

EXPLORING TRANSNATIONAL MEDIA EXCHANGE IN THE 1960s

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Abstract: In this article, Heather Gumbert uses archival and contemporary writing to reflect on and historicize discussion of the significance of imported programming in Europe in the 1960s, especially in the German Democratic Republic. Imported programming was a cornerstone of the television schedules of national broadcasters, particularly in “television poor” eastern European countries, with implications for the ways in which those broadcasters could shape the visions projected to their audiences.

Keywords: Transnational media exchange, Media imperialism, Eastern European television, GDR

1. Introduction



Figure 1: This map is an example of common visual representations of cross-border broadcasting, focusing on the one-way flow from West to East uncomplicated by imported programming transmitted domestically. It visualizes the geographical areas in which it was technologically possible for East Germans to receive West German television signals: areas in red could not receive West German programming, or only with difficulty. The southern region in particular was referred to as the ‘Valley of the Clueless’ (a phrase deserving of etymological study).

In 1990, Longworth, erstwhile economics writer and editor for the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote an [article](#) describing how television – western television, that is – had shaped the societies that were in the midst of the Velvet Revolutions. Television, so often derided in the West as junk food for the eyes, has been the secret weapon of Eastern Europe’s revolution.... The path to revolution in East Germany was paved by West German television. West German TV is seen in 85 percent of East Germany, and its regular programming showed there was another way to live.... In [Czechoslovakia and Romania], broadcasters and camera operators who had spent the last generation producing some of the world’s dullest television provided some of the most unforgettable images of the revolution.... In East Germany, the broadcasts from West German TV became so popular that the government could only persuade workers to move to factories in the eastern boondocks by relaying the West German programs to them.... West German and Austrian TV programs also are received in Czechoslovakia. Western Hungarians have been tuning into Austrian TV for years. As Hungary became free, its own TV became a magnet for Romanians, especially Hungarian-speakers in Transylvania.¹

In Longworth’s telling of it, eastern European television broadcasters finally came alive just as their states were falling apart. Before then, television was dull and broadcasters had produced little of note, only increasing the seductiveness of western and western-influenced programming. Longworth represents here the view that television undermined authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe; elsewhere [scholars have demonstrated](#) how it could instead stabilize such regimes. Significant is that, in the immediate post-Cold War period, the triumph of capitalism seemed to consign much of the socialist experience to the dustbin of history, including the shared cultural experience that grew out of the media cultures of defunct regimes. Socialist television was boring, limited by political mandates and scarce resources, and paled in comparison to robust, probing, and meaningful western entertainment and journalism.

In contrast to this vision of the televisual past, I argue here that it was domestic programming and programming imports transmitted by eastern European broadcasters – here I use the specific example of television service in the German Democratic Republic or GDR – and not the trans-border programming beamed in by other broadcasters during the Cold War that played the most important role in shaping the national media culture. There was a lively and dynamic transnational media exchange between the GDR and neighbouring countries on its eastern and western borders. It was at times an uncomfortable exchange, concentrated around the programming produced by the Soviet Union, the more liberalized parts of the eastern bloc (Czechoslovakia and Poland), and the West, including West Germany. This exchange holds a number of implications for television in (eastern) European countries. First, it challenges the assumption that, above all, the state was able to closely direct the kinds of programmes and messages broadcast by domestic media, and that the ‘threat’ to their authority came from internal dissenters or foreign over-the-air trans-border broadcasting. Second, such an exchange helped lay the foundation for a shared European media culture of the post-war period, a cultural world within which socialist media products were highly marketable. This perhaps also helps to explain why ‘socialism,’ or at least its media and consumer products, became so marketable ten and twenty years after the fall of communism in Europe. Finally, this shared culture was defined by both the ideological fissures between socialism and capitalism and, as important, *within* socialism as it was understood and practiced across the eastern bloc. This is important because it held implications for the ways in which nation-states, via their national broadcasters could project the social worlds within which they hoped their citizens would live.

2. Rethinking Supply and Demand: Television Content

By the late 1960s, the GDR offered a fully developed and politically disciplined television service. The DFF had survived the growing pains of the 1950s to reach a rising number of viewers and take its place in the pantheon of leading cultural organs in the GDR. It had weathered a two-year scandal that had drawn the DFF into a larger political debate about the representation of socialism and the ‘new socialist man’ that clarified its political mandate, as well as the latitude it could exercise in fulfilling that mission. Contemporaries lauded the ‘professional’ nature of GDR

¹ R.C. Longworth, ‘In Eastern Europe, TV Was the Tool of Revolution,’ *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1990.

television. Writing in 1965, American media scholar Wilson Dizard noted that the viewing density (number of receivers per capita) in the GDR was the highest in the eastern bloc. He described the DFF as the ‘professional equal of any in the world,’ broadcasting a diverse range of programming including operas and plays that were ‘often superior to West German television.’²

The DFF’s political mandate was considerable. Government authorities charged the service with a three-pronged mission. It would build socialism by providing a differentiated, topical programme that reflected socialist life in a recognizable way to East Germans. It should do so while drawing as many German viewers as possible (from West and East) to the socialist programme. Finally, it should strengthen East Germans’ connection to the ‘friendly fraternal states’ from Eastern Europe by providing uplifting stories of socialist development there. An important fourth factor was the consensus that the viewer had a right to be entertained.³ In this vision, political reliability at the DFF meant broadcasting a full schedule of reasonably popular programming that was accessible (entertaining and relaxing). That somehow reflected the everyday experience of East Germans, and drew them closer to their eastern bloc neighbours, all without alienating West German viewers unduly.

Television’s political mandate had not always been so comprehensive or focused on shaping the viewer’s relationship to socialist life. When the GDR began television broadcasting in 1952, its ‘audience’ was the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), or the body that was in the business of assigning broadcasting frequencies across Europe. Television programming gave purpose to an emerging network of transmitters, which in turn allowed the GDR to claim its slice of the European broadcasting spectrum. Service began with a scant two hours of ‘experimental’ programming several days a week, generally repetitive, static programming that could not really provide the ‘live’ experience that ‘television’ seemed to promise audiences. In the late 1950s, rising viewership and an expanding schedule, coupled with political crisis changed the way government authorities thought about television’s usefulness. The DFF had begun studying its viewers (in 1956), who had stubbornly insisted on writing down and submitting their opinions of television. Government authorities had come to recognize that not only a domestic audience but a ‘foreign’ one (on the other side of the German-German border) could be reached, and they began thinking of television as a tool that could tell these audiences the right story, their side of the story.

By the mid-1960s, East German television had reached full power, producing entertaining programmes that appealed to the domestic audience and generally fulfilling the state’s command outlined above. This took incredible amounts of resources. An extreme example is that of *Play Along!* (‘Spiel Mit!’) which the DFF broadcasted every year on the anniversary of the Republic in celebration of the GDR. *Play Along!* can best be described as a variety show that was broadcast over the course of an entire day. The programme included a number of different ‘bits’ performed at multiple locations around the country by DFF staff and guest artists, some of which relied upon the participation of thousands of East German citizens. It was a massive undertaking, making the most of some quite improbable scenarios (including ‘exciting live reports from the D43 (highway) between Wittenberg and Jüterborg.’ In 1966, the programme involved 578 television workers—one-quarter of DFF staff—and over two million citizens from around the Republic. The ratings were also enormous, pulling in the largest viewing audiences yet for the Department of Entertainment at the DFF.⁴ *Play Along!* was a spectacular example of the kinds of resources the DFF was willing to commit to domestic programming in the late 1960s. It was, however, unsustainable. The expansion of the programme, especially with the introduction of a second channel in 1969, confronted the DFF with the substantial task of finding enough content to fill the weekly schedule. As a result, such programmes had disappeared from GDR television by 1970.

3. Desperately Seeking Content: The Emerging Transnational Television Market

² Wilson Dizard, *TV: A World View*, Syracuse University Press, 1965, p. 197.

³ Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the GDR*, University of Michigan Press, 2014, especially Chapter 5.

⁴ Lutz Haucke, ‘Die Träume sozialistischer Massenunterhaltung in der DDR,’ in Günter Agde, *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente*, Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991, p. 113.

The DFF was not the only broadcaster facing the intractable problem of finding content. In 1972 UNESCO noted that the drive to create enough programming for a full television schedule posed a threat to broadcasters' ability to provide quality television to discriminating viewers and minimize the harm television could pose if unleashed to reach the 'lowest common denominator.'⁵ Television, the UN reported, was 'an enormous drain on creative talent....' It warned,

[t]he result of long hours of programs is bound to be that quality becomes the exception, the creative talent among writers, performers and producers alike get stale and exhausted, and that the public is swamped with a flood of programs which deadens its discriminative taste.... Television stations are thus faced with the difficult problem of achieving success by reaching the maximum number of viewers with the optimum quality of programmes and the least harmful effect upon society as a whole.⁶

UNESCO hoped that the emerging transnational market in television programming could relieve the pressure on television broadcasters that did not have the resources to provide deep schedules.

An additional benefit of transnational television exchange was that it promised to facilitate a greater understanding among nations by allowing greater understanding of both shared cultural norms and cultural difference. Created in the aftermath of the destruction of the first half of the twentieth century, the United Nations was particularly interested in preventing future international conflicts. In the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' of 1948, the UN embraced the view that the 'free flow of information' was a key to averting the 'prejudices and misconceptions' that sparked regional and global wars.⁷

To be sure, by this time a lively transnational market in television programming had emerged across the West. Media scholar Burton Paulu reported already in 1967 that:

there is far more *ad hoc* program exchange and cooperative program development than even most Europeans realize. Early in 1967, a [West German] television team flew to Moscow to make a color television documentary 'Medicine in the Soviet Union.'... In 1963 camera teams from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Japan, and West Germany came to Rumania to make films and more recently Rumania drew up a television film exchange agreement with the United Kingdom.... By 1964 Rumania was exchanging broadcasts with 65 countries in all parts of the world, [including the United States]....in 1963 [Czechoslovakia] provided material for 3,322 newscasts to Eastern and 519 to western countries, as well as distributing 513 television films.⁸

European broadcasters were forging a myriad of connections across the continent, even without the more institutionalized market governed by the European Broadcasting Union (**EBU**) or the International Radio and Television Organization (**OIRT**). This is just one of the ways in which the 'Iron Curtain' was more porous than scholars have previously recognized.

The economic value of this exchange really drove it forward, promising cheap(er) programming to fill growing television schedules, not to mention the profits that could be made by television-producing countries. In the United States, for example, the razor's edge of profit and loss in the American television industry was, by 1965, already defined by its overseas sales of television productions.⁹ The leading exporters of television in the global television market were the United States, Britain, France, and West Germany.¹⁰

⁵ UNESCO, *Television*, Arno Press, 1972, p. 26.

⁶ UNESCO, *Television*, Arno Press, 1972, p. 31.

⁷ Konrad Kressley, 'East-West Communication in Europe: The Television Nexus,' *Communication Research* 5, 1971, p. 71.

⁸ Burton Paulu, *Radio and Television Broadcasting on the European Continent*, University of Minnesota Press, 1967, p. 136-137.

⁹ Wilson Dizard, Syracuse University Press, 1965, p. 156.

¹⁰ Denise Bielby and C. Lee Harrington, *Global TV: Exporting Television and Culture in the World Market*, New York University Press, 2008, p. 38.

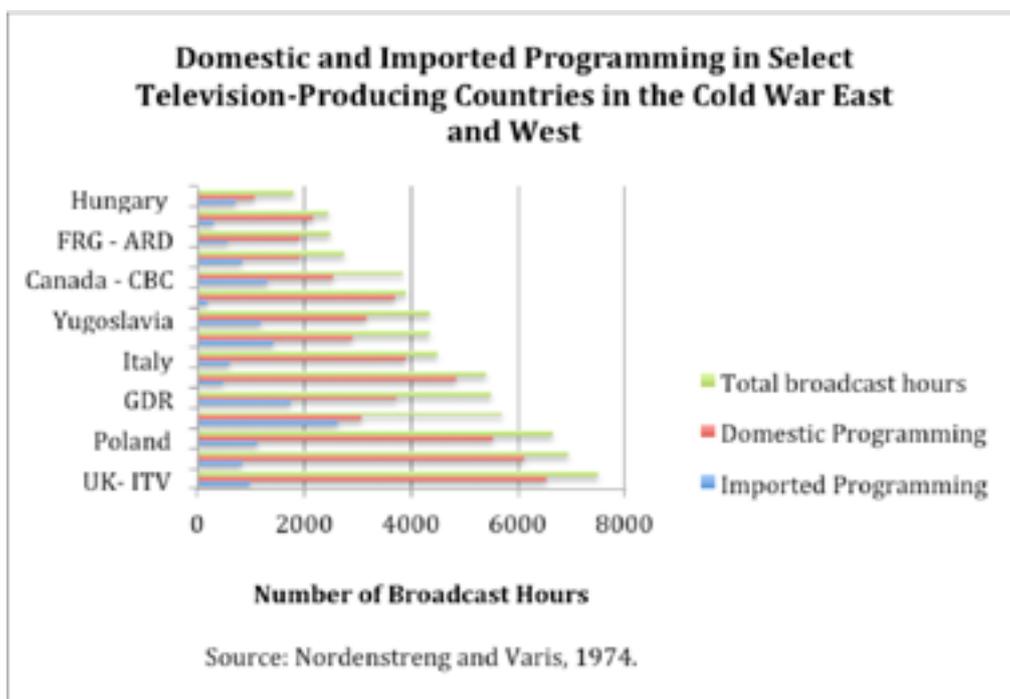


Table 1

In Eastern Europe in the early 1970s, national broadcasters were importing about forty percent of television programming, on average.¹¹ Of this, about ten percent of Eastern European broadcasts came from western sources, compared to two percent of Eastern programmes found on Western broadcasts.

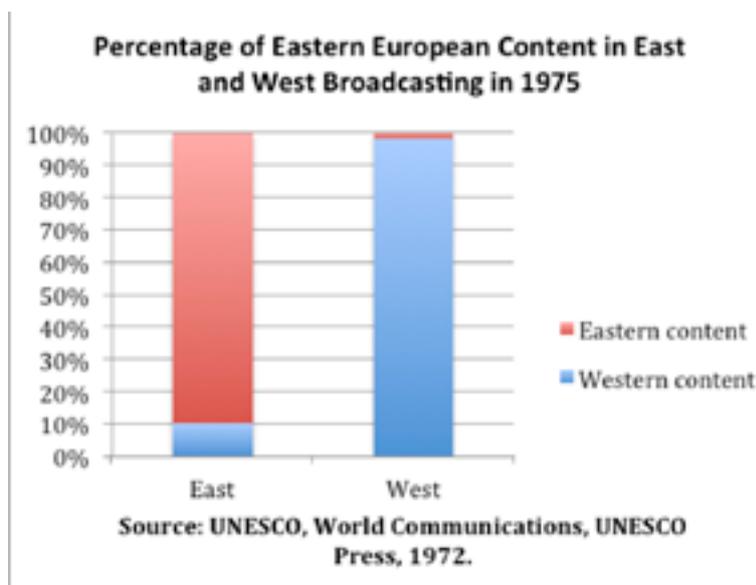
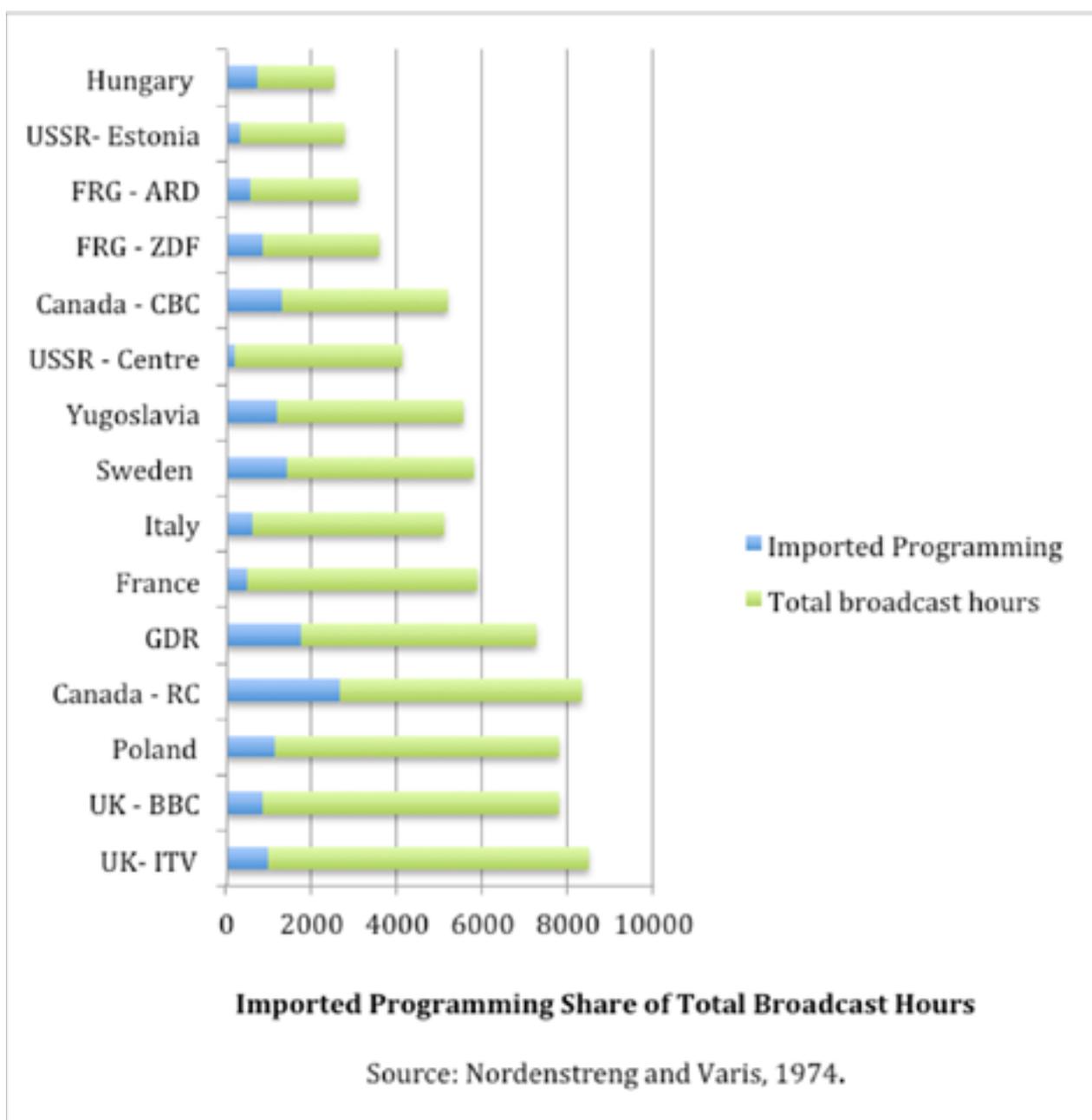


Table 2: Imported programming comprised forty percent of Eastern European broadcasts in the 1970s, compared to Western European broadcasts of which, on average, 30% comprised foreign content. In smaller countries such as Ireland, Finland, and Iceland, as much as 60% of domestic broadcasts were comprised of foreign content.

In the Eastern bloc, most of the foreign content originated in the Soviet Union or other socialist countries, especially Czechoslovakia and Poland, but some of it also came from the (Cold War) West. The GDR was a particularly strong importer of Western programming, likely from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Broadcasters imported topical

¹¹ UNESCO, *World Communications*, The Unesco Press, 1975, pp. 29-31.

information - primarily news and sports items - and entertainment programming, especially serial television and feature films. By this time Eurovision and Intervision were well established and coordinating some but still not all of the programming exchange.¹² By 1970, almost a quarter of the programming transmitted through Intervision originated in the GDR. In turn, the GDR imported almost a third of its programming, much of it from the Soviet Union.¹³



The DFF, then, had developed a particularly strong domestic service, exporting more programming and importing less

¹² Ibid.

¹³ UNESCO, *World Communications*, The Unesco Press, 1975, p. 391.

than other countries in the Eastern bloc.¹⁴

Despite the UN's hopeful, liberal, vision, television exchange did not provide a truly 'free flow of information.' Eurovision and Intervision (transmitting programming by Europeans across Europe) operated primarily as non-commercial enterprises, 'voluntarily pooling or exchanging program materials.' But, as seen in these tables, imported material comprised a much greater percentage of the television program in television poor nations than in the 'rich' television nations that were the leading exporters. Writing in 1978, media researcher Konrad Kressley noted that it was not just the scale of the West-East exchange that was 'one-sided,' but that even the kinds of programming that nations in East and West accepted into their national broadcasting networks differed. This was due to invisible structural factors. For example, the location of international news organizations' news bureaus in the cities of the leading television exporters accounted for the fact that those countries exported more news items than their television poor counterparts, argued Kressley (and not, as Cold War hawks might have imagined, because those items were more important or more interesting).¹⁵ As important was an emerging dichotomy between the 'good news' broadcasts in the East and the 'bad news' broadcasts of the West. Kressley reported that Eastern news favoured cultural, social, and scientific reporting along the political, underplaying sensationalism to 'enhance regime consensus (and) elevate cultural tastes.' Western news, on the other hand, was 'hard news' - more descriptive with less commentary - but had moved towards a preference for 'simpler and more sensational themes' that were 'non-political and easily digestible' over time.¹⁶ As might be expected, television news in East and West projected very different visions of the world, and the East 'accepted' more of the western vision due to economic, structural, and cultural factors.

Contemporary cultural theorists identified a process of 'cultural domination' in the inequitable nature of such exchanges that they felt threatened emerging media centers. Cultural imperialists argued that the 'first world'—countries like Great Britain and France, but especially the United States—exported cultural products, especially television programmes, to 'third world' countries in such volume that it overwhelmed indigenous cultures, spreading capitalist ideology across the globe. Since then, political economists and cultural studies scholars have challenged the instrumental view of the media implied by cultural domination—that audiences receive media products and messages in an uncomplicated way. Communications scholar Joseph Straubhaar argues, for example, that media imperialism is not a simple, one-way cultural transfer, but it is limited by the necessity of 'cultural proximity'—audiences will not just receive any cultural product, but rather privilege those that are closest to their own cultural experience or worldview—leading to, at best, 'asymmetrical interdependence' of different countries media worlds.¹⁷ Cultural studies scholars, on the other hand, argue that audiences actively construct the meanings they find in cultural products, potentially undermining the supposed domination of foreign cultural products.

But early cultural imperialists thought the so-called 'second world'—primarily comprised of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe—to be 'immune' (or at least insulated from) this process. In 1991, Herbert Schiller argued it was only after the fall of communism that these countries became 'eager adherents to the (capitalist) world,' offering national space to the marketing and ideological message flows of their former adversaries.¹⁸ Other scholars have suggested that a similar process of cultural domination occurred within the socialist second world, in which smaller countries were dominated by the Soviet Union.¹⁹ The history of the DFF suggests a much more complicated situation in which the fault lines of different ideological positions across the Iron Curtain and *within* socialism, as well as the economic underpinnings of the socialist media world, defined cultural exchange in Eastern European countries. Specifically, the GDR faced a conundrum that pitted cultural proximity (to West German content) against ideological proximity (to its socialist neighbours), and one was not necessarily worse than the other. Indeed, socialist media producers increasingly created content for the transnational market, material that often was

¹⁴ On the implications of this exchange in the GDR and television's role in the 'system conflict' of the Cold War, see also Thomas Heimann, 'Television in Zeiten des Kalten Krieges,' in Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Massenmedien im Kalten Krieg*, Böhlau, 2006.

¹⁵ Konrad Kressley, 'East-West Communication in Europe: The Television Nexus,' *Communication Research* 5, 1971, p. 78.

¹⁶ Konrad Kressley, 'East-West Communication in Europe: The Television Nexus,' *Communication Research* 5, 1971, p. 82.

¹⁷ Joseph Straubhaar, 'Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity,' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, 1, March 1991, pp. 39-59.

¹⁸ Herbert Schiller, 'Not Yet the Post-Imperialist Era,' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, 1, March 1991, p. 14.

¹⁹ Chin-Chuan Lee, *Media Imperialism Reconsidered*, Sage, 1980, pp. 55-57.

unavailable to GDR programmers due to both ideological and economic factors.

4. The Pitfalls of Marketing Socialist Programming to Socialists

The DFF had found early success in the emerging transnational market in the early 1960s with the historical miniseries *Revolt of the Conscience* ('Gewissen in Aufruhr').²⁰ In my book, I argue that the success of this particular series helped prove the potential political and cultural significance of television beyond the instrumental use authorities' envisioned for television up to that point. The series was so widely popular among East German television audiences in 1961 that the DFF released it also as a two-part film in Berlin cinemas. It went on to find acclaim across the Eastern bloc and in Cuba, Sweden, and Austria. In 1962 it appeared on Soviet television screens. Audiences liked it, and the model of the mini-series opened new possibilities for Soviet programmers. Expert on Soviet television *Alexander Prokhorov* argues that *Revolt* revolutionized Soviet television producers' approach to serial production and how they thought about its role in structuring leisure time. He relates Russian TV critic Sergei Muratov's epiphany that 'a film can last five evenings in a row'. ... (A)n entire week's schedule could be organized not only around work, but also around television programming—the screening of a mini-series.²¹ For the GDR (and other national broadcasters), programmes like *Revolt of the Conscience* represented a good return on a modest investment: they were popular and could draw domestic and foreign viewers; they could fill programming hours by means of repeated broadcasts and also be exported abroad, sometimes for hard currency.

The exchange also went in the other direction. This was particularly the case because of the political mandate of the DFF to draw western viewers and to bring East Germans closer to the socialist bloc. This imported programming followed the norm of the transnational market, including news, sports, and, in particular television serials and films that appealed to wide audiences. Films were particularly sought after: by the mid-1960s the DFF film department had come to see its role at the DFF as finding cheap films with which to 'fill gaps' in the schedule.²² Historically feature film production and distribution had been very closely supervised, which meant that potential films were already 'vetted' and ready for television broadcast. As television's profile and its audience grew, even films already vetted for cinematic distribution could be suspect.

In March 1963, for example, the DFF broadcast two crime thrillers that landed it in trouble. Crime thrillers (and romantic films) were audience favourites in the GDR, and Albert Norden and the Agitation Commission endorsed the strategy of counterprogramming such shows against similar West German programming to draw a larger share of the German audience.²³ The first was a French film, *On A Dangerous Mission* ('Mission Dangereuse', 1950). The film followed a conventional narrative of the capitalist West and featured a protagonist that authorities described in no uncertain terms as 'an unsurpassed 'superman'... a drunk and disreputable womanizer, who picks up everyone from the general's daughter to the whore and emerges from every malicious adventure as a resplendent victor.'²⁴ The case against that film seems fairly clear: it was too 'bourgeois,' too antithetical to the values of East German socialism.

²⁰ Based on Rudolf Petershagen's widely read memoir of the same name published first in 1956, *Revolt of the Conscience* ('Gewissen in Aufruhr', DFF 1961) follows the life of Nazi officer Ebershagen in five parts. It begins with the battle of Stalingrad and continues with Ebershagen's decision to surrender to the Red Army without a fight in the spring of 1945. His eventual return from postwar captivity to become a champion of German unity was followed by his subsequent arrest and 'show trial' at the hands of American intelligence officers, and, finally, his ideological conversion and decision to settle in the GDR.

²¹ Alexander Prokhorov, 'Size Matters: The Ideological Function of the Length of Soviet Feature Films and Television Mini-Series in the 1950s and 1960s,' *Kinokultura* 12, April 2006, p. 12.

²² DRA-Babelsberg, Sammlung Glatzer, 'Beschluss...' Teil 2, [1966] 61–63.

²³ Reported by Stasi IM in 1966, cited in Jochen Staadt et al., *Operation Fernsehen*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008, p. 337. On television reception habits in the GDR see Michael Meyen, *Einschalten, Umschalten, Ausschalten? Das Fernsehen im GDR Alltag*, Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2003, or more broadly, Michael Meyen and Andreas Scheu, 'The role of external broadcasting in a closed political system: A case study of the German post-war states,' *Global Media and Communication*, 7, 2011, pp. 115-128.

²⁴ SAPMO-BArch, DY 30 IV A 2/9.02/67, 'Einschätzung der Arbeit des Deutschen Fernsehfunks,' 23 March 1963, 8.

The second film, on the other hand, was a Romanian film from 1961 that had already enjoyed a first run in East German cinemas. *The Bomb Was Stolen* ('S-a furat o bombă') depicted a crime in progress: the theft of an atomic bomb by an unwitting 'perpetrator,' who inadvertently picked up the wrong suitcase. Two rival agencies vying for the weapon pursued this 'thief' across town while, oblivious to their efforts, the man boards a bus and falls in love with the bus conductor. The film critiqued the emerging arms race of the Cold War and suggested a peaceful resolution. It poked fun at the conventions of western spy films such as *On A Dangerous Mission*, by mobilizing slapstick physical comedy performed within a noir aesthetic. But the story unfolded entirely without dialogue or subtitles, included dream sequences, suggested that in this world, communication must be facilitated by 'futuristic' technology—a 'brain-operated typewriter' that expresses characters' thoughts to the viewer.²⁵ Government critics deemed it, too unacceptable.

Such programmes found their way onto East German television screens because the DFF needed to fill an expanding schedule with cheap material. Moreover, films from socialist countries fulfilled the political mandate to expand coverage of and film exchange with neighbouring socialist countries. In the early 1960s, no one gave much thought to the messages of such material, but in just a few years that became a political minefield for the DFF. To this point, threatening, 'modernist' influences had come from the West, according to the governing Socialist Unity Party (SED). By 1963, however, they were coming from the East as well. The international Kafka Conference of May 1963 exemplified this trajectory. Participants from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, France, and the GDR met to discuss the possible rehabilitation of Kafka and aspects of modernist literature for socialist art, grappling with the problems of realism and alienation. The East German delegation, fresh from domestic disputes over a television opera and another banned work that displayed exactly these tendencies, was the lone holdout speaking against it.²⁶ The Kafka conference had opened a space of transnational discussion that complicated the ability of national socialist parties like the SED to control the terms of the debate.²⁷ It also set off a sort of 'counterculture' in parts of the eastern bloc.²⁸ The ramifications for East German television were profound. After 1958 the SED called for television to raise awareness about the GDR's socialist neighbours, and the DFF had come to rely on programming coming *from* those countries. But the eastern bloc was turning out material that was not necessarily 'reliable,' projecting a different vision of socialism than the one with which East Germans were familiar.

Complicating media exchange across the socialist world, socialist film companies had begun to produce works specifically for the western television market, which they could sell for hard currency. That is, not just American and British television studios but Eastern European ones were producing content for the emerging transnational market that was culturally fuzzy enough for consumption across the West.²⁹ In this, the transnational television market followed a trajectory similar to that of films. American blockbuster films, for example, rely on foreign distribution sales to achieve profitability, which means that such films are really made not for the domestic American audience but for a large transnational one. American film scholar Stephen Prince points out that '(t)hey are oriented towards spectacle and hyperbolic special effects because these translate very well cross-culturally. No subtitles are required for a viewer in Thailand to enjoy the basic premise of *Jurassic Park III*, which is 'run from the dinosaurs'. The attempt to achieve cross-cultural appeal made it harder for the DFF to find politically acceptable programmes from the eastern bloc countries. Producers, accustomed to ordering films because they happened to be available, now had to pay closer attention to the politics of the works. It was even more difficult to buy the exhibition rights. Socialist countries often sold programmes to capitalist countries with non-complete clauses, making those films unavailable for purchase and exhibition in places like the GDR. The DFF noted that West German broadcasters ARD and ZDF were buying up whole annual film catalogues, making them unavailable for broadcast in the GDR.³⁰

²⁵ 'A Bomb Was Stolen,' (Film Educational Handout), Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2011.

²⁶ Günter Erbe, *Die Verfermte Moderne. Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem 'Modernismus' in Kulturpolitik, Literaturwissenschaft und Literatur der DDR*, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993, p. 81. Martina Langermann, 'Edition und Adaption Franz Kafkas in der DDR (1962–1966),' in Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Historische DDR-Forschung*, Akademie Verlag, 1993, pp. 345–359.

²⁷ Martina Langermann, 'Edition und Adaption Franz Kafkas in der DDR (1962–1966),' in Jürgen Kocka, ed., *Historische DDR-Forschung*, Akademie Verlag, 1993, p. 359.

²⁸ Lutz Haucke, *Nouvelle Vague in Osteuropa?*, Rhombos, 2009, pp. 564–566.

²⁹ Stephen Prince, 'World Filmmaking and the Hollywood Blockbuster,' *World Literature Today* 77, 3/4, Oct-Dec 2003, p. 5.

³⁰ DRA, Sammlung Glatzer, 'Beschluss...' Teil 2, [1966] 61-63.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have begun to work through some ideas about the scope and implications of the international exchange of television content in the 1960s, with an eye to how contemporaries writing about television exchange perceived the situation. In part I want to historicize contemporary writings to illuminate just how our post-Cold War expectations of television and its history have reimagined and perhaps elided the ways in which that history unfolded. I think it holds three further implications for the ways in which scholars think about media in the GDR and Eastern Europe. First, it challenges the assumption that Eastern European was irrevocably state controlled and could not speak to audiences or show experiences outside of their national (or ideological) borders. It also gives a different view of the process of 'media imperialism' underway in the 1960s. Finally, it should contribute to an emerging literature on the shared, pan-European media culture that developed in the post-war period.³¹ As the transnational market developed (or succumbed to) an industrial mode of production, programming that was innovative, experimental, and culturally specific—programming such as *Play Along!*—gave way to economies of scale, with profound consequences for the ability of (state) broadcasters to define the social worlds of their nations. Given the increasingly westward-facing programming decisions Eastern European broadcasters were making in the interests of selling their own products (television serials and the like) abroad, this 'shared' culture was surely not 'insulated' from the marketing and ideologies of the capitalist West as suggested by early proponents of the cultural imperialism thesis.

Biography:

Heather Gumbert recently published her first book, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* and is now an Associate Professor of History at Virginia Tech. She has also written on the debates surrounding the location and construction of the iconic Berlin television tower, and about the ways in which narratives disseminated by television in the second Berlin crisis helped change the way that East German authorities approached political crisis.

³¹ Irmela Schneider, Christine Bartz, Isabell Otto eds., *Diskursgeschichte der Medien nach 1945*. Three Volumes. Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. 2004. See also the contributions to the conference '[Television Beyond the Iron Curtain](#),' Erlangen-Nürnberg, December 2013.