic is the way that (sub)cultural activists reached out to embrace – and literally bring into West Germany – the cultural components necessary for the integration of the Federal Republic into the global youth revolution. In seizing agency in this way, they took part in a new democratic politics of self-invention from below, a process marked by an explosion of creativity across a range of artistic and political media. This explosion, stretching from the underground press, film, and music to the creation of alternative educational, political, and cultural institutions, is a central focus of this book. The important point here is that transnational connections and cultural transfer did not just *contribute* to the activism of the 1960s and 1970s or determine the conditions in which it took place – they were a *part* of it.

From this perspective, the study of global – local intersections in 1968 becomes intimately bound up with the study of 1968 itself, and not only because of the salience of the (sub)cultural connection-forging just described. First of all, the political *charge* of globalized culture was determined less by its meaning at the point of origin than by how it resonated

[12] See the discussion in Timothy S. Brown, "'Keeping It Real' in a Different 'Hood: (African)-Americanization and Hip Hop in Germany," in Dipannita Basu and Sidney Lemelle, eds., *The Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip Hop and the Globalization of Black Culture* (London: Pluto, 2006), pp. 137–150; see also Timothy S. Brown, "Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and Nazi Rock in England and Germany," *Journal of Social History*, 38 (1) (2004): 157–178.

with the needs of those on the receiving end. Yet the local appropriation of global cultural products was only one side of the coin, for the function of popular culture in the local setting involved a process of imagination through which young people became connected to a global youth culture. This global imagined community of youth, organized around music, fashion, and lifestyle, represents the complementary aspect of the local appropriation of globalized culture, for through it young people imagined themselves across and outside the boundaries of the nation-state. This is one sense in which this book seeks to place West Germany into the world, even as, in tracing the local appropriation of global culture, it seeks to locate the world in West Germany.

But there were other equally important ways in which young West Germans imagined themselves into the world, as well as ways in which the world came to them. If transnational connections pulled West Germany into the world at the level of popular culture and daily life, global structures and processes (e.g. the Cold War) and transnational vectors (military presences, student exchange networks, state visits), created many-sided connections and produced profound local effects. Operating in a situation in which distinctions between the foreign and the domestic, between the internal and the external, seemed to fade away, young West Germans undertook a principled engagement with the problems of Germany's position in the world. Here the aims of the counterculture and the student movement dovetailed, for if one goal of the former was the search for an *authentic* existence, this was also the aim of 68er politics more broadly; their roots lay in the perceived gap between the democratic and humanitarian claims of the parent generation and the reality of Cold War politics. Key events in the development and radicalization of the West German 1968 – the visit of the African strongman Moïse Tshombe in December 1964, for example, or that of the Iranian Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in June 1967 – were important precisely because they called attention to the gap between official rhetoric of democracy and human rights, on the one hand, and the reality of state oppression on the other.

Here again the transnational became important, in two ways. First, in broad terms, the integration of the Federal Republic into the Cold War alliance system meant that issues of democratic legitimacy abroad became intertwined with issues of democratic legitimacy at home. The West German state's relationship with its American benefactors, and with Third World dictators, meant that young West Germans were part of the world whether they wanted to be or not. At the same time, the substantial presence of Third World students in the Federal Republic helped

synergize protest around Third World issues.[13] Attention to their presence both underlines the new importance in the 1960s of increased human mobility and gives the links between the Third World and the First a concrete importance that is often overlooked. These linkages, combined with the growing propensity of young radicals to look to the Third World for the solutions to revolutionary problems at home, meant that a hallmark of the West German 1968 became a multifaceted global engagement.

If the 68er movement was global in its orientation, it was, simultaneously, intensely local, not only in the spaces in which it was played out (the school, the neighborhood, the street, the home, the body) but in the concerns with which it engaged. Nowhere does this come out more clearly than in the new focus, in the 1960s, on the personal sphere. This reorientation, which represented a shift away from the iron laws and dour demeanor of twentieth-century Marxist collectivism, was linked with a new emphasis on feelings and emotions, especially those feelings and emotions subversive of the time-honored emotional tropes of male warriordom. It was linked, in turn, both with a rediscovery of the early Marx and his focus on alienation and with a growing interest in psychoanalytic theory, especially the work of the renegade Marxist Wilhelm Reich. The shift in focus toward personal subjectivity provided the basis for an opening up of the definition of politics to encompass new fields of inquiry and action: interpersonal relationships and group dynamics; sex and relations between the sexes; child-rearing and education; and the whole range of personal subjectivity encoded in style.

The window of possibility in which these concerns were able to find expression was part of an unprecedented upsurge of prosperity in Western societies – a "golden age" in the words of the great British historian Eric Hobsbawm – that created the preconditions for a postmaterialist turn. The force of the rejection of life organized around the profit motive, careerism, and consumerism (even as its young adherents used consumption for their own ends) was reflected in the widespread popularity of the writings of Herbert Marcuse, the German-American philosopher of the Frankfurt School, who argued that a society organized around the striving after false needs masked a deep and profound spiritual oppression.[14]

[13] For the most comprehensive study of this phenomenon to date, see Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[14] For a cogent discussion of Marcuse's relationship to the West German student movement, see John Abromeit, "The Limits of Praxis: The Social-Psychological Foundations of Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse's Interpretation of the 1960s Protest Movements," in Belinda

A not dissimilar point was made by the Situationists, a Paris-centered group of avant-garde intellectuals who, already at the end of the 1950s, sought to blur the boundaries between art, politics, and daily life. They assumed (prematurely, as it turned out) the victory of a technocratic post-work society as a jumping-off point for a comprehensive critique of the ways in which the "spectacle" of consumer capitalist society prevented authentic existence. Both Marcuse and the Situationists provided theoretical voices for a widespread feeling of skepticism about the primacy of work–family–duty–sobriety; about prescribed social roles; and – going deeper – about the authoritarian face of daily life. Much of the characteristic activity of the 1960s represented an attempt to escape from precisely these social roles and cultural strictures, through explorations inner (drugs, group therapy, Eastern mysticism) and outer (communal living, hitchhiking, travel abroad).

A key element in the breakout from prescribed social roles and thought patterns was the attempt to create an alternative sphere of knowledge in which the claims of authority could be put to rigorous test even as new values and ideas were put forward. This attempt involved a struggle over representation in which the left challenged the interpretations of events and ideas presented by the mainstream media. This critique of the means by which information was presented in society found its strongest expression, in West Germany, in the campaign against the Springer Press monopoly which, alongside the Vietnam War, formed the centerpiece of student engagement during the crisis year of 1968; but this was only the most visible element in a wider emphasis on the expansion of consciousness and the development of a critical intelligence. This emphasis, which expressed itself in attempts at developing antiauthoritarian educational practice and new possibilities of self-representation, came to particularly pronounced expression in the underground press, which expressed the new intellectual combativeness in a precocious cut-and-paste style.

The underground press was a key site in the development of a more general phenomenon central to 1968: the interpenetration of radical politics and popular culture. A crucial development in the transformation of politics in the 1960s was, of course, the incorporation of the myriad concerns of daily life into the analytic repertoire of the left. One of the things that was *new* about the New Left, beyond its attempt to overcome

Davis, Martin Klimke, Carla MacDougall, and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).

the authoritarianism, compromises, and analytical poverty of the older Communist and Social Democratic parties, was a focus on personal subjectivity linked to the erasure of the distinctions between public and private. Expressed through lifestyle generally, and as several scholars have recently pointed out, through consumer choices in particular, this subjectivity transformed the broad palette of daily life into a field of political identity.[15] It was against this background that popular culture, in the form, especially, of popular music, developed into a crucial factor in the elaboration of a distinctive "youth culture," which, in the course of the unparalleled politicization of the 1960s, came to be seen (and experienced) as inseparable from the political agenda(s) of the New Left.[16] At the same time, the multisided link between youth culture, politics, and consumption became – partly as a result of consumer capitalism's ability to recuperate and commodify symbolic challenges to its hegemony, partly as a result of the willingness of authorities to tolerate (and of cultural elites to embrace) aspects of youth rebellion – the basis of a broader "cultural revolution."[17] In simultaneously pushing back the boundaries of the permissible and expanding the cultural palette of lifestyle and artistic possibility, this broad cultural revolution had a decisive impact on Western societies.[18]

Yet it would be a mistake to reduce 1968 to the level of its accommodation by mainstream society, ignoring in the process the principled engagement of its young protagonists with problems that, in many cases, remain urgently unsolved some four decades later. The very process of capitalist appropriation that helped drive the broader evolutionary moment was itself the object of fierce resistance, as anyone with even a passing familiarity with the West German scene is aware. Such resistance is significant not only in marking out popular culture as a field of conflict as well as consensus but also in hinting at the function of popular culture as an active category of political engagement. Popular culture supplied the raw material for the creation of youth identities that, over the course of the 1960s, increasingly became *political* identities. This was especially true, for example, of popular music. Functioning not as the harbinger of

[15] See, for example, the essays in Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960–1980*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
[16] Detlef Siegfried, *Time Is on My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).
[17] A concept associated with Arthur Marwick; see Marwick, *The Sixties*.
[18] Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, and Karl Christian Lammers, eds., *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000).