

## Cold War Europe

# Culture & Conflict

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## Volume 29

# Cold War Europe

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A Space of Communication

Edited by  
Tobias Nanz and Hedwig Wagner

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Tobias Nanz and Hedwig Wagner

# Cold War Europe – A Space of Communication

Introduction

## 1 The Cold War and the War against Ukraine

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Europe and the world have been challenged by the return of imperial aspirations and the emergence of a new world order in which Russia is striving to limit the influence of Western and Central Eastern European states. The Cold War, publicly and reductively known as a bipolar confrontation between “the West” and “the East,” has apparently been returning as a hot war. The situation may appear to recall the battles that were never fought in the second half of the twentieth century, but in fact, there are too many differences between the Cold War and the conflict that has emerged since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and parts of eastern Ukraine, for this to be the case. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, networked societies based on Internet technology emerged; in addition, the “War on Terror” and other new wars (Münkler 2004; Kaldor 1999) have pushed the boundaries of classical warfare, giving rise to military and political groups that challenge the order of states and international law.

In this respect, the present collection of articles about Europe and cross-border and cross-bloc communication during the Cold War may seem to have nothing in common with the current situation. However, *Cold War Europe. A Space of Communication* contributes to our understanding of Cold War media history and cultures by showing that the European communication space, which can be understood as an exchange of ideas about Europe between the Eastern and Western blocs, formed an (imaginary) Europe that both overcame imperialist, bipolar concepts and shared common ideas. In this Western and Central Eastern European volume of the *Culture & Conflict* series, the authors of the contributions discuss the formation and transnational exchange of European cultures and investigate the emergence of a common, transformative European identity through media, media infrastructures, and messages that were able to cross the Iron Curtain.

The book *Entangled East and West: Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War* (Mikkonen, Scott-Smith, Parkkinen 2019a) asserts that as of 2019, the role of individuals and organizations across Europe, spanning both the “East” and “West,” remains a neglected area of study. Even in 2024, the perspective of a distinctly European viewpoint on the cultural Cold War, as highlighted in the

book's blurb, continues to warrant further investigation. This publication aims to contribute to this ongoing inquiry. Aligned with recent trends in Cold War cultures research (Vowinckel et al. 2014), there is a concerted effort to challenge the predominantly US-centric narrative, which overlooks cooperative and multilateral developments during the Cold War era.

Historically, Cold War analysis predominantly depicts Europe and its countries as either victims or passive observers in the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. However, this perspective, while understandable from the standpoint of the so-called superpowers involved, ignores the active roles and distinct motivations of European nations. The dynamics of European interaction have often been sidelined by the emphasis on superpower rivalry in Cold War research, as pointed out by Mikkonen et al. (2019b). This volume seeks to redress this imbalance by centering on Europe, contributing to the ongoing effort to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how the Cold War shaped and influenced the continent.

Our focus and application of established concepts are guided by Mikkonen et al.'s (2019b) assertion that cultural diplomacy broadens the scope of traditional diplomacy by involving non-governmental actors, such as artists, administrators, educators, and others who may operate independently from state authorities. This expansion encompasses both state-to-state interactions and people-to-people connections facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such a broadened understanding challenges conventional notions of diplomacy, complicating the formation of a comprehensive picture. In this volume, the term "cultural diplomacy" refers to informational, cultural, and educational exchanges across state borders that involve both state and non-state actors.

According to Villaume and Westad (2010) and Villaume et al. (2016), there is growing interest in how the human rights movement acted as a catalyst in shaping East-West relations, particularly through the involvement of NGOs in driving societal change. In this volume, the abovementioned perspective is echoed in the chapter written by Beciu and Popescu. Additionally, another area of emerging research within Cold War studies, as highlighted in the chapters by Wagner and Walewska-Choptiany, centers on the role of experts. Whether they concern fields such as radio or satellite technology, recent studies by Christian et al. (2018) and Kohlrausch and Trischler (2014) have shed light on how experts and international organizations have played a significant role in constructing technological connections across the Cold War divide.

The approach to this European communication space is threefold. It encompasses, first, the infrastructures linking East and West; second, the broadcasts that crossed the Iron Curtain; and third, the messages that circulated in Europe and formed a common identity despite the hard border. This structure reflects a

media studies approach: the basic requirements of every act of communication are media and media infrastructures. These infrastructures make it possible for a broadcaster or another actor to develop a program to reach and inform audiences on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This, in turn, is the basis for the circulation of messages between East and West, in the process of which their content is sometimes transformed and reshaped as it comes into contact with the recipients' environment.

It is a remarkable fact that, despite border-demarcation efforts during the Cold War, including fences, walls, and watchtowers with heavily armed soldiers, many connecting infrastructures were put – or remained – in place between East and West. Roads and highways, cables and radio, satellites and broadcast unions, international event agencies and publishers – these are just a few examples of the block-crossing infrastructure covered by the articles in this collection. In terms of the power of the two main actors of the Cold War, the US and the USSR, this period was indeed dominated by a bipolar structure. But, according to research focusing on third parties and the world history of the Cold War, this view is too narrow (Westad 2017; Reichherzer et al. 2018). There were always state, institutional, or infrastructural actors which disrupted the bipolar paradigm. The European Union, China, nuclear powers like France or Great Britain, and non-aligned states developed their own agendas. Infrastructures and communication, finally, prevented a policy of isolation.

It is to be hoped that this is a lesson the Cold War can teach current imperialistic aspirations: communication may not always be successful – indeed, the opposite is more often the case – but “the medium is the message,” as Marshall McLuhan (1994, Ch. 1) put it, and what could not be interrupted during the Cold War is unlikely to be interrupted because of current events either.

## 2 The formation of Europe

Although there is no shortage of politicians or other actors with fixed ideas about the institutional form, order, and shape of Europe, it is not actually easy to define the continent. Is it a geographic entity, limited to the north, west, and south by the sea? But where is the eastern border? The geographical definition of Europe already puzzled Herodotus in the fifth century BC. Does it run along an imaginary line drawn from the Black Sea to White Sea, as described by the geographer Abraham Ortelius in 1570? Or is the border further east than that, as Philippus Cluverius proposed some decades later, along the rivers Don, Volga, Kama, and Ob? Another idea was developed by Philip Johan Tabbert in the 1700s; he proposed

that the Ural Mountains form the eastern border, since different vegetation is found on either side of them (Schmale 2010: 10).

But Europe is more than an uncertain physical quantity. Parts of it define themselves as a political entity determined by the specific goals of nation-states or alliances such as the European Union. Given this uncertain situation, which has shifted through history, it is fruitful to understand Europe as a cultural and mythological construct, “associated with persons, artefacts, spaces and ideas,” which “remains flexible, changeable and widely applicable and can be adduced for a number of ends” (Schmale 2010: 3). Europe, since it has never existed as a state and in view of its uncertain boundaries, is a “cultural reference,” filled with “dreams and illusions” (Schmale 2010: 10).

On this basis, Europe is first and foremost an imaginary entity whose understanding and definition have changed over the centuries and are constantly evolving due to specific media. These media have different functions, as outlined by Friedrich Kittler (1990: 369): media are forms of storage, they transmit messages, and they process messages. The storage function, which defines and represents Europe, can best be illustrated with the example of maps. A European map from ancient times is fundamentally different from maps from the Middle Ages, modern times, or the Cold War. In addition, a map conveys a different idea of Europe from an ancient Greek myth or a manifesto of the European Union. Such maps are in many cases “immutable mobiles.” The latter term was coined by Bruno Latour (1990: 26) and refers to a specific set of media that provide an overview, are easily reproducible, and do not change when they are moved. They are particularly suitable for forming a worldview. Maps claim to present evidence and to prove the borders of a territory or continent, but are, in fact, a construction based on the political strategies of their creators. Second, media transmit messages. National and foreign broadcast services (ethering Europe-wide or not) were part of the strategic planning of Western and Eastern countries and aimed to influence the societies targeted. International broadcasting unions were meant to unite parts of Europe by conveying particular worldviews. Another example of cross-bloc transfer can be seen in the introduction of the French SECAM television standard in the Soviet sphere: this was not only of economic significance but also provided a shared infrastructure for television broadcasting. Third, media process messages, enable (or force) changes, and enable the circulation of European ideas. The processing of European ideas is carried out by human agents themselves, who travel back and forth between the blocs, pick up ideas, change or enrich them as well as themselves, and pass them on. Such actors include artists like writers or musicians supported by infrastructures or broadcasters. Infrastructures keep the connection between the blocs open, and broadcasting contributes to artists’ inspiration or conveys their ideas.

Within this media studies framework, Europe emerges as a space of communication made up of signs, codes, media, and arts. It is made up of signs and codes because according to the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Michel Foucault (1970), our languages are not true representations of our world and, in this case, Europe. Rather, they actively shape our understanding of this continent. Cold War Europe is a cultural and discursive fabrication whose form consists of contributions from broadcasters, artists, novelists, and filmmakers. For this reason, this collection first examines infrastructures such as wired radio in Poland after World War II (see the chapter by Walewska-Choptiany) or satellite technology for broadcasting unions (Wagner) because these infrastructures put the signs and codes into circulation. Second, it studies broadcasts from West to East (Radut-Gaghi) and East to West (Wegener Friis and Abraham) and focuses on listener reception in Poland (Podciborska and Marzurkiewicz) to show how the circulation of signs and codes formed different and conflicting versions of Europe. Third, further articles of this volume examine artists, such as bards (Nowicki) and writers (Bauer and Patrut), who crossed the hard border and reflect on their experiences.

“During the 1940s and early 1950s,” as Odd Arne Westad (2017: 99) states, “Europe and the rest of the world were being reconstructed in ways that would have been hard to recognize from the early part of the century.” These reconstructions were physical, arriving because of World War II, but also political, intellectual, and cultural. What makes Europe special is that it has undergone “a massive delinking and relinking of transport, energy, and communication infrastructure” (Misa and Schot 2005: 9) during the Cold War, so that long-lasting connections were cancelled and other links were newly established. The two blocs decided who to include and who to exclude, but there were always attempts to break through the hard border, which is the topic of this collection.

In this sense, Europe consists of circulating and transforming messages, which are provided, spread, and controlled by infrastructures, broadcasters, and other actors. The media occupies a special position here: they produce signs, work with codes, and may create a work of art in collaboration with other actors. Media are mediators that produce and, in so doing, inscribe themselves into conceptions, ideas, and representations of Europe.

In contrast to existing approaches to Cold War cultures, our focus diverges from European-Soviet interactions. Instead, we concentrate on intra-European dynamics, particularly exploring relationships between former neighboring states and territories, such as Austria-Hungary, which were deeply intertwined before World War II. Our book delineates two distinct strands within the realms of the cultural Cold War and Cold War cultures, despite their shared foundation in cultural studies. We aim to move beyond the notion of using culture as a guise for ideology while recognizing that exchanges and encounters inherently involve ideo-

logical elements. Rejecting deterministic viewpoints, we seek to reassess the influence of individual, social, and political factors across various levels of analysis.

### 3 Structure

This collection aims to analyze the production of European cultures and a common, transformative European identity through media that enabled communication across the Iron Curtain. Cultural techniques, such as images, writing, and languages, as well as media such as radio and books, formed various specifically European cultures in East and West, which interacted with one another despite the Iron Curtain.

There were various actors that sealed off the capitalist West from the communist East or attempted to bridge the two blocs; others acted as a third party, and still others aimed to break down ideological barriers. Some actors were influential politicians who, for example, decided to set up radio stations to broadcast a supplementary or propagandistic program across the Iron Curtain. Other actors were dissidents who attempted to describe the disadvantages on the other side of the border, while others living in the Eastern Bloc had to isolate themselves to listen to Western radio. There were many human and non-human actors mediating and communicating about a future Europe, each of them living in an ideological environment. However, in order to avoid relativization, it is important to remember that it was only governments from of the Eastern Bloc that used lethal force to deter their own citizens from crossing the border into the West.

To examine the construction of Europe and its differences in the media, the three sections of this collection provide interdisciplinary approaches to a) nationally limited and interconnected European media infrastructures, b) broadcasting between East and West, and c) the formation of a transnational European communication space. Scholars from media, culture, communication, history, and literature adopt an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the formation of the Cold War European communication space.

The chapters in the first part, “Infrastructures,” explore the use of media infrastructures and actor networks that enabled the transmission of information despite the hard border. The section is based on infrastructure research that has provided multifaceted evidence of continuities and newly built connections in Europe despite the ruptures of the two World Wars and the Cold War in the long twentieth century. Technology and infrastructure promote a “hidden integration of Europe” that supports and maintains “a sense of Europeanness” (Misa and Schot 2005). Cross-border connections enabled the circulation of ideas (Högselius

et al. 2015), and historical events and new technologies stimulated modernization and European integration (Badenoch and Fickers 2010).

The strong ties of the interwar and wartime periods among European countries were materialized and manifested in the form of tubes, wires, cables, and channels. Focusing on technology and infrastructure within European history brings forth continuities despite the three wars (WWI, WWII, and the CW) of the short twentieth century (Högselius et al. 2016). The connections across borders and the Iron Curtain have been analyzed as political connections between countries, but less often as infrastructural “hardware” connections between companies and organizations and “software” connections between people. Some European countries may be best framed in the times of the Cold War as a third party: sometimes, more clandestine cooperation with Russia (e.g., France-Russia for *Séquentiel couleur à mémoire SECAM* and satellite technology; see Wagner) took place; sometimes, detours from the direct connecting lines between the two superpowers (*le téléphone vert*; see Nanz) occurred. When transportation infrastructure, as a large-scale European network, accelerated in the second half of the nineteenth century and sound and image transmission, as well as telecommunication systems, emerged as a cross-border system in the first half of the twentieth century, the network had already been established in the interwar and wartime periods, and it endured the erection of the Iron Curtain, which was clearly a harsh disruption. Mobility and circulation were redirected and re-erected in two circles, Western Europe and Eastern Europe, but they never completely broke apart, and the hard border was never an absolute barrier in that it did not completely stop the flow of people, commodities, capital, and information. Skills and knowledge transfer, alongside the material exchange, went beyond the limits of the blocs. This can be considered an echo of “this time [around 1850], [in which] technology became a reference point for European superiority – both within and beyond Europe.” (Högselius et al. 2016: xii). During the Cold War, the US and the USSR negotiated the balance of power, and one of their places of trading and exchange was Europe. The newly built transatlantic ties to the US and the new transcontinental circulation of goods and ideas were part “of the European imagination” (Högselius et al. 2016: xiii). Alongside long-lasting connections, such as the interwar networks and the ongoing peripheral ties with Europe’s (former) colonies, in which Europe was globally networked, it was (in-)cooperation and competition that sometimes gave the idea for cross-Curtain inner-European cooperation. Communication systems, especially, are at the core of a Europe framed by global networks, such as regulatory institutions (e.g., the International Telecommunications Regulations, or ITRs) that affect how to design devices (see Walewska-Choptiany). Political and cultural ways of life and thinking shaped the concrete material outcome of these telecommunication systems. On a European level, means and meanings of information are interdependent.

Summing this up, infrastructure research asks, “[How] have material structures shaped practices and definitions of Europe?” (Badenoch and Fickers 2010: 7), and in this section, the authors focus on communication infrastructures; such as wired radio; crisis communication lines; satellite technology; and the Cold War imagination of the Arctic as a political and military playground, as depicted and discussed in films.

Joanna Walewska-Choptiany’s article, “Wired Radio Spreads its Tentacles over the Country. The Development of a Wired Radio System in Post-War Poland,” deals with wired radio as it was developed in Poland after World War II. Walewska-Choptiany departs from the dominant tendency to artificially separate the postwar history of Polish Radio from the broader research context of Cold War studies and offers a perspective informed by critical studies of media infrastructure that present radio as a result of the Cold War order and the struggle for on-air domination, without reducing it to a medium of state propaganda. The article offers a reconstruction of various ways in which different actors perceived wired radio. From the perspective of outside institutions such as Radio Free Europe, wired radio was a potential threat to the transborder and transnational character of the medium. For engineers working on the reconstruction of broadcasting infrastructure, wired radio was not an ideological choice but perceived as a technical necessity resulting from the destruction of Polish infrastructure. For general audiences, it was a propaganda medium – but also often their only source of information about the world. For the government, radio was a way to claim territory and bind together parts of the country that differed in terms of war damage, infrastructure, languages, and culture. Understanding the postwar history of Polish Radio and Radio Free Europe thus requires introducing the perspective of entangled media histories, as it involves not only transborder/transnational interrelations but also transmedial/inter-medial phenomena.

In his contribution, “European Crisis Communication. British and French Hotlines to Moscow as Means of Distribution”, Tobias Nanz investigates the hotline connections between Paris and Moscow and London and Moscow. The introduction of these communication channels was primarily of symbolic value, since France and Great Britain, nuclear powers and UN Security Council members, wanted to challenge the new and unique Washington-Moscow hotline for crisis communication. Nanz argues that the US aimed to protect its hotline to the Kremlin and found the plans of the two Western European countries disruptive. However, the USSR understood the value of cultivating France as a Western partner following De Gaulle’s *détente* policy and proposed the “*téléphone vert*” as a communication channel for a new European balance of power. Nanz examines the hotline messages conveyed between Moscow and Washington and Moscow and Paris during the Six-Day War of 1967 and shows how the Kremlin attempted to

negotiate with both partners, but ultimately made the White House its primary addressee as the crisis escalated.

Hedwig Wagner's article, "(Telecommunication) Satellites, Celestial and Terrestrial Concepts of Europe," examines satellite technology that developed in the context of competition between the US and the USSR from the first satellite launch to the first moon landing. On the one hand, Wagner examines the open question of Europe's position, of the circumstances and basic conditions for the development of its space, satellite, and media institutions. On the other hand, she investigates space euphoria in Russia and the USSR in prewar and interwar times. This raises fundamental questions about the national and the international, science and politics, the intelligentsia and the popular, and highlights their interconnectedness, simultaneity, and paradoxes. Satellite technology and the introduction of European broadcast unions were associated with the hope of a cross-bloc distribution of radio and television channels. In addition, the expansion of ESA (the European Space Agency) further fueled hopes for (peaceful) world communication that would overcome the Cold War and the division of Europe. Wagner argues that all this, combined with the cross-cutting technology of the period, the SECAM color television system, resulted in the development of a pan-European alliance that encompassed both Eastern and Western European states.

Although the Arctic is one of the central sites of conflict in the Cold War, it often appears empty and inhospitable in the cinematic imagination. Johannes Pause's article, "Stories of Rescue and Sacrifice. Cold War Cinema and the Arctic Imaginary," explores how the geostrategic role of the Arctic gradually seeped into cinematic fictions over the course of the Cold War. The narratives of rescue that had already been established in earlier centuries were countered by narratives of sacrifice in which the Arctic was increasingly portrayed as a political and military playground. These latter movies were less about discoveries and conquests than about tactical navigation in terrain that seemed particularly suitable for the hide-and-seek games of the Cold War. The two types of narrative are explored by means of analyses of paradigmatic films, such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951), *The Bedford Incident* (1965), *The Red Tent* (1969), and *Orions Belte* (1985).

The second section, on broadcasting, contributes to Cold War historiography by underscoring the significance of culture, particularly radio, as a dynamic arena for dialogue and exchange. It challenges the oversimplified notion of radio as merely a tool of state propaganda and passive audience reception. Instead, it explores the complexities of cultural diplomacy and interpersonal interactions, especially among exiles, within the realm of radio broadcasting.

As emphasized in the research literature, broadcasting can be examined as an infrastructure, which is "an actor-driven process with competing designs." The process of negotiating the different designs is "the way they [actors] construct Europe"

(Lommers 2012: 22). In Cold War Europe, several states, radio stations, and broadcasting unions strove to promote the advantages of their political and cultural systems across the Iron Curtain. Based on this, the contributions of this section examine radio stations from both blocs and, in a case study, how listeners from Poland reacted to Western broadcasters. The shift toward cultural and transnational perspectives in Cold War studies has expanded the scope of inquiry to encompass non-state actors and the everyday experiences of citizens. This approach seeks to comprehend how individuals' experiences during the Cold War influenced their beliefs and behaviors, according to Scott-Smith (2019: 267).

In the first chapter of this section, Luciana Radut-Gaghi compares two major radio broadcasting services during the Cold War: "Radio Free Europe and Radio France Internationale. The Tones of Democracy and the Voices of Exiles." Different in their *raison d'être*, these two international radio broadcasting services were nevertheless similar in the role they played in fostering the fabric of democracy in the Eastern societies. They also were relevant for the consolidation of intellectual exiles from the Eastern countries. Radut-Gaghi's work adopts a cultural-transfer perspective and is based on a methodology of documentary research and interviews. With different logics of transfer, the two international broadcasting services infused a European and democratic atmosphere directly into the languages of the countries to which they spoke during the decades of the Cold War.

Bringing the view of the Eastern bloc into play, Thomas Wegener Friis and Nils Abraham's article, "Creating an Alternative Public. Socialist Media and its Followers during the Cold War," focuses on the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) foreign radio broadcasts in the Cold War. From 1955, the East German state used its international radio station, Radio Berlin International, to spread socialist propaganda. It transmitted in several languages, mainly in Europe and, at least in theory, globally. Wegener Friis and Abraham present the efforts RBI directed at Denmark and Sweden, two of the GDR's Baltic-Sea neighbors. They analyze the broadcasts not only as an instrument of East German foreign policy in the Cold War but also as part of a transnational Communist media community. This socialist media bubble created counternarratives to those of Western mainstream media, for instance, on the notion of Europe. The article examines RBI's apparatus and central messages and discusses how challenging the concept of Europe was for the GDR and the other socialist countries.

Will Studdert's contribution, "Refined and Experienced Opponents? The BBC's German East Zone Programme in the Cold War," studies the impact of a Western radio station on East Germany. He explores the ways in which the BBC German Service's "German East Zone Programme" (1949–1975) attempted to reach listeners in the GDR. His article also looks at the means by which the needs and demands of the BBC's East German audience caused the BBC to modernize its output over the

course of the 1960s in order to appeal to younger demographics. It addresses the broadcaster-listener loop and the means by which listeners in the GDR asserted agency, using letterbox programs and musical request shows as an ethereal forum for cultural and social purposes. In doing so, it examines the Stasi's view of the BBC's activities and its coordinated attempts to subvert them. It also reappraises the broadcaster Austin Harrison and his *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* program in the light of the BBC's informal relationships with the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (responsible for clandestine anti-Communist propaganda) and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

Anna Mazurkiewicz and Anna Podciborska discuss, in their chapter “‘I wanted to know the truth.’ Listeners to Western Radio Broadcasts in Poland during the Cold War: A Pilot Study” the interests of those who listened to Western radio stations and their reasons for engaging in this prohibited practice based on interviews collected in the 2020–2022 period for a pilot study on listeners to Western radio stations during the Cold War. The participants were asked whether they listened to foreign broadcasts at all and, if they did, about their motivations, their listening circumstances, what specific content they found memorable, the potential consequences of listening to Western radio stations, and whether this new source of information influenced their worldview and the way they perceived the Soviet-controlled media. The preliminary findings of the project point to an array of potential research questions, clearly indicating new directions for additional, extended studies.

The last section, “Circulation of European Ideas,” focuses on the transformation of European ideas through zones of communication and contact between East and West. It is remarkable that “Europe” became a symbol of opposition for Central and Eastern European countries during the Cold War. Traces of *longue durée* can be discerned by the fact that “European unification” (Kurska 2021: 203, editor's translation) has been considered by the “East-bloc” to be a sign of anti-Soviet and reactionary aspirations, thus demonstrating that the concept of a “European Union” was conceived during the inter-war and wartime periods. It became a “European dream” (Kurska 2021: 204, editor's translation) of peace and freedom, a “forbidden dream” (Kurska 2021: 203, editor's translation). After 1989, it was perceived as barely “returning to the European family” (Kurska 2021: 204, editor's translation), to which belonging was always latent. Being part of “l'Europe spirituelle” (Mazowiecki, cit. a. Kurska 2021: 205) and giving birth to the “renaissance de l'Europe” (Mazowiecki, cit. a. Kurska 2021: 205) was a vision articulated in 1989 and nurtured during the Cold War. Milan Kundera declared, in 1983, in the midst of the Cold War, that Central European (CE) and Central Eastern European (CEE) countries are geographically located in the center, culturally in the West, and politically in the East. Now reframed as East-Central Europe, the “small nations” (Kundera 1993) are marked by the predominance of the cultural paradigm for their identity.

Their collective identity has been built upon culture and has its foundations in the memory of the past, despite being politically nonexistent during the Cold War. These community-nations, as opposed to the territory-nations of the West, had built strong ties between one another. In times of romanticism, these countries created the “cultural-nation” and the “nation-people,” as opposed to the nation-state.

Keeping this in mind, this section focuses on publications by dissidents, writers, and musicians, and it follows feedback loops between Western and Eastern radio broadcast services, for example, those that were created in crisis situations. Human actors and the technical media have processed content that touched on European division, as well as fueling the pursuit of unity and European values through East–West exchanges.

In their article, “A Romanian Renegade: The Case of Petru Dumitriu,” Matthias Bauer and Iulia-Karin Patrut discuss the shattered career of this Romanian writer. His case shows how the division of Europe during the Cold War caused traumatic experiences that were hard to convey across the Iron Curtain. When Dumitriu decided to leave his homeland and break with the Communist Party in Bucharest in 1959, he not only accepted the life of a *persona non grata* in the East. He also faced a harsh reception from many other exiles and ignorance in the West. The article recounts his life as a renegade, explores his dissident writings, and attempts to illustrate the difficulties of a disillusioned intellectual who was highly aware of his collaboration with the inverted idealism that he saw at work in both the oppressive regimes of the East and the decadent societies of the West.

In her article, “Fifteen Minutes with Jacek Kaczmarski’ on Radio Free Europe (1983–1995). A Voice Impossible to Scramble,” Joanna Nowicki focuses on the Polish songwriter Jacek Kaczmarski, who became an icon for Poles due to his rebellious songs. He saw himself, Nowicki argues, as a jester, echoing a traditional Polish intellectual tradition that involves the king’s jester, who is in a position to question the decisions and opinions of the authorities. In his songs, Kaczmarski treats complex moral attitudes and highlights people in crisis situations who were dissidents, collaborators, or courageous. Another important topic is the construction of a Polish identity with reference to Nazi and Soviet occupation during World War II and the subsequent oppression by the USSR during the Cold War. Kaczmarski’s rebellion forced him into exile, where he did not fall silent but proceeded to perform his songs on a Radio Free Europe show called “Fifteen Minutes with Jacek Kaczmarski.” Nowicki shows that he took the name of his broadcaster literally and wrote songs about the fall of Communism, the responsibility of collaborators, and the transition from a totalitarian system to a democratic state, knowing that even democracy is imperfect. Kaczmarski, Nowicki concludes, offered a “forbidden” history lesson in his Radio Free Europe broadcasts, sketching a vision of Polish national identity and imagining a common European future.

Joanna Szytko-Kwas's contribution, "A Window onto the World? On European Themes presented in the Polish *Przekrój* Weekly Magazine," engages with the fact that although Poland after 1945 was separated from Western Europe politically, culturally, and socially, the country observed the West even from the very beginnings of the developing postwar order. The fascination with Western politics was very difficult to pursue; nonetheless, the culture of Western Europe offered some respite, hope, and sense of community. A very influential periodical in Poland that provided a "window onto Western Europe" was the weekly magazine *Przekrój*, described by its founder as "the only such magazine for eight hundred million of Slavs" (see Szytko-Kwas's article in this collection). *Przekrój* was, as Szytko-Kwas argues, a unique magazine. With varying degrees of success, attempts were made to combine a certain political neutrality with the obligations all media had towards the socialist authorities and political institutions supervising the media in Poland. The weekly was a real window onto the world of the time, when more topics were forbidden than were acceptable for discussion; it made it possible for Poles to have a perspective on Europe – something that the authorities tried to keep under strict control. At the same time, European topics that went beyond literature and the arts were not featured regularly, and the editorial team made sure to keep things as positive as possible, avoiding a situation in which the publication might have been banned.

The collection concludes with "Media and the Catastrophic Events during the Cold War: Between Ideological Borders and Solidarity," by Camelia Beciu and Dana Popescu-Jourdy. The authors examine two crisis events, namely the 1977 Romanian earthquake and the 1986 nuclear meltdown in Chernobyl, and discuss how communication between West and East was blocked and furthered by ideology and solidarity respectively. Beciu and Popescu-Jourdy argue that in crisis situations, mass media like radio broadcasting services or newspapers reconfigured their communication practices on the basis of ideological borders and humanitarian action. It is remarkable that, particularly during the initial period after both disasters, when many circumstances were unclear, Western radio stations like Radio Free Europe took over the function of the Romanian state broadcaster, which initially either remained completely silent or failed to tell the whole story. Censorship and the fact that the authorities were overwhelmed left an information vacuum which was filled by Radio Free Europe in an act of solidarity. This reversed the othering process that marked people on the other side of the Iron Curtain as enemy – the acts of solidarity transformed the other-enemy into the other-similar.

The interdisciplinary contributions to this volume deal with the history of European ideas and the idea of European unification, which bear all the marks of the *longue durée*. They illuminate the role of Europe in the Cold War and present

it in detail as a history – however fragile – of connections, rather than a history of bipolar separation. They make it clear that Europe does not consist of a single culture, but of many different and mutually influencing cultures. Since “[c]ulture and conflict inevitable go hand in hand” (Culture & Conflict), as mentioned in the description of the Culture & Conflict book series, it is not surprising that Europe has been and continues to be challenged by conflicts, wars, and processes of negotiating its own identity. Nevertheless, conflicts are a driving force for settlement and agreements. “The cultural processing of disruptions constitutes a major challenge for all self-descriptions of societ[ies],” (Koch and Nanz 2018: 3) which, as Niklas Luhmann (1984: 60) put it, “guide self-observation” of societies. How do people reflect on their society? In Europe, these self-descriptions are in a constant exchange, which, as our contributions show, could not be stopped by a hard border. The Cold War was a disruptive period for Europe (and the world), which partly restricted cultural exchange, but also created new connections. They triggered transformation processes, the cultural self-reflection of European societies and the idea of a new Europe.

This European rapprochement is not only relevant when it comes to subject-level knowledge about the Cold War; it should also inform work in the European Research Area today. In the research network that formed the basis for this volume, researchers from Western European countries and Central European countries worked together, discussing the post-socialist perspective with recent EU orientations. The editors would like to thank their contributors and Annika Jesgulke for her editorial support.

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## I Infrastructure



Joanna Walewska-Choptiany

# Wired Radio Spreads its Tentacles over the Country

The Development of a Wired Radio System in Post-War Poland

## 1 Introduction

In the report “‘Wired Radio’ in The Satellite Nations,”<sup>1</sup> which was prepared for the investigative department of Radio Free Europe (RFE) in 1954, there are signs of a palpable fear that radio, which had the role of an uncontrollable, intangible, transborder medium, would shortly become merely a tool in the hands of Eastern European governments.<sup>2</sup> The report resulted from a long-term gathering of information from various informants, mostly dissidents who had escaped from countries like the People’s Republic of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. The interviews conducted at the beginning of the 1950s gave a first-hand account of the reality of listening to the radio over loudspeakers and wired radio systems, which were installed in public places, industrial plants, institutions, and the homes of individuals. RFE took a marked interest in this problem, as it was worried that “Western broadcasts will possibly have to meet a serious challenge from the East during the next two or three years, namely the Soviet attempt to control radio audiences in the Communist-dominated countries using the wired radio system.”<sup>3</sup> There was agreement among the employees of RFE who were working on the problem of wired radio development that it might be a threat to radio stations like RFE, Voice of America, Radio Madrid, and others, listening to which was prohibited in the Soviet bloc. They were seriously concerned, even though officials in those countries were at the same time interfering with wireless broadcasting by openly using radio jammers. In fact, in the 1950s, the combined

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1 “Wired Radio in The Satellite Nations,” 14 January 1954. HU OSA 300-1-2-42692. It seems that RFE’s employees perceived the development of wire-based radios as a means of controlling the content that penetrated the Iron Curtain on air. However, even in the USSR, where in the early 1960s there were 31 million loudspeakers in use, the production of normal radio receivers was never stopped; instead, as in Poland, it was decided to shorten their reception range and jamming operations were carried out. See Mikkonen 2010.

2 The title alludes to the Radio Free Europe report entitled “Wired Radio Spreads Octopus Tentacles over Gliwice,” 27 October 1954. HU OSA 300-1-2-51714; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

3 “Wired Radio in The Satellite Nations,” 14 January 1954. HU OSA 300-1-2-42692.

power of all the jamming stations in Poland exceeded that of all the transmitters; they became the main tool for obstructing reception, which indirectly indicated that wired radio was not treated as a means to stop illegal listening to foreign radio. The discussion regarding the development of wired radio systems in the Soviet bloc was based on the lack of exact data regarding the extent of this operation and “whether or not it [was] intended to eliminate the regular and free radio reception entirely.”<sup>4</sup>

Although in the period between 1945 and 1966 the wired radio system in Poland was one of the most developed in Europe and was thus one of the primary ways of listening to the radio for hundreds of thousands of people, it is seriously underrepresented in the literature on radio history. Even though the development of wired radio was a result of the Cold War order and the struggle for on-air domination, books analyzing Cold War broadcasting do not deal with this topic but rather focus on the problem of the jamming of Western radio stations by the USSR and countries belonging to the Eastern bloc. This also applies to Polish research, in which there is a tendency to artificially separate the post-war history of Polish Radio from the broader research context of Cold War studies. Researchers of the history of radio in Poland present this phenomenon in an extremely schematic and stereotypical way because they limit its functions to the role of propaganda. The main analytical effort is focused on content analysis, a characteristic feature of research on radio in Eastern Europe.

Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski write that until recently, research on media culture has tended to prioritize studying the process of production and consumption of content, decoding and encoding, and textual interpretations; meanwhile it has been argued that “media infrastructures are material forms as well as discursive constructions” (Parks and Starosielski 2015: 5). As was convincingly shown by Dana Mustata with television as an example, in most cases, any research on mass media in Soviet-bloc countries immediately shifts the focus from technology and users’ practices to content analysis.<sup>5</sup> I agree with Mustata when she argues that “studies on television in Eastern Europe so far have been

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<sup>4</sup> “Wired Radio in The Satellite Nations,” 14 January 1954. HU OSA 300-1-2-42692.

<sup>5</sup> As an example of this kind of approach, we can point out two books published by the Institute of National Remembrance [Instytut Pamięci Narodowej]: the first of them, written by Paweł Szulc, was published in 2012 and is entitled “Zniewolony eter. Polskie Radio Szczecin w latach 1945–1989” [The Captive Ether. Polish Radio Szczecin, 1945–1989], while the second publication, by Marek Rzepa, “Propaganda Radiowa na Pomorzu i Kujawach” [Radio propaganda in Pomerania and the Kujawy region], was published in 2016. The titles of both books indicate that the researchers adopted a political perspective and focused mainly on the analysis of the broadcast content and on the analysis of documents proving that the Polish United Workers’ Party [Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR] controlled Polish Radio.

consistent in understanding television through notions of political control that have reiterated the East–West opposition of the Cold War. Whether political control has been acknowledged, denied, or complicated, a television in this European geopolitical space has been limited to conceptual structures that have prioritized politics at the expense of attention to the medium itself,” while “limiting television to political understandings loses sight of the very object of study: the medium of television” (Mustata 2015: 47). It seems that radio studies have fallen victim to the same reductionist approach, in which political and historical factors have been taken as *a priori* determinants for conceptualizing the medium.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, historical works on post-war radio usually contain basic facts about the radio stations in question and a detailed catalogue of topics covered on the air for propaganda purposes. This type of research strategy is disappointing because the propaganda policy for the press and radio was determined in a top-down manner, therefore it is sometimes difficult to discern the specifics of a particular medium from such analyses.

Thus, the present article is strongly influenced by critical studies of media infrastructure and the multi-dimensional analysis of media technologies, particularly drawing from the work of Fickers and Griset (2019: 4–5). They argue that to conceptualize and analyze information technologies “in their full material, institutional, economic, and discursive complexity,” one must consider their material, economic, and institutional dimensions, as well as the symbolic level. Accordingly, the article not only examines official propaganda documents but also delves into internal documents of Polish Radio. These include minutes revealing the extent of war damage and unsuccessful attempts to reestablish trade relations with Western countries, along with reports from radio station inspections highlighting their poor technical quality. The thorough analysis of these documents reveals a much more complex picture of the wired radio phenomena. For the engineers working on the reconstruction of broadcasting by Polish Radio, the wired radio was not an ideological choice but was perceived as a technical necessity resulting from the post-war situation in which Poland found itself. For the audience, it was a propaganda medium and often their only source of information about the world. Finally, for the government, radio was a way to claim territory and bind to-

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<sup>6</sup> This kind of approach that primarily focuses on the role of the station in historical events, the institutional history, and the responses of Communist states, was also characteristic for studies of RFE. The examples of such books include Mickelson 1983, Johnson and Parta 2010, Puddington 2000 and Johnson 2010. The latest literature, however, shows that authors are aware of the limitations of this approach and are trying to capture the history of RFE to emphasize its global nature and international reach. See Bischof and Jurgens 2015 and Badenoch, Fickers, Henrich-Franke 2013.

gether parts of the country that differed in terms of war damage, infrastructure, languages, and culture.

To outline these different, overlapping scales, I would like to look at radio in post-war Poland through the prism of its relationship with space. The category of space has various meanings: space in the geopolitical sense, determined by the changing borders of states; space as a synonym for the territory of the state, along with the infrastructure that enables free movement or makes it completely impossible; and finally, space as soundscape, the shaping of which is a tool for exercising power.

When referring to borders, I mean both the state borders, which changed after the war, and the borders within the state. Beginning in January 1944, when Soviet troops crossed the former Polish-Soviet border, a military front was pushing the occupying troops to the west. The place of the occupation administration was taken by new institutions that answered to the Polish Committee of National Liberation, which was created by Communists supported by the Soviet Union (Kersten 1990). Internal borders were marked both by the post-war destruction and the borders of the earlier partitions, which did not exist formally but were still visible due to the much less developed infrastructure – for instance, a significantly lower level of electrification – outside the former Prussian Partition. The destruction of Warsaw caused the center of the radio engineering industry to move to Lower Silesia, on the country's periphery (Birdsall and Walewska-Choptiany 2019). From the perspective of studies on media infrastructure, wired radio in Poland is a fascinating case since it is part of a vast project to rebuild a ruined radio broadcasting system. Borders can involve not only geography but also borders or border crossings between different media. Transborder approaches can identify intersections and relations between different media at any given point in time (Cronqvist and Hilgert 2017: 132–133). The wired radio network was one of the first communication networks after the war because the roads and the railway were damaged. Therefore, the process of distributing radio, which took place parallel to the electrification process, was, in a way, a means of binding the substance of the new territory of the state. The pre-war borders no longer existed, but the new ones on the Oder-Neisse line had not yet been established. In this respect, I would like to take a closer look at the technical reports from the inspections of radio stations located all over the country, including those on the periphery. Finally, I would like to look at the role that wired radio played in regaining the “Polishness” or “homeliness” of the public space, where the use of the Polish language was strictly forbidden during the five years of occupation, and its influence on the shaping of the modern urban soundscape.

Documents such as the report by RFE mentioned above on the development of the wired radio network in the Eastern bloc are interesting because they allow

us to look at these local networks as a transnational problem and Polish Radio as one of the Cold War actors that fought for a place in the international broadcasting space. Looking at radio as a transborder medium from an entangled media histories perspective (Cronqvist and Hilgert 2017: 130–131)<sup>7</sup> requires “developing and maintaining a view of a radio as a rich ecology entwined on multiple scales, through which several relationships can be traced” (Badenoch and Föllmer 2016: 12). The post-war history of Polish Radio and Radio Free Europe requires introducing the perspective of entangled media histories, as it involves not only transborder/transnational interrelations but also transmedial/intermedial phenomena if the whole process of media communication is to be considered.

## 2 Ruins and rubble

The wired radio system consisted of a network of “radio-knots” spread across the country. A “radio-knot” [radiowęzeł] was a form of relay station that consisted of a radio set or repeater (a device which receives and retransmits the signal); it might be connected to the central radio station by telephone lines, or it could receive a signal via the radio set. Then, the signal from the radio set was retransmitted by wires which connected it with loudspeakers installed in houses or with street megaphones (Fig. 1).

Wired radio has become a symbol of Stalinist propaganda in Poland for two reasons. On the one hand, this is because it was treated as a Soviet inheritance: the technologies were imposed by the USSR. In such a perspective, adopting wired radio would be a gesture of mimicry made by the colonized state towards its colonizer. However, it should also be taken into account that it was a technology detested by the Poles, because the Nazi occupation authorities had also used street megaphones, contemptuously called “szczekaczki” [barkers], “spittoon bowls,” “pots,” or “buckets.” The system was developed to provide – in Warsaw, for instance – information to the Polish population during World War II, about the occupation authority’s decrees, military propaganda information, and announcements of mass executions. On the other hand, wired radio became a symbol of censorship and the restriction of access to information due to the technology used in it, which

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7 Marie Cronqvist and Christoph Hilgert point out the need to move away from national narratives about media histories, and from narratives that focus on only one medium, and thus introduce the concept of entangled media histories to draw attention to a weakness in the methodology of historical research.



**Fig. 1:** Wired radio operator and her control room in Nadarzyn, Polish Press Agency.

allowed you to listen to only one program and in some cases made it impossible to turn off the loudspeaker.

Polish Radio was reinstated in Lublin in 1944 under the auspices of the USSR. The inaugural broadcast, delivered through loudspeakers positioned within the radio station building, featured the text of the proclamation by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PCNL, *Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*) (Fornal 1997: 97–100; Kersten 1990). Despite the evident political nature of the newly established radio station (Billig 1945b), it quickly attracted personnel from the pre-war Polish Radio. The station was set up to create an impression of institutional continuity in the national broadcasting company, which had been operational until the end of September 1939 (Nadzin 1945: 1)

Polish culture of the Stalinist period saw a strict unification of content and the implementation of a top-down cultural policy. However, as Antonina Kłoskowska emphasizes, it was also a period of combating illiteracy, developing the network of libraries and community centers, and increasing the circulation of books and mass media recipients (Kłoskowska 1964: 420–427). The era characterized by representatives of the intelligentsia as a time of terror presented an opportunity for social advancement for many individuals. The subsequent political relaxation after 1956 was an endeavor to restore elite culture. The radio and its popularization were integral to the modernization process. Despite not supporting the new government, numerous radio operators and engineers chose to work for Polish Radio after the war. Their motivation stemmed from the pre-war leftist ethos that guided them, and they perceived the reconstruction of the devastated radio station as their mission (Zysiak 2016: 40).

However, the problem was that while before the war, Poland had eleven broadcasting stations, including a 120 kW radio station in Raszyn whose power

was planned to be increased to 600 kW in 1939. After the war, all transmitters had been destroyed, so it was necessary to look for makeshift solutions. It is also challenging to estimate the scale of the damage to receiving equipment. Still, in a later document concerning the development of wired radio, probably dating from 1947, the number of registered radio receivers was estimated at fifty thousand, while the population level was approximately twenty-four million, which means one radio receiver per forty-eight people.<sup>8</sup> During the first months of 1945, both Soviet soldiers and the employees of Polish Radio were heavily engaged in the process of looting any existing radio technology.<sup>9</sup> This was conducted by Special Operational Groups of Polish Radio on a massive scale, and it affected not only the people who owned individual radio receivers but also those who were involved in the radio engineering business before the war and had thus been able to preserve some radio equipment or parts.<sup>10</sup> Searching for the preserved radio equipment was extremely tedious and often even dangerous. Destroyed railway tracks, mined roads, lack of fuel, and means of transportation, and often even the absence of suitable footwear, made this journey an arduous undertaking, akin to detective work.

For the engineers employed by Polish Radio, it was clear that the goal of making radio accessible to everybody was not achievable through individual valve receivers or even crystal receivers (Miszczak 1971: 242–243). During the discussions concerning the further development of radio broadcasting in Poland, Wilhelm Billig, who spent the war in the Soviet Union, and other engineers came up with the idea of wired radio as a solution to the severe shortage of broadcasting equipment and radio sets. However, his intention was not to emulate the solutions applied in the USSR.

Despite similarities, the social and economic background of the development of wired radio in pre-war Russia was substantially different than in Poland. Russia had a similar or even greater number of broadcasting stations than leading Western countries, but its huge territory entailed limited access to radio. In the 1930s, Moscow was “radiofied” to only 30%, and in rural areas, this percentage was even lower, approximately 20%. “Wire was cheap and durable, and as of the late 1920s, it was the only realistic means of turning radio into a ‘mass’ phenomenon; it also, of course, allowed greater control of the content” (Lovell 2015: 33–34).

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8 “Plany Rozwoju Przemysłu Radiotechnicznego,” ADA 596/11.

9 See for example: “Sprawozdanie Inspektora Szmidta Stefana z powtórnie przeprowadzonej wizytacji Komisji Likwidacyjnej Wytwórni Radiosprzętu przy Rozgłośni P.R. w Katowicach w czasie 30.VI-15.V. 1947,” ADA 4/3/1.

10 See ADA 436/99–100.

Following the lack of a possibility of purchasing the required minimum number of radio-set parts in Britain, where factories had also suffered during the war, it transpired that “Swedish receivers [i.e., Aga Baltic or Radiola] are the most modern ones on the European continent [. . .] and Sweden is now our only window to the world” (“Straty wojenne” 1945: 1). There was a unanimous agreement among technicians at Polish Radio regarding the overarching goal, both socially and culturally, to produce the best possible radio receiver. At a post-war radio broadcasting development conference, Stefan Manczarski, a pioneering figure in radio engineering and the designer of the first Polish radio set, declared the attainability of satisfactory reception for local radio stations. However, he underscored the critical need to assemble and manufacture high-quality receivers for expanding the wired radio network and providing access to foreign stations.

Manczarski emphasized that, considering the post-war conditions, the use of high-class receivers was indispensable. Notably, there was a noticeable societal inclination towards a desire for improved receivers.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Heller, the technical director of Polish Radio, highlighted that, aside from the reasons discussed earlier in the meeting, avoiding lower-standard apparatuses was financially prudent. Despite their lower market value, the production of such devices remained relatively expensive. From a commercial standpoint, Heller argued that the production of higher-grade receivers would be much more profitable (Dziurok and Musiał 2012: 108–117). Preserved meeting minutes indicate that engineers at Polish Radio held progressive views on the development of radio broadcasting and would have readily embraced Western technological solutions if they had been accessible.

Nevertheless, during numerous technical meetings addressing the development of a broadcasting infrastructure in Poland, the expansion of wired radio emerged as one of the most-discussed subjects. Wilhelm Billig, who had spent his war years in Moscow, advocated for a wired radio system on numerous occasions. However, Billig was not only considering the Russian system; he also, for example, mentioned the four-channel system for broadcasting information, Muzak, in the Netherlands, and the British experience with relay wireless, or “wired wireless” as it was called by Eckersley, the leading advocate for developing such a system (Johns 2011: 52–69). Billig considered the Dutch system a very good solution, as it allowed listeners to switch between channels, but at the same time, it was too expensive to be introduced in Poland. He also mentioned the wired radio system developed in Britain, arguing that its current development was evidence that Polish Radio was moving in the right direction. The British example was

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11 “Protokół z konferencji odbytej dnia 15 czerwca 1945 roku w Warszawie przez Naczelnego Dyrektora Polskiego Radia Wilhelma Billiga z Dyrektorem Zarządu Przedsiębiorstw Radiotechnicznych Władysławem Hellerem,” APWK, 596/1: 114–116.

also a source of inspiration for Stalin, who believed that the wired network's resilience might play a strategic role if broadcasting stations were to be bombed. For that reason, he observed the development of "wired wireless" in Great Britain closely.<sup>12</sup>

### 3 Besieged fortress syndrome

After the war, Poland suffered from a "besieged fortress syndrome," which also affected employees of Polish Radio. On the one hand, there was joy at the end of the war and pride that Poland was among the victors; on the other hand, there was a great sense of uncertainty about the shape of Poland's borders, as the fate of the "Regained Territories" was still uncertain. Also, for some people, the seizure of power in the shadow of Soviet troops meant another occupation (Zaremba 2012).

The feeling of pride in winning the war was mixed with hatred towards the Germans and a sense of historical injustice in how the Allies had dealt with Poland. If it is possible to identify the moment when the Iron Curtain fell over Poland, it was undoubtedly the introduction of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Control (CoCom) technological embargo in 1949. This embargo completely thwarted the plans of Polish Radio engineers for Polish radio to reestablish itself on the air to the same extent as before the war. The introduction of the embargo is what ultimately shattered hopes for rebuilding trade contacts with Western countries, but the cooling of these relations can already be seen several months before its introduction. Although the Marconi Company was ready to fill the gap in the Polish radio engineering market, in May 1949 its aspirations were ended by the Ministry of Supply, which was already anticipating the suspension of Western economic cooperation with countries under the influence of the USSR.<sup>13</sup>

Polish Radio felt it would soon be left behind in the transnational race – in the European space – to rebuild national radio networks. Interference from Radio Prague, whose program was being retransmitted close to the border, and various German stations, as radio transmitters were rebuilt in all four occupation zones almost immediately after the end of the war, posed a problem (Bijemy na

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<sup>12</sup> On Stalin's attitude towards wired networks, see Lovell 2015: 41, and on listening to the radio during air raids, Lovell 2015:114.

<sup>13</sup> See Newlands, "Confidential summary of report on visit to Warsaw, October 1948; Report on visit to Warsaw from 6<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> October 1948," MS Marconi 605.

alarm! 1946: 1–2). In June 1945, Radio Stuttgart began broadcasting on the same wavelength as the transmitter in Raszyn, jamming the content broadcast by the Polish Radio station in Warsaw.<sup>14</sup>

This situation illustrates the state of mind of the Polish Radio board of directors at the time, who demanded that the Stuttgart station launched by the Allies should cease broadcasting on this wavelength, even though it was the one assigned to it by the International Radio Union before the war (thus, Raszyn was broadcasting as pirate radio). They justified their claim by showing that the Polish Radio station in Raszyn had been the victim of an attack, as a result of which the technical condition of the broadcasting equipment had deteriorated to such an extent that the station could no longer broadcast on the pre-war frequency allocated to it by the International Radio Union.<sup>15</sup>

Undeniably, officials were very much concerned about the hidden public of Western broadcasting stations, but RFE's concerns over the possibility of free radio reception in Eastern Europe being eliminated by the employment of wired radio are not confirmed by primary sources.

The intention behind the introduction of wired radio was not to restrict access to foreign stations or limit content choices, as is often assumed. Instead, the primary goal was to disseminate radio among the masses. Embracing the wired radio model and developing it should not have been immediately interpreted as an unequivocal endorsement of the totalitarian state model. Radio technicians were quite measured in their assessment of Polish Radio's capabilities and recognized the makeshift nature of the adopted wired radio model. The implementation of the wired radio system was not the objective but rather a consequence of the desire to broaden radio coverage, particularly in rural and underindustrialized areas, given the constraints of very limited resources.

Starting from 1947, especially during the pre-election period, new authorities were trying to identify public enemies, also among citizens who, at first glance, seemed innocent. In factories and other national workplaces, designated persons were employed whose primary role was to evaluate the work of individual employees and their political outlook. In this period of political alertness, Polish Radio was also looking more closely into the minds and souls of the people responsible for managing radio centers. In March 1948, Waclaw Paroll, director of Polish Radio in Gdańsk, issued a memo about illegal listening to the BBC and Voice of America at many sites of collective listening (spaces like youth clubs,

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14 "Sprawozdanie z odbytej inspekcji w czasie od 26.X do 8.XI.1945 r. na terenie Dyrekcji Okręgowej Polskiego Radia we Wrocławiu," ADA 85/18/1.

15 For documents regarding the Stuttgart radio station, see ADA 85/11/1.

community centers, or canteens equipped with radio receivers), especially those in rural Poland.<sup>16</sup> As such criminal practices became widespread, Paroll asked the police to intervene. In addition to this, he forced the local representatives of Peasant Self-Help to put an end to them. They were responsible for the proper operation of local radio stations and sites of collective listening, and for appointing reliable people as managers. Very similar memos were probably issued by local management throughout the country. Changes in the positions of radio broadcasting managers, who were subject to stricter selection and control for political reasons, had not eliminated the phenomenon of listening to foreign stations, especially in small towns and villages that had not yet been connected to wired radio stations. The weak point of the audience-control system was the places of collective listening, where at least theoretically, anyone could enter and tune the receiver to any radio station. Because of that, the following year, the Polish United Workers' Party decided that Polish Radio should abolish all places of collective listening in common rooms of libraries, cultural centers, or Peasant Self-Help headquarters. Of course, this reduced clandestine and illegal listening to the BBC and Voice of America, but it also resulted in a significant decrease in radio subscribers in villages and small towns.

Later, discussing – but not listening to – Western programs was prosecuted by the secret police as an act of political sabotage, “whispered propaganda,” and counterrevolutionary activity. In his book, Paweł Machcewicz (2007: 81) identified more than twenty cases of people with different social backgrounds listening to illegal broadcasts and being sentenced to six to twenty-four months of detention in labor camps. Most cases are from the 1950s, so they are evidence of the inefficacy of the jamming operations carried out by the Communist regime.

Paradoxically, the cases mentioned of prosecuting listeners of the BBC, Voice of America, or RFE demonstrate that the origins of wired radio in Poland were not strictly political. Ultimately, radio sets that enabled listening to foreign broadcasts were available on the market until the end of 1956 by Polish Radio, and the government was forced to conduct jamming operations. This indicates that wired radio did not evolve into a tool significantly limiting access to foreign radio stations. When examining the development of wired radio, it's crucial to acknowledge the highly dynamic political situation, where prospects were subject to change over time. However, decisions regarding the future structure of broadcasting and receiving infrastructure were primarily grounded in technical and engineering principles. “The pursuit of know-how becomes the main driving motor” (Mustata 2015: 48) behind the development of broadcasting infrastructure

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16 Waclaw Paroll, “Zarządzenie nr. 25/48, Gdańsk 22 marca 1948,” ADA 88/1/5–6/.

in Poland, empowering professionals who “took charge of the medium.”<sup>17</sup> As this paper will illustrate later, it became an opportunity to undermine political control, especially for lower-level officials.

## 4 Development of “radio-knots”

In 1944 Polish Radio in Lublin had to broadcast its programs and announcements using street loudspeakers out of necessity. Still, the first “radio-knot” was only built on February 12, 1945, in Łowicz, but soon there were as many as approximately three hundred of such networks. Wired radio began to develop on a mass scale at the turn of March and April 1945, after the staff of Polish Radio moved to Koszykowa Street and then to Targowa Street in Praga. Praga is a district of Warsaw on the east bank of the Vistula River, which, in comparison to the west bank, was not so heavily destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising and its aftermath. At the end of June, Polish Radio made the first plans for establishing a wired radio system on this side of the city, with the building on Targowa Street serving as a relay station for the whole neighborhood.

Information obtained by Polish Radio through contacts with political and social organizations, Peasant Self-Help, teachers, and county and municipal national councils indicates that only material obstacles hindered radio network development in the field. The most challenging aspect of extending wired radio networks was providing rural areas with collective radio equipment like tube radio, which allows relaying broadcasts to loudspeakers.

Transmission cables were usually attached to the poles of existing electricity wires (Fig. 2). The loudspeaker was attached to an iron hook on the wall, and if the wire was long enough, or if an extra wire was purchased, it could be carried into other rooms or into the courtyard.<sup>18</sup> The small loudspeaker was popularly called a “kołchożnik,” and it enabled signal reception and the regulation of volume but prevented complete muting. The wired radio sets were not plugged into the mains but only into a special socket.

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<sup>17</sup> This quote refers to the development of television in Romania, but I use it with reference to Polish Radio to point out that processes of development of broadcasting technologies were similar in the Eastern bloc countries.

<sup>18</sup> “Wired Radio Loudspeakers Are in Practically Every House in Szentgotthard/Zsida,” 15 April 1954. HU OSA 300-1-2-45642; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

Some of the “radio-knots” could create their own programs, in which case they were also equipped with a microphone and gramophone. Professional microphones were not available, but on request, the brigade could make a makeshift microphone on the spot using the loudspeaker. With the help of a microphone constructed in this way, the manager or accountant of state agricultural farms could also broadcast news or local ordinances.<sup>19</sup> In addition, loudspeakers connected by a single line could be used like a telephone. In many memoirs, people who owned a wired radio remember hearing voices from another house through a loudspeaker instead of broadcasts (Sokołowska 2022). This type of memoir appears also in an interview with a wire radio fitter conducted by an employee of Radio Free Europe, which places it in a purely political context of “eavesdropping” and reporting people to the security forces:

The microphone can also be set up at the explicit request of the manager so that he can eavesdrop on the workers. It happens that the families of farmers or workers forget to turn off their loudspeakers in the evening, and that allows the PGR manager to intercept their most intimate nighttime talks. [He knew one of such a case]; however, it should be assumed that there are more such incidents, especially when the managers or officials of a given PGR are in the services of the Security Office (Bezpieka).<sup>20</sup>

Radio as a nationalized institution represented the achievements of the Communist state and its ability to rebuild infrastructure despite technical obstacles, the scarcity of materials, and lack of help from the outside. In January 1947, in a letter addressed to the employees of Polish Radio on the occasion of the New Year, Wilhelm Billig wrote that the plan for developing the radio had been completed and met its goals by approximately 200%.<sup>21</sup> In a report describing the situation in the country, written by an anonymous author for the Polish government in exile, wired radio is mentioned in many contexts and is described as an essential chain of Communist government propaganda.

From dawn to dusk, Warsaw Radio is pounding out propaganda – every radio play, every lecture, every speech, every concert, or message breathes with Communism or Russianism. To the point of boredom. It has reached the point that part of society, lacking the nerves to withstand this [ . . . ] (Mysiakowska-Muszyńska and Muszyński 2015: 147–148).

This report describes acts of vandalism against loudspeakers, and the sense of a loss of enthusiasm and confidence in the new medium as it became too pervasive.

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<sup>19</sup> “Wired Radio,” 16 May 1956. HU OSA 300-1-2-71091.

<sup>20</sup> “Wired Radio,” 16 May 1956. HU OSA 300-1-2-71091.

<sup>21</sup> “Zarządzenie Nr. 10/47, Warszawa, dnia 22 stycznia 1947 roku,” ADA, 550/2/1.



**Fig. 2:** Development of the wired radio network in a rural area, Polish Press Agency.

This is interesting because, in most cases, the narratives about wired radio are binary. They record only the situations of total engagement with or total rejection of the image of reality created by the new medium. I would like to focus on in-between cases because experience with audience research leads us to assume that the situation was far more nuanced and complex. The challenge we face when examining phenomena like wired radio is that we rely solely on official data, which is often unreliable. Instead, I would prefer to examine official technical field reports created by Polish Radio employees. These reports unveil a significant range of erratic or widespread behaviors among wired radio users, documenting instances of malfunctioning technology. The benefit of delving into these reports lies in their extensive coverage across the entire country, standardized formats, and practical purpose. Consequently, they provide us with a comprehensive understanding of wired radio and its users.

On one hand, all reports of this nature can be viewed merely as sources of technical information and anecdotes. Nevertheless, on the other hand, they should be regarded as captivating ethnographic sources. Despite being crafted for a specific administrative purpose, their language, and the breadth of information they present provide an opportunity for reflection on the everyday practices of radio listeners. The primary objective of the inspections conducted by technicians on “radio knots” was to assess the technical condition of the equipment or, in some instances, rectify technical malfunctions. Furthermore, these inspections served as an opportunity to verify whether the managerial practices aligned with the policies of Polish Radio. Technical challenges were a daily occurrence.

In the town of Otwock, the “radio central” was closed on Saturday (May 1947) due to radio damage, prompting its transportation to Warsaw for repairs.<sup>22</sup> In Mszczonów, the manager of the radio central divided listeners into two groups to ensure decent reception. One half of the community tuned in for seven hours from 7 a.m., while the other half did so in the evening.<sup>23</sup> Despite the imperfect operation of the radio central, the technical skills of the manager were highly regarded. However, he expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the technical direction of Polish Radio had neglected his requests for the essential equipment needed for radio network maintenance. Despite the imperfect operation of the radio central, the technical skills of the manager were highly regarded. However, he expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the technical direction of Polish Radio had neglected his requests for the essential equipment needed for radio network maintenance.<sup>24</sup> It’s worth noting that during the Communist era, authorities thoroughly investigated technical faults, as not all of them were considered innocuous. Some instances of technical malfunctions were interpreted as deliberate acts of sabotage and anti-government activities. For example, in Elbląg, during the official Labor Day celebrations on May 1, 1947, the equipment intended for transmission was placed in a car with a leaky roof and got damaged by rain. The transmission was abruptly halted at the most crucial moment of the ceremony and could not be resumed. The employees were accused of sabotage by the local security bureau, leading to subsequent interrogations.<sup>25</sup>

Especially in the case of wired radio, which was one of the government’s flagship projects, authorities endeavored to thoroughly investigate difficulties that arose. For instance, at the radio station in Wierzbnik-Starachowice, acts of sabotage

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22 “Raport z inspekcji poszczególnych Radiowęzłów, Warszawa 13 maja 1947 r.,” ADA 1/2/1/.

23 “Protokół z inspekcji Dyrekcji Okręgowej Polskiego Radia we Wrocławiu dokonanej przez Inspektora PR. ob. Kuszakiewicza Waclawa w dniach 11.IX-10.X. 1947,” ADA 1/2/1.

24 “Raport z inspekcji poszczególnych Radiowęzłów, Warszawa 13 maja 1947 r.,” ADA 1/2/1/.

25 “List do Dyrekcji Okręgowej Polskiego Radia w Gdańsku, 22 czerwca 1948 roku,” ADA 1/2/1.

on the equipment were frequently reported, perpetrated by unidentified individuals. “Cases of sabotage are also widespread in other regions, including the vicinity of Warsaw.”<sup>26</sup> Although the wired radio system seemed to be a way to prevent citizens from listening to foreign propaganda, at some point, Polish Radio realized that there was one blind spot in the whole system, namely, the managers of the “radio-knots.” The primary cause for concern was the prospect of relaying illegal broadcasts from foreign stations, yet the potential for unauthorized broadcasts was limitless. “Radio-knot” managers, armed with microphones and gramophones, had the ability to air their own programs – content that proved challenging to control or censor.

The presence of these devices, which would typically warrant action against the radio station manager, could easily be explained by the fact that running one’s own program was unavoidable. This was the case since retransmitting the program from Radio Warsaw or a local radio station was not possible due to technical difficulties. Did atmospheric conditions always hinder the retransmission required by the recommendations of the Polish Radio authorities? This seems doubtful, given that the inspection protocols describe instances where local listeners anticipated the very practices that were supposed to be avoided. Reports from other parts of the country affirm that the wired radio system was often utilized to meet the needs of the local community. Nevertheless, we also encounter contrasting examples in the archives, which demonstrate that the self-righteousness of radio station managers, who assumed the role of local DJs, was frequently wearisome.<sup>27</sup>

Besides the technical imperfections of the radio equipment, one of the most common technical difficulties was unauthorized activities by listeners, who often illegally connected their loudspeakers to the radio network to avoid paying subscription fees.<sup>28</sup>

The 1948 map of wired radio distribution preserved in the Archive of Polish Television in Warsaw creates the impression that the entire country was enveloped by a dense network of loudspeakers, making radio accessible to everyone. However, this data fails to illustrate how people engaged with radio or whether it was genuinely available in every region. Naturally, we are unable to reconstruct an exact map of wired radio today that would demonstrate its reach, but even these few examples underscore the importance of analyzing media infrastructure alongside social practices.

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26 “List do Ministerstwa Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego z dnia 6 grudnia 1947 dot. sabotaż w rejonie Wierzbnik-Starachowice,” ADA 1/2/1.

27 Dyczkowska, “List do Dyrekcji Polskiego Radia w Warszawie, 3 grudnia 1947 roku,” ADA 4/3/1, “Raport z inspekcji poszczególnych Radiowęzłów, Warszawa 13 maja 1947 r.,” ADA 1/2/1.

28 “List do Dyrekcji Okręgowej Polskiego Radia w Gdańsku, 22 czerwca 1948 roku,” ADA 1/2/1.

## 5 Wired radio soundscapes

During the German occupation, radio broadcasting was prohibited, and clandestine listening was considered a political statement. As a result, the organization of broadcasting became a priority for the authorities of the new regime (Kwiatkowski 1989). The ability to hear the Polish language on the airwaves was not only essential for practical reasons but also carried symbolic significance. In numerous post-war recollections, the opportunity to acquire a radio set was seen as a sign of normalization. In some accounts, its importance even elevated to the symbolic end of the war.

And then the German occupation started and listening to forbidden broadcasts on the receiver installed under the bed of the Bochenek family. It was a genuinely odd sight: four or five people with their heads under the bed. Then – the army and first broadcasts from Lublin. First the *toczka* loudspeaker, and shortly after that, in 1950, in a new family, a considerable and extraordinary investment – the purchase of an Aga receiver, based on Swedish parts, equipped with this magic eye, working to this day . . . In the same year, I won a Pioneer [receiver] in the “Literature of the first five years of the People’s Republic of Poland” competition.<sup>29</sup>

While the emergence of the Polish language in public spaces was met with great enthusiasm, radio enthusiasts were less likely to consider it the optimal solution. Whenever possible, they opted to purchase tube receivers. Prior to the lifting of the ban on owning a radio set in June 1945, people primarily listened to the radio through loudspeakers mounted on street poles in the central areas of towns and cities. In some instances, technical radio crews erected the loudspeakers, but in many cases, they were already in place, such as in Wrocław, where more than 150 loudspeakers were scattered throughout the city (Birdsall and Walewska-Choptiany 2019). Huge loudspeakers or megaphones were also placed in public areas such as production halls, squares, canteens, and in town centers; “such a megaphone is made of two loudspeakers, placed on a tree or a special pole.”<sup>30</sup>

Subsequently, between 1945 and 1949, Polish Radio was able to build eleven broadcasting stations in central Poland, in the Upper and Lower Silesia and Pomerania regions. Regional stations were obliged to relay broadcasts from the central station in Warsaw. This was rather tricky because the relay system was not fully developed before 1949, so they often broadcast via radio receivers. Shortly after the war, the power of the transmitter at the central station was only 60 kW, resulting in significant interference. During periods of particularly severe inter-

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<sup>29</sup> M. Trachimowicz, “Słuchacze piszą historię Polskiego Radia,” MK-A/409.

<sup>30</sup> “Wired Radio,” 16 May 1956. HU OSA 300-1-2-71091

ference, regional broadcasting stations assigned an employee to monitor the news from the central station. This individual was tasked with creating a condensed version, which was then broadcasted. Additionally, to prevent interruptions and awkward silences on air, local stations would play gramophone music.

In the cases of broadcasting stations in Wrocław and Katowice (border regions in Lower and Upper Silesia), German and Czechoslovakian stations caused interference with the local broadcasts, which resulted in listeners' complaints. For example, in a technical report from Bogatynia (Rychwald), the situation was described as extremely difficult because "[. . .] reception of the Polish Radio programs is very weak. [. . .] The lack of qualified personnel hinders the job. The 'radio-knot' [radio central] is located 9 km from the Czech and the German borders."<sup>31</sup> In Lubań, Bogatynia, Świdnica, and Dzierżoniów (Lower Silesia), radio centrals still worked. Even so, they were using old German radio sets and amplifiers (Lorenz, Telefunken, Nora, Siemens), which caused problems with reception. In Gorzów, the "broadcasting system works in challenging conditions, which result from the remote location of the broadcasting stations; reception of the programs is impossible."<sup>32</sup>

Zbigniew Weber, the manager of a radio central in Zabrze, recounted an incident that occurred on the morning of June 20, 1945. Upon arriving at the radio central to transmit a broadcast of the morning program from Katowice, he was forcibly removed from the building by the Red Army commander. Despite his protests, the soldiers proceeded to broadcast "Moscow" and arbitrary gramophone records. Weber found the behavior of the Russian soldiers incomprehensible, as they acted as if they were the owners of the radio equipment, even though it had been brought from Klagenfurt.

It is reasonable to argue that, at the end of the war, in many towns and cities across Poland, the urban soundscape comprised a multilingual blend of voices, music, and various sounds. Regional radio station programs heavily relied on recordings, some of which were acquired at local markets "szaberplatz." Particularly in Upper Silesia and the "Regained Territories," some recordings featured German classical music or were donated by institutions such as the British Council. For several months, the music program primarily consisted of a dozen records in Polish sent as gifts from the Soviet Union.

In many cases, radio station employees procured records from looters. In cities like Łódź, where recording equipment had been repaired, they recorded

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31 "Protokół z inspekcji przeprowadzonej w Dyrekcji Okręgowej P.R. w Katowicach w dniach od 1 do 25 września 1947 roku przez Inspektorów Polskiego Radia ob. ob. Tucza Stanisława i Jarzynę Stanisława," ADA 4/3/1.

32 "List do Dyrekcji Okręgowej Polskiego Radia w Gdańsku, 22 czerwca 1948 roku," ADA 1/2/1.

broadcasts of popular and dance music from Western stations. It wasn't until 1947 that Polish Radio initiated discussions with the Union of Gramophone Factories to establish terms for the exchange of matrices, enabling the production of records for radio broadcasting.

It's highly likely that the incident in Zabrze was not an isolated occurrence nationwide. However, such events were typically not reported to Polish Radio due to the official perception of the Red Army as the "friendly army of liberators."

We can assume that the appearance of megaphones in public spaces changed the sonic environment because of the recollections of this that we find in several documents. Kamila Staško-Mazur (2018: 123–124), who writes about the post-war soundscape of Warsaw, mentions several memories of loudspeakers in public spaces in her article. But in most accounts, after a brief period of delight at hearing the Polish language in public spaces, people began to perceive street loudspeakers as something that made their lives rather miserable.

At a convention of Polish Radio employees in Szklarska Poręba in July 1945, Adam Kostaszuk, director of Polish Radio in Poznań, mentioned that listeners were writing to him with requests to remove the loudspeakers because the noise was interfering with their work.<sup>33</sup>

The appearance on the streets of loudspeakers through which the Polish language could be heard for the first time since the beginning of the occupation was greeted with enthusiasm. Even so, after a while, their presence in public spaces began to be seen as noise pollution. People working at Polish Radio were also aware of this. They saw street megaphones as a temporary solution that would gradually be supplanted by home speakers connected to the wire radio network and tube radio sets.

In the interviews conducted by RFE in 1955, a reference can be found to the fact that loudspeakers are squawking on the streets of Koźle all day without a moment's pause.<sup>34</sup> However, it is essential to consider how much we can trust the information in these interviews. For example, in two interviews from the same year conducted with residents of Szczecin, we find mutually exclusive information. The first says that there are many loudspeakers on the city's streets, broadcasting from eleven in the morning until eleven at night, while the second interview says that

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<sup>33</sup> "Zjazd Delegatów Dyrekcji Okręgowych Polskiego Radia w Szklarskiej Porębie, 17–19 lipca 1945," ADA 14/3/2, 19.

<sup>34</sup> "A German Woman from a Small Village in Upper Silesia Answers the Attitude Questionnaire," 1 July 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-59704; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:27c090b3-2909-4399-9975-6fff1df2a409> (accessed 17 March 2024).

they are no longer there.<sup>35</sup> It is worth wondering why there is such a discrepancy.<sup>36</sup> After all, this is not a matter of interpretation but of facts. Perhaps the loudspeakers were gone but those who answered the questions subconsciously felt that the interviewers expected them to give answers that confirmed their belief in radio as an omnipresent medium. Alternatively, the loudspeakers in Szczecin's urban space might have still been operational, but residents perceived them differently. For some, the sounds emitted may have become nearly inaudible, blending into the background like the everyday noises we hear and become so accustomed to that we cease to pay attention. However, as Bijsterveld suggests, "conflicts about sound have involved issues of power and the right to dominate some environment with specific sounds or, conversely, to free a setting from such sounds" (Bijsterveld 2013: 17). For others, the program broadcast over the loudspeakers might have represented an unauthorized claim on the acoustic space, to the extent that even politically neutral music or content became intolerable.

The evaluation of the significance of street loudspeakers from that time is challenging today. Positive memories of this radio listening method are rare, contributing to a prevailing black-and-white narrative about radio in Poland during the Stalinist period. This narrative is so firmly entrenched that it has the potential to distort memories and perceptions of the era.

## 6 Conclusions

RFE (Radio Free Europe) gathered its understanding of wired radio through multiple sources, including the press, radio listening, and interviews conducted by its Audience and Public Opinion Research Department, founded by Max Ralis. These interviews were carried out using a questionnaire and, notably, were not recorded; instead, they were transcribed from memory. The reliability of these transcriptions was assessed by comparing them with other sources. Despite this methodological approach, these interviews serve as a fascinating source of information about the radio listening habits of individuals in the People's Republic of

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35 "Audience Analysis," 15 March 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-56273; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:664772e6-8820-41b9-ad4b-f3c6aea940e1> (accessed 17 March 2024).

36 "Audience Analysis," 18 August 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-61202; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:a5dff68d-cff5-4379-8f92-f7bf5c901a3f> (accessed 17 March 2024).

Poland. Furthermore, they indirectly offer insights into the interviewees' state of mind, as their responses occasionally veer from the objective language of description to include more personal remarks or comparisons. The terms used range from something as straightforward as "regime wired radio" to more metaphorical expressions like the "Big Brother program," a phrase invoking Orwellian connotations to describe a broadcast on a factory radio station. Another term mentioned is "captive sets," which refers to Czesław Miłosz's "Captive Mind." Implicit in these expressions is a thesis about the nature of wired radio technology as a seemingly secure medium that can be perceived as a tool for subjugating the listening public.

Feinberg argues that the interviews conducted by International Public Opinion Research (IPOR) at the request of Voice of America were designed not to challenge but rather to reinforce the researchers' pre-existing beliefs about life on the other side of the Iron Curtain (Feinberg 2017: 77–83).

However, the situation was much more complex, and even with such a specific selection of interviewees, who were relatively reluctant to support the Polish authorities and who had managed to escape abroad or agreed to talk about the political situation in the country, there were statements about radio that shattered this stereotypical picture.

The "Big Brother" program described here involved individually named workers, both men and women, who were either praised or blamed based on their performance, with blame being attributed to issues such as poor work, drunkenness, or loose morals.<sup>37</sup> Another form of this program included short sketches illustrating the negative effects of moral laxity.

When asked about the radio station playing in the factory, a worker from Katowice mentioned that people were accustomed to the "buzzing of the radio in the background,"<sup>38</sup> which did not disturb them while working. Another worker from Szczecin explained that the wired radio in factories broadcasted from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Unlike typical wired radio, which combines programs from local radio and Radio Warsaw, factory wired radio had its programming cells. Consequently, it often surpassed regular radio, providing superior music. The quality of the programs depended on the individual organizing them and their knowledge of music. Additionally, wired radio offered better sound quality as it was free from atmospheric interference.

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37 "Audience Analysis," 26 July 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-60401; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: General Records: Information Items; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest: <http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:0fcce579-5091-49d6-aa11-2f72ab265e27> (accessed 17 March 2024).

38 "Audience Analysis," 26 July 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-60401.

The worker from Szczecin also indirectly referenced a concern among RFE (Radio Free Europe) employees, stating that he had never heard that the regime aimed to replace regular radio with wired radio. However, he noted that the existence of wired radio lines in areas inhabited by poorer individuals exerted indirect pressure on them to acquire wired radios because they were affordable and accessible.<sup>39</sup>

The period of Stalinism in Poland is often regarded as monolithic. Scholars often overlook the distinction between different attitudes towards the new system and the assumptions behind the decisions that shaped the future of broadcasting. Although there are some similarities between the process of wired radio development in the Soviet Union and Poland, the thesis about wired radio as a Soviet heritage is disputable because one needs to look at the social and economic realities which motivated the people who made decisions that shaped the future of the broadcasting system in Poland. To look at the origins of wired radio technology without bias, one must focus on the period between 1944 and 1949, when the situation was still in transition and different political scenarios and plans for technological development were considered. It is also worth looking at the medium of radio from the point of view of infrastructure studies; for this purpose, it is necessary to balance content studies with research that considers the social, economic, cultural, and political conditions of technological development in post-war Poland.

One should also bear in mind that the prevailing narrative about radio in post-war Poland is frequently shaped by opposition activists, often affiliated with RFE. This influence has necessarily affected how research is conducted and the conclusions drawn from the analysis of surviving documents. The dominant perspective of RFE distorts a realistic view of the highly complex phenomenon of wired radio, for it reduces it to the role of a propaganda tool of the Communist authorities. In the meantime, researchers on Polish Radio often write about the losses that Polish radio suffered during World War II but rarely draw conclusions from this fact. And yet, radio is a medium that depends very much on broadcasting infrastructure, geographical location, and atmospheric conditions. This article has aimed to show that the people who returned to work in radio were flesh-and-blood people who, despite the dire financial situation, tried to rebuild it to the highest possible standard. As Kwiatkowski writes, "Polish Radio between 1944 and 1949 was socialist in content, pre-war in its form" (Kwiatkowski 1990: 148). Although radio workers wanted to elevate it to catch up with foreign radio, they nevertheless had such poor resources at their disposal that the results of their work were often unsatisfactory.

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39 "Audience Analysis," 26 July 1955. HU OSA 300-1-2-60401.

However, a closer look at the technology reveals that its lack of sophistication created a space for diverse, usually illegal user practices like original broadcasting programs addressed to the local community or radio phreaking. Analysis of the social background of the functioning of the wire radio network shows that disputes over its applications did not simply unfold along the political or ideological axis but were also grounded in aesthetic preferences. There can be no denying that the development of wired radio, despite its ideological importance, had a significant influence on the process of modernization of the country, as for many people (some of them were illiterate), loudspeakers were their first or even only source of information about the world. Looking at the social background of wired radio development faces many difficulties and risks; one of them is falling into merely relating anecdotes and losing sight of the overall picture, but it is precisely for this reason that one can register a diverse panorama of behaviors, attitudes, needs, and desires connected to wired radio.

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## Figures

- Fig. 1** Wired radio operator and her control room in Nadarzyn Archiwum Polskiej Agencji Prasowej [Archive of Polish Press Agency].
- Fig. 2** Development of the wired radio network in a rural area. Archiwum Polskiej Agencji Prasowej [Archive of Polish Press Agency].



Tobias Nanz

# European Crisis Communication

## British and French Hotlines to Moscow as Means of Disruption

The Cold War was characterized by a bipolar order that continues to shape the perception of world division, power, and confrontation in this period even today.<sup>1</sup> The dichotomy of East and West assumed paramount importance and stood for the Western and the Eastern bloc, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, as well as the US and the USSR or West and East Germany. The two superpowers, the US, and the USSR, were each at the center of their respective bloc, especially since their nuclear armament was so excessive as a means of deterrence that none of the other nuclear powers could compete with them.

But this binary order was already being questioned during the Cold War, which was in any case not a homogeneous period (Schild 2013: 9–17). President Richard Nixon already doubted this bipolarity in 1972 and identified Western Europe, China, and Japan as emerging stabilizing powers, while others recognized only three regulating forces, namely, the US, the USSR, and the People's Republic of China (Joffe 1976: 13).

Nevertheless, the binary thinking of the world order was of great significance for this period. Other factors contributed to the establishment and strengthening of the bipolar code, especially those that emerged in popular culture with strong roots in political, military, and scientific thinking. Objects such as the red telephone are among these fictions which depicted the horrors of an atomic war and nuclear apocalypse and inspired the imaginary of Cold War societies. The red telephone was introduced through narratives and images from literature and film, but also through journalistic and political debates, and contributed to a discourse that emphasized mutual contact between the two main powers of the Cold War in order to protect the world from nuclear war.

The red telephone seems to be the bipolar medium par excellence: it consists of exactly one channel, each end of which is connected to a telephone, so that not even a dial plate or a numeric keypad are necessary to establish contact. Third parties – other countries and nuclear powers like the UK or France – do not have a connection to this channel and are not part of this Cold War imaginary. Western European countries do not seem to be important enough to communicate with

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the Soviet Union in a crisis situation. At the same time, the red telephone assumes the position of a third party, since it makes it possible to undermine the sharp and sealed border between East and West during crisis situations. The means of crisis communication itself became an agent within the Cold War conflict.

This essay studies the function of disruptive, parasitic third parties in crisis communication through the example of the red telephone and hotlines that actually existed. The goal is to show how crisis communication media of the Cold War on the one hand were engaged in the formation of a bipolar worldview and on the other hand simultaneously undermined it. The position of the third party embodies a position of disruption, since it “always plugs into the system; the parasite [as the disruptive third party] is always there; it is inevitable” (Serres 1982: 63). In this conception, which goes back to the philosopher Michel Serres and the mathematician Claude Shannon, the disruptive third party is a basic requirement of communication channels, since every channel contains noise (understood, for example, as the crackling of a telephone or telegraph line). The noisy channel connects sender and receiver, because without noise, no communication is possible. This approach emphasizes the difference between noise and signal as opposed to transmitter and receiver.

In this article, the UK and France are parasitic third parties that on the one hand disrupt and try to undermine communication between Washington and Moscow. On the other hand, they acknowledge the importance of the bipolar link. The following argument is divided into four sections. The first section provides a brief review of the history of the first transatlantic radiotelephone link for political crisis communication during World War II and examines a contemporary model of communication that remains relevant today. The second section looks at the red telephone and the hotline between the US and the USSR. It is noticeable that although the US and the UK led the way in real-time, long-range crisis communication, the US decided to exclude its closest Western ally from this privileged channel. The third section analyzes the British government’s plans to join the crisis communication link as a third party and its attempt to take over the channel. The fourth section introduces another European disruptor, namely, the French government, that developed a different policy towards the Soviet government than the other Western allies and established a hotline with Moscow which was partly used during the Six-Day War of 1967. Finally, a summary follows, reflecting on the function of third parties in the Cold War communication *dispositif*.

# 1 Noise of the sea

When the English mathematician Alan Turing crossed the Atlantic to New York in November 1942, he may not have enjoyed the sound of the sea undisturbed: German submarines threatened the sea route between Great Britain and the US. Turing embarked on this trip on behalf of the British government to work on encryption projects in the US, and to examine the technology of the new radiotelephone link between Washington and London before it was completed and installed. This telephone link provided a tap-proof channel between President Theodore Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill for discussing war strategies in real time. To this end, Bell Laboratories developed the X-System, which was the first digital and secure voice system used for Allied communications during and after World War II. The system converted the acoustic waves of the voice into discrete signals using a vocoder, a technical device invented a few years earlier. Subsequently, the digitized voice was encoded using one-time-pad encryption. Henceforth, the signals could be transmitted across the Atlantic and received at the US headquarters in London, where the signals were decoded again and forwarded to the telephone room of the Cabinet War Rooms, disguised as a toilet (Hodges 2012: 309–312; Holmes 2011: 128; Mills 2012: 133–134). In semantic terms, the noise of the encrypted radio link was as incomprehensible to the personnel of the German listening stations as the sound of the sea.

In the cafeteria of Bell Laboratories, the famous US research and armament company during World War II, Turing occasionally met Claude Shannon, who was consulting on the transatlantic telephone system and working on the outline of his mathematical information theory (Hodges 2012: 314–315). Shannon was concerned with the question of how data could be transmitted using telecommunication channels such as telegraphy or telephony and worked on the mathematical and technical conditions for electronic signal transmission.

His theory was based on the idea that communication between a sender and a receiver is always disturbed by noise, for example, caused by technical devices or the atmosphere. Thus, he included in his communication model a source of noise that could affect the channel in the same way as, for example, a human sender who wants to convey meaning to a receiver (Shannon 1949: 10–21). Therefore, successful communication always stands in relation to interference: the greater the signal-to-noise ratio, i.e., the more a signal can be separated from the noise and stand out more clearly, the more likely it is that the desired signal will reach its receiver and not be lost in the noise (see, from a media theoretical perspective, Kittler 2014: 165–177). In Shannon's theory, noise is part of the channel established and constitutes the desired communication. Using radio communication during World War II as an example, one can observe two different types of

noise that challenged the Allies: first, atmospheric noise was the background through which the radio signal had to pass, and second, US radio stations added additional noise to the signal by scrambling the communication. Since the Germans tried to intercept transatlantic communications, encryption was a necessary requirement. As a result, German listening posts had to cope with a wide range of noise, since atmospheric noise was as unintelligible as the jammed signals caused by the Allies. From this perspective, this example describes a multiplication of transmitters: the US Army is a sender, just like the atmosphere and encryption as noise sources. While for two parties – from the Allies – the encryption of the messages is the prerequisite for communication, a third party – the German listening post – can only interpret the noise of the codes as an annoying interference.

The significance of Shannon's model, which can describe every communication process, goes far beyond information theory, and extends into philosophy, cybernetics, and media theory: he expanded a bipartite scheme like subject–object or sender–receiver into a tripartite one that includes a third party which can be classified as a disruptor or parasite (Schüttpelz 2002; Siegert 2007: 7). Since then, successful communication has meant nothing other than the “successful exclusion of this third party” (Serres 1991: 50).

## 2 The red telephone

The telephone connection between the heads of government of Great Britain and the US was regularly used and remained in operation after the war. In the history of international relations, telephone diplomacy is nevertheless an ambivalent instrument. The advantage is that one receives an immediate response from one's interlocutor and may be able to interpret a statement in connection with an emotional (voice) reaction. However, this immediate response may also be disadvantageous if affective behaviors are provoked or if negotiations are conducted in a foreign language that one does not know well enough. For this reason, telephone diplomacy is also more of a medium for politicians from friendly states, since affects and misunderstandings do not necessarily carry such weight in the translated words (Berridge 2005: 93; Baumgarten 1989).

After the Soviet Union caught up with the US in the nuclear arms race and both powers were working on intercontinental ballistic missiles, the problem of crisis communication between Washington and Moscow was a burning issue. The US game theorist Thomas Schelling emphasized in an article on limited warfare the need to have lines of communication that could be used by authorized individuals available at all times for negotiations (Schelling 1957: 34). In 1960, US sec-

retary of state Christian Herter proposed a communication link between the two countries to prevent a nuclear war based on a misunderstanding. And finally, the journalist Jess Gorkin launched a series of articles in the *Parade* magazine advocating a hotline, asking in an open letter to Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev and President Dwight D. Eisenhower: “Must a world be lost for want of a telephone call?” (Gorkin 1960: 6; see Stone 1993: 848).

Until the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the telephone calls Gorkin envisaged were made solely by fictional heads of government. In Peter George’s novel *Red Alert* (1958) and in Peter Burdick and Harvey Wheeler’s book *Fail-Safe* (1962), there is a transatlantic telephone connection by means of which the US president and the Soviet prime minister are able to avert all-out nuclear war. The film adaptations of the above-mentioned novels, *Fail-Safe* and *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (both US, 1964), popularized such a phone, well known as a red phone during the Cold War.

The red telephone is a hybrid object that came into being due to several discourses and practices, including technological possibility, political and military necessity, and popularization by the mass media. It was technologically possible because existing lines as well as equipment could be accessed and the necessary encryption technology was available. It became politically and militarily necessary because of nuclear warfare strategies that needed a reliable negotiating option to clear up misunderstandings or prevent a nuclear war. Literary and cinematic fictions, as well as caricatures and other artistic products, called attention to the dangers of nuclear war and often staged telephone calls in crisis situations for narrative reasons, so that the negotiations of government leaders could be used for dramatic performances. A president operating a teletype – Stanley Kubrick described a telegraphing president in a prequel screenplay to *Dr. Strangelove* (Nanz 2016: 202) – seems to be more difficult to stage in dramaturgical terms than a head of government whose desperation and shaken voice can be heard on the telephone. In real life, Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and Walter Mondale in 1984 took up such scenarios in their presidential campaigns when they participated in election commercials that showed red telephones (the color is not visible in Johnson’s black-and-white film) and thus emphasized their negotiating skills as future heads of government (Mondale’s self-representation is discussed by Nanz 2010: 71–75). The color red refers to power and domination (Wanzeck 2003: 69), both desired attributes of presidents that have to be demonstrated, especially against the background of a possible nuclear war. The fiction of the campaign commercials affected the reality of life.

But, as mentioned earlier, the red telephone never existed. It turns out that fiction is a parasite and disruptor that docks onto the communication channel between politics and the population. But this parasite is most welcome on both

sides. Campaign managers instrumentalized the myth of the red telephone to emphasize the presidential candidates' ability to act decisively. A president must be able to make decisions in crisis situations and demonstrate a spontaneous and self-confident discussion style that is convincing in its arguments. For its part, the population was reassured by the fact that, according to the commercials, there was a rapid means of communication between the two capitals and that state leaders had an apparatus for negotiating with each other in crisis situations. The fiction of the red telephone arose from the omnipresent fear of nuclear war (see, for fear and the Cold War, Greiner et al. 2009; Peyk 2013; Masco 2014).

The world was on the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. This conflict was perhaps the most serious crisis during the Cold War and demonstrated not only to John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, but also to the world public, that a direct crisis communication link between Washington and Moscow was necessary. The dispute over the deployment of Soviet missiles on the Caribbean island of Cuba could have ended in nuclear war, as the means of communication between the US and the USSR were poor in every respect. Kennedy and Khrushchev did not have the technology to communicate with each other in real time, as normal telephones could not be used because of possible interception. They sent intermediaries to negotiate or used the (commercial) telegraph network to transmit messages to the embassies in Moscow or Washington. However, these options were very time-consuming, as it took up to eleven hours for one side to transmit a telegram to the other. This was an archaic state of diplomatic communication technology (Greiner 2010: 83–84). Oddly enough, the crisis was resolved when the Soviet prime minister went by car to Radio Moscow to broadcast a statement about the withdrawal of Soviet missiles (Dobbs 2009: 324, 336). This seemed to be the quickest way to save the world from nuclear war, as the de-escalation had almost failed because of the poor communication infrastructure. But his creative use of media could have missed its addressee and thus escalated the crisis situation to the point of war. After all, weapons systems that enable a nuclear attack within a short period of time must be accompanied by a communication system that links governments as quickly as possible in the event of a crisis. To put it more precisely: the (diplomatic) information must be transmitted before the missiles are launched.

To deal with this issue, both parties decided to establish a telegraphic teletype link between the two capitals. The cable link ran from the Pentagon across the Atlantic to the Kremlin via London, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Helsinki, and was backed up by a radio link via Tangier. The US and USSR supplied each other with teletype equipment to use both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. Each party was able to write in its own language so as to preserve its own sovereignty and avoid translation errors in its telegrams. Several teams of technicians and trans-

lators were deployed in the Pentagon; they supervised the machines around the clock and checked them with hourly test telegrams in order to be prepared for crisis situations.<sup>2</sup> In September 1963, the hotline finally went into operation with test messages, and it passed its first acid test in the course of the Six-Day War in June 1967.

### 3 British disruptions

The British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, must have been concerned about the global political importance of the British Empire when he was informed of the hotline negotiations between the US and the USSR. Although the crisis communication channel passed through London, the two powers did not plan to include London in the hotline. In the early stages of the US–Soviet negotiations, Macmillan’s government sought to correct what it saw as a misguided planning and wanted to join the talks on establishing a telegraph link to Moscow. But the allies in Washington asked Macmillan not to press the matter at this time, so as not to disrupt the US negotiations with the Soviet government (see the excellent research in Eglisson 2003: 12).

Nevertheless, at a dinner in February 1966, Prime Minister Harold Wilson raised the issue with Premier Alexei Kosygin. His goal was to point out the advantages of British participation in the hotline, and he stressed that London was in the advantageous position of a third party: “There might be occasions when the Americans might find it preferable to make urgent points to the Russians through a third party rather than directly, and vice versa.”<sup>3</sup>

The intention was certainly honorable, but his suggestion shows that Wilson had not completely understood the concept of the hotline. It was not established to initiate indirect diplomatic negotiations through an intermediary but, on the contrary, to directly connect opposing parties who, in the worst case, were on the brink of nuclear war.

Although Kosygin was reluctant to accept the idea,<sup>4</sup> the British government developed concrete plans only a few weeks after the signing of the Hotline Agreement between the US and the USSR in June 1963.

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2 Information Related to the Washington–Moscow Hot Line (Draft), pp. 1–6, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, Reference File, Folder: Hot Line.

3 Conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr. Kosygin [ . . . ], 23.2.1966, The National Archives, Kew/London, CAB 192/1.

4 Hot Line to Moscow, p. 3, The National Archives, Kew/London, CAB 192/1.

Sir Bernard Burrows, the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, had worked out three options for this purpose. The first had priority in the negotiations and proposed that the British government join the US–Soviet channel, which would not only have saved costs but also have put it in a powerful position. Burrows noted:

By this method we would receive all messages passing on the link, and it would not be open to the Russians and the Americans to communicate privately by this, unless they employed a cypher setting which was withheld from us.<sup>5</sup>

Burrows added that a separate link could be set up for messages to Washington and Moscow. If this variant had been realized, the British government would have gained a powerful position as a parasitic third party. It would have been possible for it to intercept all communications between Washington and Moscow, insofar as they had not been protected by encryption. At the same time, the British would have been able to send a telegram to one party without the knowledge of the other. It is not surprising that the US allies immediately rejected this proposal.<sup>6</sup>

The second option proposed a model that would have put the British government at a double disadvantage. This plan would not have given London direct access to the hotline; instead, it would have been connected solely as needed to the other two capitals. The Washington–Moscow channel would thus have remained untouched, and London would have had to set up separate lines to Washington and Moscow respectively. The British government would have been able to contact the capitals, but would not have been in a position to view all telegram traffic without gaps. Accordingly, the concept paper states:

The disadvantage of this system from the U.K. point of view would be that it would still be open to Washington and Moscow to be selective about the messages which they passed to London.<sup>7</sup>

This variant would have stirred up mistrust. If, for example, the US government planned to send a telegram to Moscow, it would have been its decision whether to send a copy to London at the same time. From the point of view of London, the real source of interference in the channel, Washington or Moscow would have become a permanent interference, since neither would have guaranteed the forwarding of messages. This plan was not realized either.

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<sup>5</sup> Document 24 (“Hot Line”), p. 1, The National Archives, Kew/London, FO 371/171142.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. document “Confidential” (Burrows), July 16, 1963, The National Archives, Kew/London, FO 371/171142.

<sup>7</sup> Document 24 (“Hot Line”), p. 1, The National Archives, Kew/London, FO 371/171142.

The third variant, a separate hotline between London and Moscow, was finally established on October 26, 1967, when the British prime minister was able use it for the first time and transmit an inaugural message.<sup>8</sup> But another third party had beaten him to it by more than a year. Its success was reported in the British daily newspapers at the end of June 1966: “‘White’ phone from France to Soviet Union.”<sup>9</sup> The French president, Charles de Gaulle, forestalled Great Britain in marking France as a power that had achieved the status of being important enough to have a hotline to Moscow. The red phone has since been accompanied by a white and green phone, as the hotline was also known as the “TELEPHONE VERT”<sup>10</sup> in France.

## 4 French disruption

This success of the French government was grounded in President Charles de Gaulle’s policy of *détente*, which the French leader developed as an independent way of resolving the bipolar conflict in Europe through a French initiative. De Gaulle was convinced that the Communist political system would decline and that, as a consequence, West and East would converge in the future in terms of politics and trade. Cooperation with the USSR, he felt, would build strong ties in foreign relations and establish a Franco-Russian understanding, so that France would be at the forefront of the anticipated political reorganization of Europe. Other countries like the US, UK, and Germany would be placed in a weaker position. De Gaulle’s government prepared the way for these developments with trade and cultural agreements, and underlined this partnership with his state trip to the USSR in June 1966 (Soutou 2008: 30).

These policies and actions led to a normalization of the Soviet Union and marked Communism as a “legitimate social experiment” (Soutou 2008: 31) in the eyes of de Gaulle’s government. This was appreciated by the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Leonid Brezhnev. During the French president’s state trip, Brezhnev proposed the establishment of a hotline between the two countries. The French ambassador, Philippe Baudet, sent this proposal by telegram to Paris on the night of June 22–23, 1966:

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<sup>8</sup> Doc. Note for Files, The National Archives, Kew/London, CAB 192/7.

<sup>9</sup> Doc. 9: “Hot Lines,” The National Archives, Kew/London, CAB 192/1; see also Eglisson 2003: 20–21.

<sup>10</sup> Téléphone Vert (24.11.1966), Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Série Europe, 1966/1970, URSS, Carton 2665. Printed in capitals.

M. Brejnev a longuement développé les idées soviétiques sur l'intérêt de la coopération et des consultations avec la France. Il a proposé l'établissement d'un fil direct entre Moscou et Paris et s'est félicité de la conclusion des accords sur la coopération scientifique, technique et économique, sur l'espace et sur la télévision en couleur. (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères 2006: 136, doc. 55)<sup>11</sup>

The cooperation in science, economy, technology, space, and in particular the introduction of the French SECAM television standard was the foundation for stronger ties in foreign relations, which were symbolized by the establishment of a Moscow–Paris hotline. The Franco-Russian agreement concluded one year before it was seen as a diplomatic move that excluded the German PAL and US NTSC television standards (the US did not want to deliver NTSC anyway). As the USSR forced its satellite states to adopt the SECAM standard, de Gaulle's policy mirrored the division of the two German states (Fickers 2007: 162–186, 332). The political gap between capitalism and Communism was strengthened by different TV broadcasting standards.

Brezhnev's gift, the "fil direct," put France in the position of the disruptive and parasitic third party. The technological progress in communication media, i.e., the SECAM standard for television transmission, was rewarded with a symbolic communication channel that disrupted the Washington–Moscow hotline and bipolar configuration.

Although the Franco-Russian hotline had already been announced in the official declaration of de Gaulle's June 1966 state trip, the direct communication link was again mentioned in the declaration after Premier Alexei Kosygin's return visit in December 1966. The two governments explained that the hotline should enable the exchange of views and the sending of messages at the highest level whenever it seemed necessary.<sup>12</sup> Both countries were obviously interested in the quick implementation of the hotline, so that already in January 1967 one engineer and one inspector traveled from France to Moscow to set up the technical equipment.<sup>13</sup> Finally, the opening of the link between the Kremlin and the Élysée was

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<sup>11</sup> Translation: "Mr. Brezhnev elaborated on Soviet ideas about the value of cooperation and consultation with France. He proposed the establishment of a direct [communication] line between Moscow and Paris and welcomed the conclusion of agreements on scientific, technical and economic cooperation, on space and on color television."

<sup>12</sup> Déclaration Franco-Soviétique (9.12.66), p. 7, Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/LaCourneuve, Série Europe, 1966/1970, URSS, Carton 2672.

<sup>13</sup> Adresse Ambafrance Moscou 2053, Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/LaCourneuve, Série Europe, 1966/1970, URSS, Carton 2665.

announced on November 24, 1967, in a special broadcast on Soviet television about Franco-Soviet relations.<sup>14</sup>

As a means of crisis communication, the Franco-Soviet hotline was first used earlier, during the Six-Day War in 1967. This war, which was started by Israel as a preemptive strike, was in fact the first situation in which the US–USSR hotline was used as a crisis communication device. The Kremlin resembled a busy telegraph office at this time, as several telegrams were submitted between Moscow and Washington and between Moscow and Paris after the battle in the Near East began. The French government became a third party disrupting the bipolar configuration by becoming involved in world affairs with its own channel to Moscow.

But it would be a mistake to conclude that the Soviet government kept the French and the US government on the same level. The exchanges over the hotlines differed depending on how the war was developing. Most messages discussed strategies for UN Security Council meetings or provided information on the rapidly changing war situation. Some telegrams between Moscow and Washington contained aggravated language; one in particular was interpreted by the US government as a threat of war. A total of twenty telegrams were exchanged between the US and the USSR,<sup>15</sup> but only eight between the USSR and France.<sup>16</sup>

When comparing the hotline telegrams, it is remarkable that all messages sent from Moscow to Paris also reached Washington. The Archives Diplomatiques, i.e., the archives of the French Foreign Ministry, do not contain all received Russian-language originals. But when examining the French and US translations made in Paris and Washington, it is noticeable that they show only minor changes, which are due to issues of translation and the etiquette of diplomatic protocol, e.g., in the greetings and sign-offs. Sometimes Kosygin addresses de Gaulle a bit more personally and highlights the French president's "INFLUENCE BENEFIQUE"<sup>17</sup> or refers to their "ACTIVE COOPERATION."<sup>18</sup> But the actual content of the message is the same. In these cases, it can be assumed that the Soviet government drafted one message

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**14** Message Personnel pour M. Fontaine and Téléphone Vert, Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Série Europe, 1966/1970, URSS, Carton 2665.

**15** Doc. 3: Washington–Moscow "Hot-Line" Exchange, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, NSF Head of State Correspondence, Box 8, Folder USSR Washington–Moscow "Hot-line" Exchange, June 5–10, 1967.

**16** As documented in Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Secrétariat Général. Entretiens et messages 30.

**17** Doc. 313: A MR Le Président (5.6.1967), Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Secrétariat Général. Entretiens et messages 30. Printed in capitals.

**18** Doc. 318: Au Président de Gaulle (6.6.1967), Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Secrétariat Général. Entretiens et messages 30. Printed in capitals.

and sent it to Washington and France, where it was translated into English or French.

While this can be seen as a labor-saving measure, it is notable that on June 8 the hotline traffic between France and the USSR breaks off. Kosygin submitted one hotline telegram to Washington and Paris complaining that Israel was not complying with the UN Security Council's resolution concerning a ceasefire.<sup>19</sup> De Gaulle responded to this by pointing out in general terms that joint efforts were necessary. According to the files of the Archives Diplomatiques, this is the last hotline exchange between Paris and Moscow during the Six-Day War. The filed documents do not provide any reasons for this break in communication. One reason for this could be that the Six-Day War developed into a growing source of tension between the US and the USSR. The Soviet Union had planned and prepared a landing of marines on Israel's shores to support Arabic countries, which, if implemented, would have led to a clash with the US, Israel's remaining protecting power (Ginor and Remez 2007: 10–14). Therefore, for Moscow, especially since the Israeli attack on the USS *Liberty*, the US government was the relevant addressee for its messages.

So, in contrast, the hotline exchange between Washington and Moscow continued. On June 8, the Israeli Air Force attacked the USS *Liberty*, which was an “auxilliary [*sic*] ship,”<sup>20</sup> i.e., spy ship, in the Mediterranean Sea. The motive for that attack is still under debate (Oren 2003: 180–190, and Ginor and Remez 2007: 262–271), but President Johnson “immediately assumed that the Soviets were involved” (Oren 2003: 268). He informed his counterpart in Moscow about the incident and explained the deployment of fighter jets via hotline to prevent an escalation. Two days later, escalation increased. Chairman Kosygin showed his anger about Israel, which had “completely ignored” the UN resolutions and did not seem to be willing to enter into a ceasefire. In his hotline telegram, Kosygin asks Johnson to “demand from Israel that it unconditionally cease military actions in the next few hours.” If not, he would be ready “to adopt an independent deci-

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**19** Doc. 321: A Monsieur Le Président (8.6.1967), Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/LaCourneuve, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Secrétariat Général. Entretiens et messages 30 and Doc. 18: To President Lyndon B. Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, NSF Head of State Correspondence, Box 8, Folder USSR Washington–Moscow “Hotline” Exchange, June 5–10, 1967.

**20** Doc. 19: To Chairman Kosygin, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, NSF Head of State Correspondence, Box 8, Folder USSR Washington–Moscow “Hotline” Exchange, June 5–10, 1967.

sion.”<sup>21</sup> Johnson and his administration understood this announcement as a threat of war and, after a tense meeting, took action to deter the USSR from starting hostilities. This crisis escalated with five telegrams in short intervals until it was resolved, and the war was ended on the same day.

It is interesting to see that, after the crisis increased, the bipolar powers got rid of the parasitic third party. The disruption caused by events was so significant that they excluded the parasitic third party. The French government was not involved in the hotline traffic anymore, since the USSR concentrated on crisis communication with the US. This confirmed de Gaulle’s fear that “an Israeli attack [leading to the Six-Day War] would weaken its [i.e., France’s] image as a Power with influence in the Middle East, an image to which the Americans, and the Soviets in particular, apparently still subscribed” (Heimann 2010: 253). The French hotline subscription ended during the hottest phase of the war. The next message from Moscow to France came five days after the end of the war and contained a request from Kosygin to stop by in Paris on his way to New York to discuss some issues concerning the UN General Assembly.<sup>22</sup>

## 5 European crisis communication as symbolic and disruptive events

The bipolar construction of the Cold War world and the arms race with nuclear weapons focused minds on the necessity of fast crisis communication media. But the hotline link between the Kremlin and Washington was challenged by two other nuclear powers and UN Security Council members, Great Britain, and France, who established their own hotlines to Moscow. As third parties, they disrupted the transatlantic connection and thereby reinforced the significance of the Soviet–US link: the US government in particular highlighted the importance of an exclusive channel through the exclusion of its British allies. The decision that the UK should establish a separate channel with the USSR is in line with the Paris–Moscow link, even if it was based on other political goals. The French hotline was, in contrast to the British one, already active during the Six-Day War, but it lost its importance when the crisis escalated. The main communication partners, the US and the USSR, were suc-

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<sup>21</sup> Doc. 25: To President Lyndon B. Johnson, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas, NSF Head of State Correspondence, Box 8, Folder USSR Washington–Moscow “Hotline” Exchange, June 5–10, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> Doc. 322: Pour le Général de Gaulle (15.6.1967), Archives Diplomatiques, Paris/La Courneuve, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Secrétariat Général. Entretiens et messages 30.

cessfully able to exclude the parasitic third party and maintain their superior position.

Ultimately, one British and one French hotline crossed the Iron Curtain, but their functions were grounded more in symbolic value than in actual crisis communication. The dissolution of these former colonial powers was reflected in the discrepancy between their claims to be active parties in a hotline link and their actual position. But even if their hotlines were not as significant in terms of crisis communication as the US link to Moscow, their presence as third parties called the bipolar order of the world into question.

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Hedwig Wagner

# **(Telecommunication) Satellites – Celestial and Terrestrial Concepts of Europe**

## **1 Synopsis**

Satellite technology was born out of the spirit of the Cold War: the US and the USSR as the two world superpowers waged their proxy war in space – as a competition for the first satellite launch; for the first unmanned, later the first manned space-flight; and for the first moon landing. Awareness of this is firmly established in the general public. On the one hand, the present article confronts that knowledge with the open question of Europe's position, of the circumstances and basic conditions for the development of its space/satellite and media institutions. On the other hand, the article contrasts this general knowledge with the unknown space euphoria of Russia or the Soviet Union in prewar and interwar times. It raises fundamental questions of the national and the international, science and politics, the intelligentsia and the popular; their interconnectedness, simultaneity, and paradoxes are made apparent. Satellite technology was associated with the hope of a cross-bloc exchange of radio and television channels in the EBU (European Broadcast Union) or between the primarily Western European EBU and the primarily Eastern European OIRT (Organisation internationale de radiodiffusion et de télévision). The expansion of ESA (the European Space Agency) further fueled hopes for (peaceful) world communication and overcoming the Cold War and the division of Europe. Satellite technology, which was increasingly used in the 1980s, replaced the hitherto dominant technology of terrestrial television and radio-wave transmission, and so radio once again “went over the ether” (this time set somewhat higher – through the electromagnetic fields of satellite transmission in orbit). The article then presents, for the first time, files from the National Archives of France that give insight into the development of Franco-Soviet cooperation in the 1960s.

## 2 Space enthusiasm in pre- and interwar times between national policy, aspirations of internationalism, and the open question of Europe

Soviet cosmonautics dates back to an enthusiasm initiated by “Konstantin Tsiolkovskii, who in 1903 produced the first mathematical substantiations that spaceflight was possible” (Siddiqi 2008: 261). Soviet efforts and utopian enthusiasm for space travel increased enormously in the 1920s, in the New Economic Policy (NEP) period, nourished by two ideological strands that unfolded partly in parallel and partly in contrast to each other.<sup>1</sup> However, it was culturally expressed in a very international way: in the creation of “impressive exhibitions, displaying the visions of the major prognosticators of the day such as Tsiolkovskii, the American Robert Goddard, and the Romanian-German Herman Oberth” (Siddiqi 2008: 261). Literature, painting, and film also participated in this Eastern–Western European cultural exchange and encounter. (First-wave) space enthusiasm was expressed – just as it was in the second wave of space enthusiasm in the 1950s and 60s, the decades of and after the *Sputnik* launch – by civil society, especially by amateur initiatives that exchanged information. In material terms, it was only in 1933 that it led to the creation of a national institute to build rockets. The quest for interplanetary communication (for which the Society for the Study of Interplanetary Communication – a world first – was created in Moscow) led to international East–West communication in the twentieth century. This aspect of cultural practices in pre-war times prefigured, seen from an Eastern perspective, the nexus between the Cold War and culture,<sup>2</sup> already showing aspirations of internationalism and the rootedness of the East as a “bloc” at

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1 Siddiqi “shows how the cause of space exploration in early twentieth-century Russia originally stemmed from two ideological strands: technological utopianism and the mystical occult tradition of Cosmism. The former (seemingly modern, urban, international, materialist), alternately clashed and meshed with the latter (superficially archaic, pastoral, Russian, spiritual), creating an often contradictory but urgent language of space enthusiasm.” (Siddiqi 2008: 260).

2 The term “cultural Cold War” refers to all kinds of cultural activities, mainly provided by a state’s actors or public institutions to promote its own culture, arts, literature, and music. In the exchange between the two blocs – and Europe! – these promotion campaigns exported cultural goods. The cultural Cold War was not a propaganda campaign as such, but can reveal differing political choices. It can be contrasted with the term “Cold War culture,” which, according to Annette Vowinckel et al., *Cold War Cultures. Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (2012), is used in recent research in cultural studies in “a broad sense to describe media influences, social practices, and symbolic representations as they shape, and are shaped by, interna-

the same time. The expert circles of scientists were also internationally networked in pre-war and interwar Europe, as well as later, after the end of the Second World War, across the system boundaries of the two blocs. There was European networking in theoretical physics in the interwar period, for example, in contacts between Alexander Alexeyevich Lebedev and Nils Bohr.<sup>3</sup>

Europe is not explicitly thematized; it appears as an unnamed and unaddressed mesolevel that exists parallel to the microlevel of the national and the macrolevel of the (Eastern or Western) bloc, but that does not intervene on the latter level. The national is manifest, and also material and existent; Europe, on the other hand, can be grasped, or more precisely approached, as ideal and virtual.

### 3 Outer space in the post-war period: Europe and the cultural Cold War

In 1946, several hundred German scientists and engineers had been forcibly relocated to Russia (cf. Siddiqi 2009: 120–143). This happened in the time right after the end of the Second World War, the beginning of Cold War – a term that became more widely known in 1947 due to Baruch's speech and Lippmann's *Cold War* book. After the enormous transfer of knowledge that these scientists provided, they were sent back, to the GDR, after five years because of alleged inefficiency. This was convincingly explained by Siddiqi in terms of a “resurgence of postwar nationalism and the culture of extreme secrecy” (Siddiqi 2009: 120). This resurgence shows the beginning of segregation along the lines of the blocs. Unfortunately, there has been no systematic effort to follow up what became of the Russia-experienced German experts relocated to the GDR, and there is no testimony of cooperation between Eastern and Western Europe at this time. In *Gorodomlia*,<sup>4</sup> Werner Albring (cf. Albring 1991), one of the forcibly relocated German aerodynamics experts, recounts working on the development of rockets and military

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tional relations. Yet, it remains in question whether – or to what extent – the Cold War Culture model can be applied to European societies, both in the East and the West” (book cover).

3 In the post-Stalin era, a French Communist was expelled from the Landau School (the Society for Theoretical Physics) in the Soviet Union, which must mean, conversely, that at least until then there must have been participation by individual researchers from Western Europe. This was shown by Karl Hall (2008) in “The Schooling of Lev Landau: The European Context of Post-revolutionary Soviet Theoretical Physics.”

4 *Gorodomlia* is a small Russian island to which these experts were relocated.

rockets for the Soviet Union. Despite being removed from his position, he later helped to develop the launch rocket for the *Sputnik* satellite. After his relocation to the GDR he had – according to his autobiography – no contact with colleagues from Russia or its satellite states, let alone from Western Europe.

The emergence of science fiction literature can be seen as a reflection of the emerging expert circles in science with the promise and threat potential emanating from this exclusively circulating knowledge. In the 1950s, for example, John Wyndham created his three most famous SF novels, all of them space sagas. In this fictional literature, the role of experts in society becomes reflective, at times Wyndham is declared the prototype of critical social science and STS, science, technology and society. (Rees 2019)<sup>5</sup>

In the Soviet Union, even in the Thaw period, spaceflight and satellite technology relied on the engineering culture of the Stalin era. Engineers such as Boris Chertok, for example, described themselves as ones who “worked in isolation from their Western counterparts and relied exclusively on domestic technologies,”<sup>6</sup> but there were nonetheless international aspirations in the Soviet Union, even though spaceflight and satellite technology were state industries in Cold War times. Rocket engineers and cosmonauts could spread their technological utopia to Soviet society and were bolstered by an international vision, too. It was an ambiguous issue: “The case of the space engineers suggests, however, that this most privileged group of the Soviet technical intelligentsia had a torn identity: the secretive world of postwar rocketry reinforced their affinity with the military, while working on cutting-edge technologies nurtured their sense of belonging to the international technoscientific elite” (Gerovitch 2008: 209).

How scientific internationalism and scientific intelligence go hand in hand with state policy is well illustrated by the US president Dwight D. Eisenhower’s nuclear policy of 1953–1955. He declared on 29 July 1955 that the national contribution of the US to the International Geophysical Year (IGY) would be the construction of a satellite to orbit the Earth. Not only was science used politically; scientists themselves also acted politically in the scientific arena. Krige has demonstrated the use of internationalism and national interests in the nuclear field during the early Cold War (Krige 2006).

In the science policy field, the International Geophysical Year 1957/1958 played a particularly important role.<sup>7</sup> Both the Soviet Union (*Sputnik*) and the US (*Van-*

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<sup>5</sup> Rees cites the following novels by John Wyndham: *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957), *The Kraken Wakes* (1953).

<sup>6</sup> Boris Chertok, quoted in Gerovitch 2008: 208.

<sup>7</sup> The International Geophysical Year (IGY), official French: Année de Géophysique Internationale (AGI), was a period – established by international agreement – from 1 July 1957 to 31 Decem-

*guard project*) launched programs to put artificial satellites into Earth orbit to explore space during this period. In the early Cold War, the international exchange of (geophysical) data was severely restricted or even completely forbidden. The IGY brought a breakthrough in favor of the freedom of science, from which later space research also benefited greatly and in whose spirit it stood, not in spite of but alongside the competition between political systems, entering into interdependent relationships with it. In order to enable an unproblematic exchange of data, World Data Centers (WDCs) were established for a number of academic disciplines.

Data that could only be obtained through international cooperation – especially between the Soviet Union and the US – was of high national relevance. Nationally important data acquisition was based on the basic distinction between internationally acquired raw data and exclusively national data processing: international data and nationally applied data. According to Aronova (2017), national or bloc-centered data acquisition, storage, and evaluation gave the Soviet Union the edge. The extent to which Aronova's thesis involves retrospective bloc-building in the history of knowledge will not be discussed here, but the lack of relevance of the WDC-C (the European World Data Center) is striking when it comes to the European as the mesolevel encompassing both West and East. The beginning of satellite technology is interesting for media studies not only because of the transnational media events, but also because television and the origins of Big Data are connected in satellite-technology telecommunication data. In the same way that discourse analysis must critically question the politics of power in the archive (Foucault 1969), data must also be seen as power-asymmetrical producers of discourse in society as a whole.

The WDCs – all data held in WDCs was available for the cost of copying and sending the requested information – can be seen as a positive Cold War technology. Originally created for the data collected from the observation programs of the 1957–1958 International Geophysical Year, they nurtured aspirations for an all-round knowledge of outer space, extensive civilian scientific empowerment, and shared global control. There is a double paradox in national or bloc data: data from space, not even Earth-bound, let alone partially Earth-bound, are nationalized and on the other hand free to science and the world. There is also a double meaning – one literal and material, the other transferred to scientific activity – for transmission and exploration. Data transmission has to cross the electromagnetic field, across which data is transported with satellite technology, and it is a mission across the Earth, for the Earth. Exploration is discovery and exploi-

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ber 1958. The period served for worldwide research in all fields of geophysics, including space. Cf. Krige and Russo 1994.

tation, as well as open-ended explanation and territorial, or at least reterritorializable, conquest. Space exploration, which took its starting point with the IGY, is a world scientific cooperative project and a large-scale political institutional project, and is characterized by the ambivalence of international cooperation and national segregation.

## **4 Between scientific internationalism and scientific knowledge as part of national identity**

The role of science and technology in shaping national identity was a decisive one for Russia, establishing an equation between science/technology and the Cold War as a Russian national identity. Another kind of equation can be seen in the case of the “neutral” Switzerland, where science and state were made neutral in a reciprocally constitutive manner (Strasser 2009). The “coproduction of neutral science and neutral state” (Strasser 2009: 165) led in the Swiss case to a challenge for national identity – hence the “dual use” technology for military and civilian issues that meant building missiles/rockets for warheads and/or satellites. The urge to participate in the European ELDO and ESRA, both founded in 1962, was driven by the wish to have Swiss scientists lead these two organizations for pursuing European space issues for peaceful purposes and to see Swiss national interests (most of all that of neutrality) represented. In Strasser’s view both sides, national identity on the one hand (relating to the culture and political institutions of a country) and science (often presumed international) on the other hand, are treated as interdependent. The national framing of science in terms of organizations and funding is reversed by the study of how science shaped national identity.

On the one hand, Europe derives its satellite-development narrative from the grand narrative of the two competing superpowers – as propagated in popular science – but on the other hand, this narrative of progress supports a development of the European position independent of the two superpowers, either balancing them out or as a successor to the now-defunct Soviet Union. On the one hand, in Cold War Europe science was militarized and repoliticized; on the other hand, science is alleged to be neutral, universal, and objective. And indeed, Europe has seen enormous evolution in the civilian (re)use of space technology. Nevertheless, the potential reconversion of rocketry remains a complex interdependency. Providing cutting-edge key technologies during the Cold War signified for Europe an ambivalence between nationalization and internationalization,

and creates a self-perception and guiding principle for Europe as a domain for the peaceful reuse of military knowledge and technologies.

## 5 European outer space institutions and the becoming of Europe

The history of the European Space Agency (ESA), which emerged from the merger of its predecessor institutions, the European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO) and the European Space Research Organisation (ESRO), has been written many times (cf. Madders and Thiebaut 1992). European networking, the technical and infrastructural becoming of Europe, was made possible by how the intermediary organizations of the *Conférence Européenne des Télécommunications par Satellites* (CETS, 1963–1970) and the *Conférence Européenne des Administrations des Postes et des Télécommunications* (CEPT)<sup>8</sup> worked together with the European Community (EC) and the European Economic Community (EEC). It is not widely appreciated that ESA developed European integration before the EC. The history of these organizations is well known in the case of the political institutions, less so or not at all in the case of the media institutions. Their potential for European integration – even with an intercontinental dimension – is (to a greater or lesser degree) extraordinary, but there is no reference to Eastern European states or an Eastern–Western European exchange. ESA still remains a Western European story of success and failure.

Written in 1997, the manual *A new force at a new frontier. Europe's development in the space field in the light of its main actors, policies, law and activities from its beginnings up to the present* (Madders 1997), which covers all the legal bodies and institutions and their involvement in European space issues, explores the history of ESA, ELDO, ESRO, and many other institutions and associations in detail and offers

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<sup>8</sup> CEPT (European Conference of Postal and Telecommunications Administrations) is an umbrella organization for the cooperation of regulatory authorities from forty-eight European states with its head office in Copenhagen, Denmark. CEPT was founded in 1959 by nineteen state postal and telecommunications administrations (PTTs). CEPT members decided to establish the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI) in 1988. In 2004, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was renewed between CEPT, ECC (Electronic Communications Committee, a committee of CEPT), and ETSI, with the purpose of European cooperation in the standardization and regulation of radiocommunications equipment and systems. Among other things, the MoU is intended to contribute to the consistent translation of technical compatibility studies of the ECC into harmonized European standards of ETSI. Cf. <<https://www.cept.org/cept>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

interesting insights into their aims and development. It is significant, and for the purposes of this article disappointing, that Madders could not devote a chapter to the cooperation, or at least the exchange, between Eastern and Western European states or institutions: even though external cooperation was permitted and its establishment sealed in the ESA Convention, Art. XIV, “[i]nternational cooperation agreements form a last, quantitatively fairly small, category” (Madders 1997: 415). And the cooperation agreements that Madders does cover are Western ones – almost exclusively. An external relations agenda is also foreseen in other articles of the Convention. Although ESA did have a commercial aim, a firm interest in promoting European industrial products, with regard to external cooperation “[q]uestions on the substance of ESA’s ‘concerting’ role still remain unanswered today” (Madders 1997: 416).<sup>9</sup> Madders’s account is dominated by the participating member states; the office in Moscow, established in 1995, is hardly mentioned, let alone explored, although Moscow is mentioned as a major partner when channels of communication were established. Despite its significance in the organization’s history, the role of ESA in bridging Eastern and Western Europe at this time has still not been fully appreciated.

Nowadays, in a retrospective view, ESA lists European astronauts who have been to space, naming the Eastern Interkosmos ones and the Western ESA ones in chronological order, without highlighting the Eastern or Western outer space institutions to which they belonged.<sup>10</sup> It is mentioned that the French “spationaute”<sup>11</sup> Jean-Loup Chrétien participated in the Soyuz T-6 Salyut 7 mission from 24 June 1982 to 2 July 1982, but it is unmentioned that this was a spaceflight launched by the Soviet Union through the Interkosmos organization; instead, the institutional affiliation indicates he was part of CNES, the Centre Nationale d’Études Spatiales.

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9 And Madders continues: “But ESA’s *procedure* for undertaking external relations (i.e. within Europe and internationally) and its promotional role were addressed at the first Council meeting at ministerial level, in resolution ESA/C-M/Res. 4 of 15 February 1977 (“On the Agency and Its External Relations”).” (Madders 1997: 416).

10 <[https://www.esa.int/Science\\_Exploration/Human\\_and\\_Robotic\\_Exploration/Astronauts/European\\_astronauts\\_in\\_space](https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Human_and_Robotic_Exploration/Astronauts/European_astronauts_in_space)> (accessed 17 March 2024).

11 The term ‘cosmonaut’ was used in the Eastern world, ‘astronaut’ in the Western world; ‘spationaute’ is the French term. The different terms all have their own ideological associations.

## 6 The Cold War narrative and the Centre Nationale d'Études Spatiales (CNES)

Still embedded in the well-known Cold War narrative of competition between the two superpowers, all the literature on European space issues (Madders 1997; Krige and Russo 1994) applies its oversimplified dualistic perspective to the history of space research, satellite technology, and other outer space-related issues.

The narrative is driven by two opposing positions. The first can be called the military view, which references the past and the beginnings of rocket technology as derived from the German V2 Nazi rockets. The second is a kind of counternarrative of pacifistic hope and allusions to ending the Cold War. It counterbalances the martial first steps and emphasizes the later evolution of Europe's space efforts. Significantly, each side claims to be advocating peace over military competition. Krige and Russo start unfolding the narrative of superpower competition before the Second World War is even over: "The last convoy of V2s left Nordhausen for Anvers and New Orleans under the nose of the Soviet troops on 31 May 1945" (Krige and Russo 1994: 6). Proud of the fact that the US was the first to "plunder" the Nazi technologies and to benefit the most from them ("The United States was not the only country to benefit from Nazi rocketry, but it captured the richest prizes." [Krige and Russo 1994: 6]), they assert the peaceful intentions of the US and give this as the reason why the US lost the space race.

The two superpowers took very different policy decisions on satellite deployment. The Soviet Union unhesitatingly decided to use a military launcher for the scientific mission envisaged in the IGY [the International Geophysical Year] framework. The United States reasoned differently. The Eisenhower administration wanted to stress the scientific image of the venture, . . . [ . . . ] This became project Vanguard, and it was intended to put the USA's first satellite into space, all the while preserving its non-military image. It was a tactical choice for which the Eisenhower administration was to pay heavily. (Krige and Russo 1994: 8)

What I want to stress is not so much the national side-taking in this paragraph as the way it argues that science was a pretext for the subsequent pursuit of military development – and maintains this as the main constituent in the narrative. The quote continues to undermine the peaceful image by revealing: "The Eisenhower administration wanted to stress the scientific image of the venture, partly because they wanted to use their participation in the IGY to establish the freedom of space for peaceful purposes before probing the Soviets' reaction to military reconnaissance satellites" (Krige and Russo 1994: 8).

What is commonly known as the "space race," the competition between the US and the USSR, can also be described as a multinational space effort which finally saw a joint Soviet–American space initiative of détente, the ASTP (Apollo–

Soyuz Test Program). Technical discussion between the American and the Soviet space agencies had already begun in 1970. In May 1972, the US president Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev had agreed in Moscow “to send American and Soviet spacemen on a historic joint Earth-orbiting flight in 1975” (Burgess and Rex 2009: 310).

A strong current in the narrative – neutralizing and nourishing the universal claim to have non-geostrategic power goals (“outer space belongs to no one”) – is science development. Gaining scientific knowledge via satellite is a goal from the outset.

While the Soviet Union and the United States have undertaken the conquest of extra-terrestrial space, the European states feel little affected by this new frontier, which seems to be devoted solely to science and which seems a gimmick in the media competition that has accompanied the Cold War. Without being much more convinced of the future of space applications, the French government of President Charles de Gaulle wants to avoid leaving the USSR and the United States with a monopoly on the techniques for producing satellites [Fr.: “satelliteisation”]. Until now, French research undertaken in the field of rocket engines has been conducted in a military framework using technologies more or less derived from the German V2 missile experiment. As part of the national research and technology effort, it has been decided to create a civilian entity that will devote its activities to the scientific exploration and use of space.<sup>12</sup>

The introductory lines, presenting the French CNES (Centre Nationale d’Études Spatiales) as the driving force behind the European space program, generate the same narrative element: competition between the two superpowers that is held to explain the advancement of the world, the evolution of science. The military beginning is set aside, future-oriented science is set as the main goal, and for the sake of competition Europe joins in this space race and competition. The turn from military to scientific is established by the creation of CNES. The above quotation is followed by a sentence lamenting that the main goal is industrial and commercial development, even at the very beginning, so contradicting the scientific claim.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. <<https://www.techno-science.net/glossaire-definition/Histoire-du-Centre-national-d-etudes-spatiales-1961-1981.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024), quote translated by the author.

## 7 Outer space and satellite technology cooperation between the Soviet Union and France in the sixties

The following presentation and analysis is based on files stored in the French National Archives, Archives nationales, files 19771409/89–19771409/90,<sup>13</sup> which report on the meeting of the “2ième Grande commission franco-soviétique Moscou Janvier 1968” – the minutes of the second session of the Franco-Soviet Permanent Joint Committee (Commission mixte permanente franco-sovietique: Procès-verbal de la deuxième session).

The permanent Franco-Soviet Committee, established after a Franco-Soviet declaration signed on 30 June 1966 to foster scientific, economic, and technological cooperation, held its second meeting in Moscow from 8 to 11 January 1968 to discuss three prominent topics:<sup>14</sup>

- a) nuclear energy
- b) exploration and use of outer space for peaceful means
- c) color television

The report on the implementation of the agreement on scientific, economic, and technological cooperation by the “petite commission” [small committee] sheds light on the activities in 1968 and stresses that the identification of fields and projects for possible cooperation has ended and that the most promising cooperation projects are ready to be put into action. Economic information exchange had started, along with patent and license exchanges and meteorological cooperation. Longer-term economic cooperation was planned. The report on Franco-Soviet commercial and economic exchange showed a good balance sheet of goods exchanged between 1965 and 1969, which was intended to increase in the next five years, especially in the field of industrial machines and technical equipment. The present analysis sets aside the implementation of the agreement on nuclear energy, considering instead those on the exploration of outer space for useful purposes and color television because they both rely on satellite technology.

The Franco-Soviet Chamber of Commerce, which included 70 Soviet and 182 French foreign trade companies, had its headquarters in Paris and successfully

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<sup>13</sup> I am very grateful to Tobias Nanz, who provided me with insights and references here.

<sup>14</sup> The meeting was headed under the chairmanship of Mr. Kirilline, vice-president of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and chairman of the State Committee for Science and Technology. The French delegation was chaired by Mr. Michel Debré, Minister of Economy and Finance. Both sides were accompanied by high-ranking committees.

opened a branch in Moscow. It provided both information and organizational support for commercial activities involving Russia and France – this was also to the benefit of the working groups that had been set up. The second file holds out at its end the prospect of an airspace agreement for the Paris meeting in October 1968 as a brilliant finale.

In a communiqué, the report of the “large committee,” success stories were announced in a political-cant speech on increasing trade. The communiqué was preceded by a listing of all the high-ranking representatives of state institutions for research, trade, color television, and atomic energy on the French side and followed by a listing of all the high-ranking representatives of state institutions for research, trade, and atomic energy on the Soviet side. The somewhat more detailed report on the above-mentioned successful cooperation in geophysics and meteorology also highlighted satellite technology. The *Molnya 1* satellite, it was announced, would transmit experimental color television broadcasts between Paris and Moscow. Space research was seen as the most promising area of cooperation. In the field of atomic energy, joint experiments with the world’s most powerful particle accelerator (76 G.E.V.) were agreed upon (and subsequently carried out), and color television had seen joint simultaneous transmissions of broadcasts.

Files 19771409/89–19771409/90 – “Première Session de *Commission mixte permanente franco-soviétique*” – contain a memorandum from the French Ministry of Finance and Economy’s Department of Foreign Trade Relations for the Minister. It is the report on the first session of the *Commission mixte permanente franco-soviétique* from 26 January to 31 January 1967, in addition to the previous minutes. According to Mr. Kirilline, chairman of the committee, the further development of relations between Russia and France was “a stable pillar in the foreign policy of the USSR.”<sup>15</sup>

In the field of satellite technology, more far-reaching cooperation and projects were envisioned, but in view of the technical and financial problems, the working group was to limit itself to carrying out feasibility studies for launching a French satellite using a Soviet launcher. The “celestial telecommunication” working group conceived of a collaboration that was realized one year later. A clear exchange of technical details for the launcher and the satellite, and of French measuring equipment for installation in Soviet satellites, is evidenced only by the criticism that correspondence between the French and Soviet experts had not been fast enough. The Soviet Union had been able to come up with great advances in celestial telecommunication with black-and-white television – not only image transmission but also

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15 “Une ligne stable de la politique extérieure de l’URSS.”

successful simultaneous sound transmission. The transmission of color television according to the same principle was promised.

Alongside the technological success of the engineers and technicians, uncertainty about the bureaucratic responsibilities of the large and the small committee was mentioned, indirectly revealing that the large committee was the supervisory and controlling authority for the small one. Furthermore, the files contain data sheets on the development of color television. The “Troisième Session de la *Grande Commission franco-soviétique*” brought a series of success stories. The success stories, written almost in telegram-style in November 1968, related first and foremost to the extremely successful color television, and second to satellite technology. A joint observation program by means of simultaneous satellite photography had been established, i.e., both French and Soviet satellite images had been instantaneously merged in a terrestrial observation station and evaluated at the same time. The committee regretted that no further development of satellite technology could take place, as this would have exceeded the competencies of the French national space agency and would have required government intervention. The Inter-sputnik telecommunication system, which France and Russia would have liked, was blocked by the US when it refused to renew the Intelsat agreement.

For 1969, a further joint satellite imagery observation was scheduled. The archival documents prove that the French experts had access to Soviet ground stations (including Hayes Island), even in the special restricted zones, and that they could use Soviet equipment, airplanes included (to observe sodium clouds). Especially with regard to Cold War culture, these zones attracted considerable attention in public discourse. The most famous example, the internationally known movie *Stalker* by Andrei Tarkovsky,<sup>16</sup> shows the concept of a territory in which regulations such as physical rules as well as juridical regulations are set aside. It is presumably a former, now abandoned, military zone where the rule of law is suspended, and not-yet discovered or known rules and procedures apply, with mythical or at least irrational events happening. This is somehow connected with nuclear tests and atomic threats – in fictional movies and literature, nebulous engulfed “non-territories” took on the quality of Foucauldian heterotopias,<sup>17</sup> with the underlying hope of subverting the stabilizing power and the normal societal order in order to give space to the excluded minoritarian. In reality, these were

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Andrei Tarkovsky: *Stalker*, USSR 1979, Mosfilm production, a film by Andrei Tarkovsky.

<sup>17</sup> Heterotopias are “real places, effective places drawn into the institution of society, counterplacements or abutments, as it were, actually realised utopias in which the real places within culture are at once represented, contested and turned, places outside all places, as it were, however they can actually be located.” (Foucault 1986: 24).

zones that were silenced in public discourse but which the Russians fatefully knew to be actually dead zones, more a no-man's-land than a heterotopia.

The limits of this cooperative and effective network of experts were highlighted by the unrealized intergovernmental agreement on the Intersputnik telecommunication system, which was thwarted because the US would not agree to a renewal of Intelsat.

Further, the documents give evidence that the Soviets and the French had installed and made jointly accessible tracking cameras on the Kerguelen Islands and the Guyana launch base. The Soviet participants had wished to undertake joint geodesic research, but the French members had withdrawn from this for financial reasons. A well-documented and well-argued dossier had had to be submitted, and the project had had to be approved by the French prime minister, who was in charge of scientific research and nuclear and outer space issues.

Reading between the lines, one can see that although this is an internal French national report addressed to French authorities and state bodies, the Soviets seem to dominate it due to their much higher financial stake and wider scope of interests, e.g., in meteorological research. In this latter domain (meteorology), the French relied on Russian expertise. The Soviets not only had a larger financial stake but also, importantly, contributed more manpower and technical equipment. With regard to the financial aspect, it was reported that the Soviets were limited when it came to covering the costs of paying in foreign currency, whereas none of the costs on Soviet territory represented an obstacle for the French or the Soviets. This implicit knowledge of the state-centeredness of research and outer space issues, along with the economic and societal order in social-realist countries, was taken into account as a precondition for cooperation. However, another meeting was scheduled for April 1969 in Moscow.

The Soviets wished to install a listening/monitoring station, run by Soviet equipment and staff in French Guyana, a plan that somehow disappeared. To what ends this monitoring station would have been run remains as unclear as the joint nature of such an enterprise.

All this found its reflection less in the cultural Cold War and more in Cold War cultural practices. The *Sputnik* launch, which provoked not so much a shock as enthusiasm all over the world, especially among young people and adolescents, led to the founding of many civilian initiatives – on the Eastern side and the Western side of the Iron Curtain (cf. Wagner 2019; Hartmann 2009; Buthmann 2012).

## 8 Peaceful space research and use

Three working groups were set up in October 1966 to advance scientific space research: for meteorological purposes, for aeronomy, and for satellite telecommunications. The main goal was to launch a French satellite, called *Roseau*, using a Soviet rocket, into a high Earth orbit more than 100.000 km from Earth. Scientific experiments were to be carried out, essentially aimed at exploring the ionosphere, the magnetosphere, and interstellar space. Further collaborations were agreed upon. Soviet probe-launch vehicles were to be equipped with French measuring instruments, and the possibility of launching vehicles from each other's territory was agreed. In view of the technological possibility of reconversion, i.e. the conversion of probe launchers back into (nuclear) missiles, this is extremely remarkable and testifies to a policy of détente and great trust between the Soviet Union and France.

With regard to satellite telecommunications, the location data of the ground stations were exchanged, as well as those of the satellites in orbit themselves. Mutual data transmission was also agreed upon, as were telephone communications and television broadcasts. This remarkable track record, which paid off for both sides, was to be continued with another meeting of the working groups in February 1968.

Burgess and Vis argue in their history of Interkosmos that it was disputes between Germany and France over internal financial issues and prestige within ESA that led to an intensification of Franco-Soviet cooperation.<sup>18</sup> The case of Jean-Loup Chrétien and Patrick Baudry, the two French finalists (after a series of selection processes) in the Interkosmos program, makes clear the full extent of the knock-on effects of Franco-Soviet cooperation. Not only did these two astronauts work for years at the space training center near Moscow; they also learned Russian, the working language. They lived near Moscow (Baudry with family), were surrounded by a large staff, and gained insight into the Soviet Union's level of technological development and equipment. The transfer of civilian technological knowledge (similar to that of military knowledge), the numerous diplomatic relations, the institutional entanglements – all this is unrecognized in the often condensed and deliberately anecdotal reporting about the one Frenchman who was in space with the Soviet team. What is not appreciated is the significance of cross-system cooperation and its political consequences, which can only be understood

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<sup>18</sup> Burgess, Colin and Bert Vis (2016) *Interkosmos. The Eastern Bloc's Early Space Program* (New York et al.: Springer International Publishing), especially: Chap. 1: History and development of the Interkosmos program; Chap. 11: Beyond Interkosmos: Soyuz T-6.

in the coexistence of competition and scientific cooperation, anchored in higher-level values.

The cooperation between colleagues was accompanied by friendship between the people – the astronauts and the engineers – who on the one hand connected on a human level but on the other hand were always representatives of institutions and part of a network of actors that circulated knowledge, technology, and ideals globally. In the following quotation, it becomes particularly clear how much materiality and immateriality flowed indistinguishably into one another. Thus, the human actors receded behind a self-executing program that executed a program through inscription (Latour). And this intentionality went far beyond the politically acknowledged cooperation.

A large portion of this program [the joint training program of French and Soviet scientists for the Soyuz T-6 mission] was devoted to research into the effects of weightlessness on human organisms. [ . . . ] In the Posture experiments the cosmonauts also studied the interaction of human sense organs and motor systems. (Burgess and Vis 2016: 194)

What can be gleaned from this quotation is not only the technological determination that “executes” the future mission of world peace beyond human will, but also the almost self-executing program of the object–human relationship. This human–machine interaction gave rise to a new entity and form of communication, in other words, the procedural sign chains of actor-network theory show the course of the world (history) unfolding beyond the scope of intentionality.

## 9 Color television and its political implications

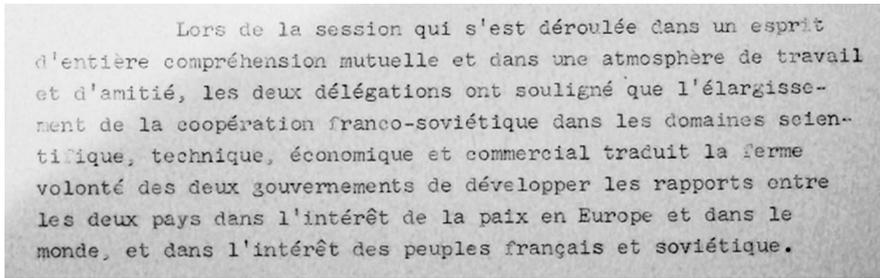
An important practical result of the above-mentioned agreement was that SECAM III, the joint Franco-Soviet TV system, was successfully put into operation in both countries on 1 October 1967. A continued industrial implementation of the joint color TV system in both countries as well as other countries was underway. This cooperation was very productive in the field of cathode-ray tubes, and new French industries were to be launched to implement the Soviet cathode-ray tube developments. An extension of the cooperation was agreed upon for February 1968 (meeting in France) and March 1968 (meeting in Moscow). It was recommended to the committee that a procedure be set up for the direct exchange of industrialists and technicians in order to put SECAM into operation as quickly as possible and as far as possible in other countries. This possibility for experts to contact each other, which amounts to networking and establishing communication channels between technicians, engineers, and scientists independently of official policy, should not be

underestimated. The analyzed files point to the presence of “backchannel communication in expert networks.” This happened analogously to the nuclear energy sector, where excellent contacts between French and Russian experts had been established, which finds special mention in the documents kept under lock and key at the time. Independently of these files, Kai-Henrik Barth (2006) has presented evidence of backchannel communication between scientists that changed national policy in a core domain of national security: the verification of nuclear test bans.

Surprisingly, the socialist countries of Eastern Europe are only mentioned – at a clear distance – with “*le cas particulier*,” the special case (p. 9 of the file), that the French committee had agreed to investigate. How little a direct connection between France and its Eastern European neighbors was conceived of here, let alone already in place or to be established in the near future, is more than remarkable in view of the fact that many Romanian and Polish dissident intellectuals were in France and certainly found an audience there. It is also astonishing because the French Communist Party played a considerable role in French political life and maintained links not only, albeit primarily, with the Soviet Union, but also with a number of other Eastern European states. Sudhir Hazareesingh, for example, demonstrates the links of the French Communist Party with the Soviet Union and argues that “the party’s return to the traditional canons of pro-Soviet internationalism after 1980 was rejected by Communist intellectuals” (Hazareesingh 2011: 1). The concept of “Eurocommunism” in particular was well known at this time: “party intellectuals were strongly committed to this idea, despite its lack of substance in policy terms” (Hazareesingh 2011: 1).

My conclusions from the parallelism of the reports of the large and small committees are a) that the operational authority lay with the small committee and b) that the report of the small committee was approved by, and primarily addressed to, the large committee, which was staffed with high-ranking politicians and state representatives. The linguistic style of what I conclude to be an expurgated record gives a hint of the many preliminary versions of this version of the report. The files also allow us to conclude that many circles of actors were involved, that there were strong hierarchical chains of command on both sides, but that there was an orientation towards higher values too, as expressed in file 19771409/90 (see Fig. 1):

During the session, which took place in a spirit of full mutual understanding and in an atmosphere of work and friendship, the two delegations stressed that the expansion of Franco-Soviet cooperation in the scientific, technological, economic, and commercial fields reflects the firm will of the two governments to develop relations between the two countries in the interest of peace in Europe and in the world, and in the interest of the French and Soviet peoples [translation by HW].



**Fig. 1:** Photography of the minutes by Tobias Nanz. Archives Nationales, Paris/Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. Series: France. Ministère de l'Industrie. Direction des industries métallurgiques, mécaniques et électriques (1940–1986). Reference Code: 19771409/90.

A treaty agreement was, the report added, to be prepared for the coming seventh meeting and then brought forward for signature.

## 10 Eastern/Western European Television

Beutelschmidt (2017a) proves how neglected research on inter- and transnational telecommunication exchange was and still is, despite the fact that the Russian and other Eastern European archives opened up in 1990 (Beutelschmidt 2017b). The old narrative of the two superblocs confronting each other is maintained, too. Taking into account political framing, Beutelschmidt explores ideological media narratives, as well as cultural impact, the OIRT (Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision),<sup>19</sup> the Intervision distribution network,<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> OIRT is the International Radio and Television Organisation, prior to 1960 the International Broadcasting Organization (IBO)/Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion (OIR). The OIRT was the umbrella organization for the radio and television stations of Central and Eastern Europe, with its headquarters in Prague. It was founded on 28 June 1946 in Brussels. The task of OIRT was the mutual exchange of information on programming and the promotion of technological development, as well as the exchange of programs among members and with Eurovision via Intervision. In 1966, there were twenty-four OIRT members, thirteen of whom also participated in Intervision. The broadcasters of the neutral states Austria (ORF) and Finland (YLE) were members of both the Western EBU (Eurovision) and the Eastern OIRT (YLE), or at least participated in Intervision (ORF).

<sup>20</sup> Intervision was an institution founded in 1960 by the Organisation Internationale de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision (OIRT) for the exchange of television programs between the then-Eastern bloc countries and with Eurovision.

and Intersputnik<sup>21</sup> in detail decade by decade. Not only is light shed on international organizations; multilateral media relationships, the technical side of infrastructure, and connectedness via broadcasting technology, cable, and satellite are – and this is a great credit to Beutelschmidt – highlighted too. The entanglement that Beutelschmidt shows for the OIRT is equally valid for the EBU (European Broadcasting Union)<sup>22</sup> and ESA, due to its technical nature, but goes far beyond a technological network:

[P]rogramming transfer as practiced by East German television can be described as a shifting of the institution between disparate logics of politics and cultural policy and intrinsic dynamics of the medium. [ . . . ] However, a more discriminating look at international programming transfer shows that the interrelations between the rival camps expanded continually after the arrival of television in the 1950s, and that the relations between the media institutions in different countries never broke off even at high points of East–West confrontation. They were ‘allied enemies.’ (Beutelschmidt 2014: 60)

Beutelschmidt’s study, which presents “the finding that extensive cooperation developed and continued between the socialist and capitalist blocs in spite of the political reality of East–West confrontation” (Beutelschmidt 2014: 61), is located in “Cold War media culture,” a recently emerging research field that stresses peaceful coexistence after 1970. The multilateral connections established by OIRT and UER/EBU, a lot of bilateral relationships between Eastern and Western European broadcasting companies, and the encounters at TV festivals and fairs as interface or communication spaces are largely unexplored. I completely agree with the call to conceptualize a “Europe of the media” [Europa der Medien], an expression coined by Hans Heinz Fabris in 1994 (see Fabris 1994). As for the OIRT, I can reaffirm that the dialectics of globalization and regionalization defined ESA and its predecessor organizations. An in-depth focus on different European countries and periods (often decades) can be found in recent research developments.

From 1970 onward, a “hunger for programming” and a shift towards more entertainment were the reasons for processes that unfolded similarly in East and West

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21 Intersputnik is an international satellite organization and was founded on 15 November 1971 in Moscow by the nine socialist states of the time. Its task was and is the development and joint use of news satellites. The counterpart on the Western side was Intelsat.

22 The European Broadcasting Union (EBU)/Union Européenne de Radio-Télévision (UER) is an association of television and radio broadcasters in countries in Europe, North Africa, and the Near East, based in Geneva. The European Broadcasting Union was founded on 12 February 1950 with the aim of establishing a network for the exchange of news films. Furthermore, the EBU aims to promote and standardize technical developments in the radio and television sector. Founding members were twenty-three broadcasters from Europe and the Mediterranean region. In 1993, the EBU merged with its counterpart, the OIRT.

(deploring “uniformity and schematism” in East and West) related to media (besides the political reason of the mutual recognition of the two German states, the change from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971, and many other tokens of the politics of détente like “Der kleine Grenzverkehr” of 1972).<sup>23</sup> Besides this, more and more, “a shift is observable over time from confrontational patterns of communication towards a certain rapprochement and openness to dialogue” (Beutelschmidt 2014: 67).

Following European infrastructure research, the dynamics between the various actors in the field must be considered. Sometimes it must be recognized that legal framing regulated the work of the technological expert networks; sometimes ideological battles among politicians took precedence over technology, which was shaped by regulations and technological infrastructures. Very often, the technological expert networks and their effective backchannel communication remained unnoticed and operated successfully. The extent to which Europe was built on infrastructural and technological expertise, however, is often overlooked (cf. Kohlrausch and Trischler 2014). “Media diplomacy,”<sup>24</sup> conceived in terms of the media as ambassadors and diplomats, focuses on international organizations, how they operate (shaped by juridical frames, namely, regulations and technological infrastructures), and the way they govern nation-states’ intergovernmental exchange. Thus, it can be observed that utopian technological visions for data transmission initiated the process of using satellite technology for telecommunication transmission. Initially pursuing the aim of a global means for news exchange, the idea of world broadcasting services using relay stations in outer space was mooted as early as 1945 by the Briton Arthur C. Clarke (Beutelschmidt 2017c: 256). It took twelve years to see the launch of the Russian satellite *Sputnik I* on 4 October 1957, and the American *Explorer I* to actually realize the idea. Beyond the well-known narrative of the “space race,” international evidence shows that the ITU (International Telecommunication Union)<sup>25</sup> established the technical basis during a confer-

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23 “Der kleine Grenzverkehr” was an agreement for crossing the border – between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic ratified in 1972. The border, formerly hermetically sealed, became permeable.

24 Media diplomacy is characterized as the use of media by a government for public diplomacy. Later on, diplomacy was exposed to the media and public opinion. Here, media diplomacy is not meant as the use of the media as a means for diplomacy but instead considers the media as mediating actors in diplomacy.

25 ITU/UIT, the International Telecommunication Union/Union internationale de télécommunications, founded in 1865 and based in Geneva, is a specialized agency of the United Nations and the only organization under international law that officially deals with technical aspects of telecommunication worldwide. The objectives of the ITU are to coordinate and promote international cooperation in communication by international regulations for the use of frequencies, international assignment and registration of transmitting and receiving frequencies, coordination of the

ence in 1959. It was mandatory for research on space issues to be limited to peaceful purposes in countries of the European Community (due to restrictions still resulting from the Second World War). And it was part and parcel of the main purpose of international organizations (political bodies) and the self-perception of Russia “to serve the exchange between peoples and to aim for peace” (Joachim 1960: 37, following Beutelschmidt 2017c: 257). After an impressive series of successes in outer space media events by the Soviet Union, telecommunication transmission, more precisely television transmission, was first accomplished with the satellites *Echo 1* (American, launched by NASA) in August 1960 and *Telestار 1* in 1962. These technological experiments were accelerated by a media event in the Global North: the welcome given to Yuri Gagarin, first cosmonaut/astronaut (the choice of the term depends on where one has been raised – locally and ideologically) on Red Square in Moscow in 1961. The most interesting part of this story is not the spectacular fact that television images and sound had been transferred from Moscow to everywhere in the Global North, but rather the technological backbone channeling: by terrestrial cable from Moscow via Leningrad to Helsinki,<sup>26</sup> and then on to Prokkala, south Finland, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Hamburg in the Western European Eurovision network, and then to East Berlin, where the voyage continued to the socialist countries in the Eastern European Intervision network. The first transatlantic television transmission from the United States to Europe took place in 1963. Other intercontinental television bridges followed (e.g. Europe–Asia). Pictures of the Olympic Games in 1964 were distributed in the Eurovision and Intervision networks.

## 11 Conclusion

The spacecraft *Soyuz* can be classified as a medium not only in the sense that it is in between Earth and orbit, in between atmosphere and universe, in between air and airlessness,<sup>27</sup> in between gravity and weightlessness. *Soyuz* – and the spacecraft *Apollo* – are also media in the sense of materialized outcomes of acts of communication with a highly symbolic value, signifying global communication. They are carriers of communication satellites, speech-act-driven communicative en-

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development of telecommunications equipment, and coordination of efforts to deal with interference in international radio communication.

<sup>26</sup> Finland was part of the Eastern union, Intervision, as well as of the Western union, Eurovision, and it had its own, the Northern Vision Union, whereas Yugoslavia, an Eastern European country of the “Third Europe,” was part of the Western European Eurovision network.

<sup>27</sup> Air as medium: in antiquity the first reflections on whether air is a medium or not, carrying sound waves and light rays, but in itself invisible and contentless, can be found in Aristotle.

counters in the divided world, and they carry messages of peace-making and Earth-preserving environmental care for our globe. Beyond that, they carried back media in a more conventional sense: “to send back down to Earth the results of their experiments, including exposed film, logbooks, tape cassettes, biological and medical samples, and materials produced in the furnaces.”<sup>28</sup>

The history of views of the Earth began as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Thielmann 2009) with visual sensations. Footage filmed with 16 mm cameras from airplanes already exposed the vulnerability of the planet. Later on, the pictures from *Apollo 11* provided images of the entire globe that acquired iconic status. Bringing back exposed film and tape meant that there were a variety of media practices for recording, for documenting, for transmitting the sights and sounds of outer space. The medialization of the visually depicted/sound-recorded world as documents and legacy also serves as a heritage for future generations. These media practices gave rise to media experts, and the exchange of sounds and images between Western and Eastern programs via satellite found a counterpart in depicting and describing them. These descriptions became so famous that they were transformed into inscriptions. Inscriptions as normative behavior-influencing devices transmitted instructions for a cautious preservation of the globe overcoming the Cold War threat. But the ambiguity remains, because even in this cooperation “there was still an undeniable aura of distrust, secrecy and distortion going on behind the scenes” (Burgess and Hall 2009: 312).

In this article, the Franco-Soviet cooperation in satellite technology in the sixties has been presented with reference to files from the National Archives of France, the minutes of the Franco-Soviet Permanent Joint Committee, and been analyzed and interpreted within the political and ideological context of the period and against the broader background of long-lasting cultural and societal currents, namely, popular civilian as well as elitist scientific (intelligentsia) space enthusiasm and the cultural Cold War (but also Cold War cultures). Alongside this, the article has deduced unnamed implicit concepts of Europe. Soviet scientists, torn between international scientific aspirations, global universalistic values, and their own rootedness in Soviet politics and socialist policy, experienced seemingly paradoxical allegiances to the supranational Soviet (microlevel) and the global (macrolevel). Europe, as the mesolevel that otherwise tends to be overlooked, managed to avoid one-sided allegiances and the predominance of ideological-political factors when it came to the exploration and use of outer space for peaceful means and the domain of telecommunication satellites. Specifically, the ex-

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<sup>28</sup> Unaccredited article (1971) “Targets for Soviet space research,” in *New Science and Science Journal*, 6, 308–310, quoted in: Burgess and Vis 2016: 2.

change of radio and television channels and programs, as well as the cross-cutting technology of the period, the SECAM color television system, brought the independent development of Europe as a pan-European alliance, encompassing both Eastern and Western European states. This is evident on the one hand in cross-system cooperation and cultural encounters. On the other hand, even more importantly, the old narrative of the two competing superpowers was dismantled and the emergence of Europe was highlighted. European telecommunications institutions (EBU, OIRT), their networks (Intervision, Eurovision), and the European space institutions (ELDO, ESRA, ESA) emerged and became established in networks and infrastructures, the latter englobing institutions, discourses, and technology.<sup>29</sup> As science is grounded in the national and the international, Europe in this period, understood predominantly but not exclusively as Eastern and Western Europe, is grounded in globalization and regionalization.

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<sup>29</sup> In infrastructure research these are referred to respectively as the material level, the institutional level, and the discourse level; cf., e.g. Alexander Badenoch; Andreas Fickers, and Christian-Henrich Franke (eds.) (2013) *Airy curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting the Cold War* (Baden-Baden: Nomos), especially the chapter: Broadcasting and the Cold War: some preliminary results.

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- Fig. 1** Photography of the minutes by Tobias Nanz. Archives Nationales, Paris/Pierrefitte-sur-Seine. Series: France. Ministère de l’Industrie. Direction des industries métallurgiques, mécaniques et électriques (1940–1986). Reference Code: 19771409/90



Johannes Pause

# Stories of Rescue and Sacrifice

Cold War Cinema and the Arctic Imaginary

## 1 Attacking the arctic imaginary

On August 2, 2007, a Russian research team installed the national flag of the Russian Federation in the immediate vicinity of the North Pole. Unlike historical explorers such as Robert Edwin Peary (1909), Ivan Papanin (1937), or Walter William Herbert (1969), however, who had reached the same destination by air or over the ice, the Arktika 2007 expedition did not claim the geographical location per se for its own country, only the seabed: the flag was placed at a depth of 4,261 meters on the floor of the Arctic Ocean. The photos of this unusual land grab triggered strong protests from all around the world and provoked comparisons with the early days of colonialism. However, the participants of the expedition only felt spurred on by this: “The Arctic has always been Russian,” claimed Artur Chilingarov, one of the members of the expedition, in an interview (Breyfogle and Dunifon 2012).

The undersea flag controversy not only underlines the increasing economic importance of the Arctic, which is also demonstrated, for example, by China’s recent vision of a “Polar Silk Road” (Lim 2018). It is also a reminder that the Arctic Ocean has been contested since the Cold War, especially below the surface of the eternal ice. And it heralds the beginning of a new Cold War, in which this Arctic Ocean – as in the old Cold War – is of special strategic importance. In fact, the United States Army (2021) has already declared the reassertion of “Arctic dominance” to be a new priority. Above all, however, the placement of the flag on the Arctic seabed makes visible a political apportioning of the very last corner of the Arctic space.

This is remarkable insofar as the Arctic is still often staged in the popular imagination as a terra incognita, an endless expanse in which people necessarily lose their bearings. In reality, however, the Arctic is not only geographically surveyed, politically divided, and subject to an international administration represented mainly by the collaborative work of the Arctic Council. It is also home to a large number of people, an industrially developed resource reservoir, and – as a result of climate change – a political project for the future (Lahn and Emmerson 2012). The Arctic is for the most part divided among the nations that form part of it, and it is crisscrossed by military, scientific, and economic infrastructures such as pipelines, weather and research stations, military camps, settlements, and air and shipping routes. The Russian expedition intervened in this Arctic order by

revitalizing the outdated, yet politically powerful, traditional narrative of discovery and conquest.

But even if the old image of the Arctic as empty space continues to have great influence, the broad economic, political, and military development of the northern polar region has gradually seeped into people's consciousness. While for a considerable time, the Arctic was regarded exclusively as a "surface to cross" (Steinberg et al. 2018: 6), today it has developed into something much more complex, even contradictory, in both the popular and the political imagination. The Arctic appears as a politically regulated space with shared governance, but also, as the Russian expedition shows, as a "terra nullius, an unclaimed but potentially claimable space beyond the normative regulations of international law, where individual states are free to exercise their expansionist tendency, whether claiming land, water, ice, or seabed" (Steinberg et al. 2018: 16). The Arctic is a strategic playground of global powers such as the US and Russia, but states such as Norway, Denmark, and Canada also play a decisive role here; furthermore, it is a space inhabited and claimed by indigenous peoples. The Arctic is a source of numerous resources, an archive of life and modern history (Frank and Jakobsen 2019), but also a place where climate change has a visible impact, "a space whose nature is pristine but endangered, and that therefore should be governed according to an ethic that transcends the prerogative (and the developmentalist ideals) of the sovereign state" (Steinberg et al. 2018: 17). Despite all this, the Arctic is for the most part still a hostile, distant, and cold place; yet at the same time, it is increasingly becoming a tourist destination that offers unique spectacles to customers willing to pay for them, such as ice hotels, overnight stays on icebreakers, or direct flights to the Northern Lights.

This proliferation of the Arctic imaginary can be traced back at least to the 1950s, and thus to the beginning of the Cold War. It is important to note, though, that an earlier, brief resurgence of interest in the 1930s, especially in the Soviet Union (McCannon 1998), was the last gasp of the scientific myth of the North Pole, which had long made it the preferred destination for voyages of discovery; this imaginary was finally put to rest after the Second World War (Müller 2022: 11). During the Cold War, the military development of the far north replaced the figure of the explorer with that of the pioneer: the aim was now the systematic exploitation and partial settlement of the Arctic region, the subjugation of its hostile nature. "Like a wagon trail in the Old West," intoned the narrator of the television documentary *The Story of Camp Century: The City under Ice* (US 1963), produced by the United States Army Signal Corps, in scenes showing special vehicles pulling up to a new research station built in the eternal ice. The goal of the explorers was no longer to traverse this territory but to settle in it, and research stations became the new paradigmatic site of the Arctic imaginary:

From the 1930s through the 1950s – the decades bracketing the second and third international polar years – research in the physical and biological environmental sciences of the Arctic increased dramatically. The heroic, expedition-based style of Arctic science, dominant in the first decades of the twentieth century, gave way to a systematic, long-term, strategic and largely state-funded model of research which increased both Arctic presence and the volume of research output. (Doel et. al. 2014: Abstract)

Alongside science, and in collaboration with it, military forces became central actors in the Arctic. While the Soviet Union built up its Northern Fleet on the heavily fortified Kola Peninsula, the US established the DEW Line, a series of radar stations that connected large parts of the “western” Arctic. The function of this line was to detect enemy aerial attacks at an early stage, since the shortest route for such an attack was across the Arctic. At the same time, the SOSUS system, a network of passive sonar stations, was able to identify movements in the depths of the ocean even over great distances (Vehlken 2018). Numerous other secret projects, most notably Project Iceworm, which aimed to install nuclear missiles in the perpetual ice of Greenland, were launched at great expense, and the Arctic Ocean was regularly crossed by aircraft and nuclear-powered submarines. The Arctic, permeated with an increasingly militarized presence, thus stood in striking contrast to Antarctica, which for a long time was imagined as a “continent of ‘science and peace’” (Leane 2020: 695).

As Anna Westerståhl Stenport has explained, the Arctic’s huge military significance promoted a new Arctic imaginary in which the idea of an infinite ice desert and the concept of a geopolitical playground overlapped:

The Arctic Ocean was the most militarized sea in the world. The ideas of the Arctic as empty, open to conquest and visualized as an object governed by preset rules of logic – like a chess game – through which one opponent could gain supremacy over the other, came to dominate the imaginary. Cold War interests in the Arctic maintain the East/West ideological and military power balance, with the empty space used as an equilibrium, and as a projection screen on which small countries disappear, as do all environmental considerations. The so-called empty, abstract ‘End of the World’ territory becomes a primary stabilizer of geopolitical tension; the perceptual/imagined blankness is invested with significant power precisely because of its apparent vacuity. (Stenport 2015: 162)

Following Stenport, this essay explores how Cold War film and cinema contributed to this new image of the Arctic. As the central medium of the popular imagination in the second half of the twentieth century, film does not simply provide visual representations of the increasing military, political, and scientific opening up and making available of Arctic space; rather, it creates narratives and iconographies in which traditional images of the Arctic are cited and solidified, as well as challenged and changed.

The popular imaginaries for our planet's two poles are of particular importance because these regions – unlike many other parts of the world – cannot be explored easily in person. What is known about the Arctic is, therefore, largely based on fictional products and documentary material, on narratives and images (Ebeling and Lund 2019). These imaginations became even more important during the Cold War, which has often been described as an imaginary war (Oakes 1994), but can perhaps better be captured as a “war against the imagination” (Grant and Ziemann 2016: 2). Since the 1950s, the permanent threat of nuclear war has led to a veritable political colonization of the imagination. In fact, the human imagination became a direct ideological battlefield to which a broad range of scientific and military research was devoted. A large number of Cold War films, from brainwashing fictions such as *The Manchurian Candidate* (US 1962, John Frankenheimer) to science-fiction thrillers such as *Dreamscape* (US 1984, Joseph Ruben), in which the global confrontation is fought out directly in the dreams of the American president, render the political significance of the imagination visible (Pause 2018).

However, the struggle over the human imagination is by no means necessarily a creative struggle; on the contrary, in many cases it consists precisely in preventing the development of new narratives that do justice to political reality. This also applies to the Arctic as a theater of the Cold War. The massive political changes to which this area was subjected in the twentieth century and that fundamentally altered its character stand in stark contrast to an astonishing continuity in popular fictions about the Arctic. Particularly in movies, the Arctic continues to appear as a largely unexplored area where even the bravest explorers regularly fail. Some of the most successful productions belong to the genre of the “fantastic voyage,” in which the Arctic – again following an older literary tradition that even goes back to antiquity (McGhee 2005: 23) – becomes a gateway to unknown or forgotten countries that remain completely disconnected from the “civilized world.” In *The Island at the Top of the World* (US 1974, Robert Stevenson), for example, it is Vikings that are found; in *Zemlya Sannikova* (“The Land of Sannikov,” USSR 1973, Albert S. Mkrtchyan, Leonid Popov), natives of the fictional Onkilon Inuit tribe are discovered by an Arctic expedition. Both Vikings and Inuit live in temperate climates close to a volcano, and both need to be rescued from a dictatorial, backward government regime. The US and the USSR are each staged as peacemakers here, while the Arctic itself appears as a desert of ice that hides forgotten lands, a continent tied to the past, not to the present or the future.

Scandinavian films, on the other hand, often focus on the defense of the Nordic region against foreign invaders. This is frequently the case in films about the Nordic Middle Ages, such as *Ofelaš* (“Pathfinder,” NOR 1987, Nils Gaup), but also in cinematic treatments of the Second World War. *Kampen om tungtvannet* (“Op-

eration Swallow: The Battle for Heavy Water,” NOR/F 1948, Jean Dréville, Titus Vibe-Müller) and *Ni liv* (“Nine Lives,” NOR 1957, Arne Skouen), both based on historical events, for example, present knowledge of the Arctic region and trust in inherited traditions as prerequisites for successful resistance operations against the Nazis. In these films, the Arctic is portrayed as a place that is inhospitable and hostile only to those who haven’t lived there all their lives. At the same time, the Arctic remains a timeless counter-space to civilization – a civilization, however, which is now portrayed as threatening and destructive. Other European films from the Cold War period, such as the two literary adaptations *Atómstöðin* (“The Atomic Station,” ISL 1984, Þorsteinn Jónsson) and *Flucht in den Norden* (“Flight North,” D/FIN 1987, Ingemo Engström), also focus on the traditional motif of the Arctic as an unspoiled, pristine, traditional reserve and retreat area, offering temporary protection from political turmoil, persecution, and war. Although these works invert some of the colonial narratives of US and Soviet cinema, the key characteristics of the Arctic space they invoke seem to be drawn from an internationally shared cultural imaginary.

Even films that deal directly with the Cold War tend to use traditional narratives. While the Arctic became an important theater of strategic submarine maneuvers during the Cold War, the brave submarine commanders in Cold War films such as *Ice Station Zebra* (US 1968, John Sturges) or *Hell and High Water* (US 1954, Samuel Fuller), for example, are descendants of the old Arctic explorers and venture under the eternal ice only exceptionally and at great risk (Pause 2020). In fact, the submarine can be seen as one of the essential “modernizers” of the Arctic. Due to the existence of a nuclear-powered submarine fleet, whose boats could operate for months under the eternal ice, the Arctic Ocean gained central importance for the global maritime strategy of the Cold War, as it allowed military maneuvers to be carried out in very close proximity to the enemy. Since the Soviet Union had stationed a large part of its military fleet directly in the Polar Sea, which only has access to the other oceans through the GIUK gap between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom, the strategic importance of the Arctic was obvious. American and, shortly afterwards, Soviet submarines were built to break through the polar ice without taking damage, a maneuver first carried out in 1959 by the USS *Skate* (cf. Calvert 1996), then in 1962 by the Soviet boat *Leninski Komsomol*. This maneuver was of central importance for the bastion strategy with which the USSR reacted to the superiority of the Western navies in the 1980s by concentrating on the defense of the Arctic Ocean as its central area of action. A submarine surfacing in the perpetual ice became an iconic image of the Cold War that was reproduced time and again in movies (Fig. 1). The iconography, however, presents the Arctic once again not as a strategic space but as an icy desert conquered by heroic pioneers.



**Fig. 1:** The illustration published by the US Defense Agency (1985: 90) shows a Soviet submarine firing a ballistic missile after breaking through the ice. A considerable number of submarine films reproduce this iconography.

Nevertheless, the popular imaginaries of the Arctic that circulated through television and cinema during the Cold War were not entirely nostalgic and old-fashioned. Slowly, the awareness developed that imagination itself was part of the global conflict, and that the way in which Arctic worlds were made visible or invisible to a broad population had political significance. This essay explores how the geostrategic role of the Arctic gradually seeped into cinematic fictions in the course of the Cold War. Thus, the narratives of conquest and rescue that had already been established in earlier centuries were countered by narratives in which the Arctic was increasingly portrayed as a political and military playground. Both types of narrative are linked by the fact that they constitute the Arctic space primarily through visibility and invisibility. While the narratives of rescue assume a fundamental invisibility of human activities in the boundless ice deserts of the Arctic, which can only ever be accessed vectorially, i.e., never in its entire surface, the new, more political type of narrative makes the relationship between visibility and invisibility the object of strategic, political, or military calculations. Those who are lost in the Arctic or have to sacrifice themselves have not lost a heroic battle against an environment hostile to humans anymore; they are meant to be seen as victims or sacrifices in a game of

intelligence and disinformation. The narratives of rescue are thus juxtaposed with narratives of sacrifice. As a consequence, the Cold War enters the Arctic space as a war of imaginations.

Both types of narrative, however, collide with the reality of life for those people who inhabit the Arctic and for whom the Arctic space primarily serves as the background of daily life. These are the inhabitants of the dominant Arctic “nations” that today form the members of the Arctic Council founded in 1996: Russia, Canada, the US, Norway, Denmark (Greenland), Finland, Iceland, and Sweden, as well as the Inuit as a separate “nation” without its own national territory. In this way, the Arctic can be described as a contact zone (Pratt 1991) of North American, Soviet, Western European, and indigenous peoples. Europe in particular occupies a precarious intermediate position here, as illustrated by the aforementioned Project Iceworm, in which the US attempted to install a large number of nuclear missiles in Greenland without even informing the Danish government (Petersen 2008), drawing attention instead to the Camp Century research station, which was used to deliberately obscure the actual nature of American research in the ice.

In the following discussion, I propose a systematization of Arctic cinema during the Cold War on the basis of the two dominant narratives mentioned above. My analytical focus lies on the specific spatial constructions in the films. How is the Arctic space opened up for the viewer? What role do political, military, or media representations of space, such as maps, play within the plot, and how do these relate to the medium of film itself? What is the relationship between the general image of the Arctic evoked in this way and its actual geostrategic significance? What do the cinematic imaginings of the Arctic make visible, or render invisible, and how is this relationship between visibility and invisibility reflected by the movies? By addressing these questions, the following investigation also searches for the specific counter-spaces that cinema evokes in order to question geopolitical mechanisms. As I will show, such counter-spaces repeatedly refer to Europe and the European states of the Arctic Circle as complex contact zones in the global conflict. And while European cinema has often also reproduced established narratives, in some cases it has proved to be an active interrogator of the established Arctic imaginary, confronting it not with mere counter-narratives but with complex explorations of a space that is formatted in many ways, both imaginatively and politically.

## 2 Rescue narratives

The Arctic looks back on a long history of discovery that is primarily tied to the paradigm of the expedition. The type of space associated with the expedition is a “smooth space” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 479) that is developed vectorially, i.e., through a horizontal movement that aims either to reach a specific location, such as the geographical North Pole, or to prove the possibility of crossing the Arctic, as in the case of the Northwest Passage. The fact that parts of the Arctic can be named and located, that glaciers, fjords, straits, islands, mountains, and geographical landmarks are marked on maps, does not change the fundamental experience of emptiness associated with the Arctic space. The geographical North Pole, for example, is indistinguishable from any other place in the eternal ice; in fact, it only really exists on the level of spatial representation (cf. Felsch 2010: 11). For this reason, the Arctic is also experienced as a frontier of human knowledge where the categories with which space is usually described become ineffective and unconvincing. In fact, the Arctic Ocean represents a space in which technological and scientific knowledge is constantly in tension with individual experience, but also with forms of poetic and aesthetic representation (Wolf 2013: 14). This borderline situation is at the heart of the stories of rescue that Cold War cinema continues to tell.

### 2.1 Stories of two expeditions

The stories of discovery told by Cold War cinema are usually about two expeditions: an original voyage of discovery that fails, and a second mission that has to be launched to rescue the members, or findings, of the first one. The famous early classic *S.O.S. Eisberg* (“S.O.S. Iceberg,” GER/US 1933), shot by the German director Arnold Franck in an English and a German version, provides the blueprint for these narratives, as the film is about a rescue mission that is itself unsuccessful and therefore has to be followed by further expeditions. As a rule, the pioneers of the Arctic always get lost, with the result that the goal of the expedition changes (Pause 2016): the discovery of mathematically calculated geographical locations soon cedes priority to the life-and-death decisions surrounding the expedition’s survival. The topos of rescue allows a dramatization of the empty space of the Arctic, which transforms it from a scientific object into a human space of action. At the same time, the narrative of rescue constitutes a human temporality: there is only a narrow time window between the event of the disaster and the intended rescue (Lehmann 2016: 33). The spatial and temporal monotony of the

Arctic is thus made human, and narratable, through the introduction of a spatial goal and a temporal horizon of urgency.

Rescue narratives were particularly popular in Soviet cinema, where they were supposed to express the moral superiority of the USSR over the West. In many films, Western missions fail because of their egoism and have to be saved by altruistic Soviet pioneers. In the case of the Arctic, however, it is mostly missions of the Soviet Union that need rescuing. In the Stalinist propaganda film *Alexander Popov* (USSR 1949, Gerbert Rappaport), for example, the value of Popov's inventions is only demonstrated when they can be used to rescue a Russian polar expedition. The first film adaptation of the popular novel *The Two Captains* (USSR 1955, Vladimir Vengerov) was particularly influential; in it, a lost Soviet Arctic expedition becomes the central fascination of the protagonist, who devotes his entire life to uncovering the reasons for its failure. As a student, pilot, and soldier, he collects clues that eventually lead not only to the recovery of the body of the leader of the lost expedition, but also to the identification and prosecution of a saboteur who was responsible for its failure. The Arctic borderland appears to be the core identity for this Soviet pioneer, who not only has to defend it against the German army during the Second World War, but who also has to protect the Soviet departure into a new world, which the expedition symbolizes, from betrayal and oblivion (cf. Frank 2010).

Rescue narratives presuppose the opposition between a civilized space and an empty, unmarked space that represents the frontier of civilization. The Arctic thus becomes a “region of proximate interaction among circumpolar territories” (Steinberg et al. 2018: 162) where only those who carry with them the principles of their state are ultimately able to survive. As the small communities of the expedition become mobile exclaves of a state, the space of the Arctic becomes a place of cultural as well as political self-encounters, and of self-discovery. The confrontation with external dangers is thus translated into an internal confrontation: in the vastness of the Arctic, it becomes clear who among the expedition participants is, for example, a true Soviet pioneer at heart and who is not.

This paradigm of self-encounter also applies to Western film and cinema. One influential example is *Men against the Arctic* (US 1955, Winston Hibler), one of the partially animated television documentaries produced by Walt Disney, partly in collaboration with the Pentagon, during the early Cold War period. Here, the plot centers on an icebreaker that is meant to deliver important material from the Greenland base of Thule to the Canadian research station of Camp Alert far to the north. The mission is thus to connect two locations in the Arctic already controlled by the US and its allies. Camp Alert is called “the end of the earth” in the film, and since the Arctic has no “beyond” here, it becomes the place where North American culture encounters itself.

Halfway there, the icebreaker is damaged and has to be rescued by another icebreaker, which in turn becomes frozen into the ice for several months. The men's only opponent seems to be nature itself – the film announces right at the beginning that the goal of all polar pioneers has always been to push the “frontier of the Arctic” further out. Like the “space race,” the “cold race” thus becomes a direct continuation of the conquest of the American continent, which was organized around the concept of the “frontier” (Seed 2005: 48). In the Disney production, this shifting of the frontier takes place through an expansion of transport networks, the establishment of routes through the eternal ice. Thus, even though the film refers to the context of the voyages of discovery in its first, animated images, a colonial paradigm is already at work in the presentation of the Arctic as a wasteland to be settled. At the same time, as in other Disney productions of the time (Nanz and Pause 2021), the context of the Cold War resonates subliminally, as the dangerous weather fronts that threaten the work of the polar explorers stand metaphorically for the “actual” political enemy: “The ‘enemy’ is nebulously configured as equivocal with ice and cold, thus presenting a verbal and visual conflation between the environment and larger geopolitical discourses mobilized in the films” (Stenport 2015: 166).

The concept of the rescue mission was also implemented in the 1955 US feature film *Top of the World* (Lewis R. Foster), which points more clearly to the context of the Cold War than Disney's documentary, since it explicitly describes the Arctic as a future battlefield of the superpowers. The attempt to build a weather station near the North Pole to better study the climatic conditions of the region fails, however, due to the fragility of the large ice floe on which it is built – and not because of a confrontation with the Soviets. Nothing is heard or seen of the Soviet Union here; so, once again, nature appears as the real adversary of the soldiers. The expeditions bring the men, as well as the people who follow their adventures by radio, closer together. In the end, they all understand their actual task and identity, which is always already shaped by the American state and its expansionary mission. The rescue narrative thus serves to connect the individual to the collective: it stages an encounter with oneself, not with the other, which leads to a reinforcement of one's own identity.

## 2.2 Imaginations of agency: Fantastic voyages

Even in movies about the military, such as *Top of the World*, references to the Cold War remained largely indirect in the US cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. This was especially true of fantasy films, which in these years famously deployed alien invasions or other outlandish threats in order to metaphorically address the pos-

sibility of a nuclear war. B movies like *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (US 1953, Eugène Lourié) identified the Arctic as a place of danger, but reversed the vectorial logic of the explorer film. The dinosaur from the Arctic that has come back to life here sets off on a journey towards New York, and the protagonists' task is to convince disbelieving military officers and scientists of the reality of the danger. The civilized world must now be saved from a spreading, invasive Arctic that threatens to turn back the progress that the US stands for, as the dinosaur represents, in the words of one of the characters of the movie – a paleontologist – a “world of countless yesterdays.” It is no coincidence that the backward-looking scientist ends up dying together with the creature that fascinates him. Here, once again, the Arctic represents the past, not the present.

Skepticism of science is a recurring motif in fantastical Arctic movies. From the Superman episode *The Arctic Giant* (US 1942, Dave Fleischer) to the comedic blockbuster *Iceman* (US 1984, Fred Schepisi), in which prehistoric creatures are rescued from the eternal ice and brought back to life, the exploitation of the Arctic by modern and inhumane actors is at the center of this criticism. An unmistakably political, Cold War-related twist is given to this motif in the 1951 classic *The Thing from Another World* (Howard Hawks), in which a humanoid, yet plant-like creature from outer space threatens the Earth; the alien eventually has to be located with a Geiger counter and hunted down with radioactive isotopes (Henriksen 1997: 54). But the real danger in this film is not radioactivity; the main threat comes from a scientist who does not recognize the political dimension of the alien invasion and tries to keep “The Thing” alive even when it is already running amok in the Arctic station that provides the setting for most of the movie's action. *The Thing from Another World* introduces the polar station as a location into Arctic cinema. Here, the internal and external threats to American democracy, as well as the political forms of organization of American society during the Cold War, are shown in detail. At the same time, the research station forms a starting point for the mapping and measurement of the Arctic. For instance, the point of collapse of the alien's “flying saucer” can be precisely located relative to the station. The station is thus the epitome of the state exclave, and its inhabitants are shown as political subjects, representatives of their nation even against their own will. The film emphasizes the collaborative approach of the Americans, their commitment to democracy and liberalism even in the greatest danger, while on the other hand the mindless swarm of vegetable people clearly represents the political threat of collectivism.

As with Disney and Lourié, Hawks's filmic control of the Arctic is also a consequence of the use of media. In addition to maps as classic ciphers of the military-political control of space, radar and radio play a crucial role in these movies. These technologies enable, at the very least, a communicational traverse of the

empty space between the isolated exclaves of the state. In addition, there are aircraft and helicopters as central tools for traversing that space, and they allow a new, analytical view of it. As in *S.O.S. Eisberg*, the landscapes of the Arctic are repeatedly depicted from above, so that places that initially only appeared in technological or abstract form, for example on a map or a radar monitor, become directly visible to the human eye. Traces of human or alien interference can be detected, so that a distinct location in the Arctic suddenly becomes a crime scene that can be analyzed and deciphered. In this way, the movies divide the Arctic into separate locations that can be connected by the vectorial movement of aircraft. These settings become cinematic scenery in front of which classic plotlines can be performed, while the realities of the Arctic are shifted outside of these settings.

The Arctic becomes a veritable collection of crime scenes in the US independent film *The Atomic Submarine* (US 1959, director: Spencer Gordon Bennet), which introduces the nuclear-powered submarine as a new scene of action and as another type of exclave of the state. The film is set in a highly engineered future in which such submarines are used as civilian liners for the worldwide transport of passengers and goods. One of the submarine lines runs under the perpetual ice of the Arctic and thus right through the central theater of the Cold War. The plot centers once again on an alien invasion: the Arctic line is threatened by a violent extraterrestrial. The USS *Tigershark*, a super-submarine equipped with nuclear warheads, is entrusted with the mission of tracking down the unknown invader.

The use of the submarine in *The Atomic Submarine* is therefore not strategic but tactical. Like a traditional submarine, the *Tigershark* is sent on a special mission that involves the targeted destruction of an enemy maritime unit. So, although the Arctic is presented as a routine area for maritime traffic here, it still remains the subject of an expedition. The *Tigershark* primarily uses visual media to make the region visible: its central tracking device looks like a sonar monitor, but this monitor in fact shows cinematic images rather than schematic ones, regardless of whether the boat is fully submerged or operating at periscope depth (Fig. 2). Even more clearly than with the images from the air, at stake here is transferring the Arctic space made available by means of data processing into the visibility regime of film. The endless expanse of the Arctic is made controllable, as is the threat of nuclear war on a global scale, by translating it into a visually manageable cinematic space of action in which human actors can achieve victory for their country.

Overall, the films that follow the narrative of rescue thus usually construct a “fantasy of citizenship” (Melley 2012: 26) in which the protagonists defend the principles of their state in controllable spaces of action outside their own state territories. In this process, the Arctic appears more as a network of individual locations



**Fig. 2:** Optical media produce cinematic images in *The Atomic Submarine* (US 1959).

than as a strategic space. The Hollywood production *Ice Station Zebra* (US 1968, John Sturges) also follows this fantasy of citizenship. Although this blockbuster film portrays the real enemy of the Cold War rather than metaphorical opponents, it nevertheless adheres to the expedition narrative. The plot revolves around the crash of a Russian satellite that is said to have photographed all of the nuclear missile bases in the US from space. The dangerous photographs have been lost with the satellite near the North Pole, which therefore does not itself appear as a militarized zone: the British *Ice Station Zebra*, which stands near the crash site, is in fact just a weather station.

The crew of the American nuclear submarine *USS Tigerfish* is given the task of recovering the satellite so that the photos do not fall into enemy hands. To do this, the boat has to break through the ice layer of the polar sea, which is portrayed as a decidedly risky, unusual undertaking. The fact that nuclear submarines can carry nuclear missiles themselves, and therefore make the complete satellite reconnaissance of a country's nuclear potential impossible, is not mentioned in the film, as this would ultimately make the mission of the brave Americans, who go to the edge of the world in order to save it, unnecessary. The use of the *Tigerfish* remains tactical in nature and follows the old explorer narrative, while strategic weapons appear to be always land-based and are not used in the Arctic Ocean. *Ice Station Zebra* can thus be seen as an example of how adherence to a particular narrative can lead to an outright obfuscation of actual military and political paradigms.

### 2.3 Medializing the Arctic: *The Red Tent*

The rescue narrative, popular in American and Soviet cinema, can also be found in European films. Examples include Norwegian post-war films such as the aforementioned *Ni liv* by Arne Skouen, which follows the flight of resistance fighter Jan Baalsrud from the German occupiers through northern Norway during the Second World War. Baalsrud goes blind in the snow and his legs die, so he has to be rescued several times by other Norwegians. Although the German soldiers are omnipresent, it is the encounters with his fellow countrymen, most of whom turn out not to be collaborators, that determine the film's dramaturgy. Once again, the film is about the self-encounter of national identity, but the journey through the Arctic also seems to be a journey into the past, as Baalsrud is rescued at the end by a Sami, who represents a pre-civilized way of life, and who takes him to safety in Sweden on a sledge amidst a herd of reindeer. Whereas in Hollywood cinema American identity must be asserted against the impositions of the Arctic, in Skouen's film Norwegian identity is only revealed through the encounter with the atavistic North.

Of particular importance among the European films that follow the narrative of rescue in a Cold War context is the Russian–Italian co-production *The Red Tent* (1969, Mikhail Kalatozov) from the time of the Thaw (on the production context, cf. Corsi 2020), which seeks to undertake a genuinely European extension of the narrative of rescue. The film links different national rescue expeditions to the Arctic to form a large, international network of vectorial movements that converge from different starting points in Europe. Although most of the characters never meet, they know of each other, and they are in contact through various media. Politically, the Arctic thus appears as a potential contact zone in which different peoples, and also different national narratives, do not have to compete with each other but can be interwoven in an inclusive grand narrative of rescue.

The film creates a concept of space that gains additional complexity through the fact that the Arctic space is also presented as a space of memory – and thus is the product of imagination. Plagued by guilt, the elderly Italian general Umberto Nobile (Peter Finch) recalls his failed 1928 Arctic expedition aboard the airship *Italia*. In his flat in Rome, the ghosts of those involved in the incident twenty years before appear to him, among them Roald Amundsen (Sean Connery) himself, who died on his failed rescue trip. The ghostly assembly must decide on the guilt Nobile bears for the death of the greater part of his crew, partly because he made the controversial decision to take the first opportunity of being rescued himself and leave some of his men behind in the Arctic. In this way, the cinematic images of the expedition are at the same time framed as images of memory. The arrangement of the ghosts in Nobile's flat, which visualizes the lines of political

and personal conflict and dynamics between the various people involved, and the cinematic reconstruction of the complex rescue narrative, which creates a filmic arrangement of Arctic locations, make the viewer aware of the constructed character of the Arctic space (Fig. 3).

Despite its somewhat erratic narrative form, the film takes great care to reconstruct the chronology of the accident. Three main locations of action are established in the Arctic: the crash site of the airship, the camp of the survivors who had been flung off the zeppelin before the final crash and who try to contact civilization by radio – this is where the eponymous red tent is located – and a small group of crew members who try to reach the nearest settlement on foot. At the same time, in various parts of Europe, other people are trying to locate Nobile's scattered men. The main rescue missions are an air rescue operation coordinated from King's Bay airfield in Norway, and the expedition of the Russian icebreaker *Krassin*.



**Fig. 3:** In *The Red Tent* (1969), the Arctic is accessed through radio and maps, but also through memory.

The *Krassin's* journey is set in motion by a dedicated Russian amateur radio operator who, in a key scene of the film, has a horde of children fly a kite that is repurposed as an antenna, which ultimately receives the *Italia's* emergency signal. However, the radio operator, clearly a descendant of the young protagonist of *The Two Captains*, himself arrives too late for the departure of the icebreaker: while the Arctic space is shaped by an international network of actors in *The Red Tent*, the countries from which these actors come also themselves appear as networks whose fragile connections can easily break. Successful communication is unlikely both in the Arctic and even in the heart of civilization. The Arctic thus becomes a social metaphor that tells of the isolation of individuals in the cold societies of modernity (cf. Stephan 2019). In Kalatozov's film, cinematic space is simultaneously socially structured, with the ruptures between life worlds being presented in the form of contrast cuts: the stokers of the *Krassin* experience the polar voyage below deck quite differently from the capitalist Swedish pilot of one of the rescue planes (Hardy Krüger), who is primarily concerned with his own economic gain.

The subjective tone of the historical reconstruction not only stems from the narration of Nobile's memories, but also integrates the perspectives of the other characters in the film. The sequence showing the departure of the *Italia* is presented as the view of one of the crew members looking back at his girlfriend (Claudia Cardinale), who is waving from the ground, becoming smaller and smaller as the airship pulls away. In addition to these subjective perspectives, the "official" state perspective is always present. As the *Italia* reaches the North Pole, where a flag is thrown from the airship, marking the identity-less place in the eternal ice, the mission is closely followed by the rest of the world with radio and newspapers. The film depicts Nobile's journey as a media event by showing how reporters translate the information and data transmitted by radio into dramatic stories. Historical footage intercut into the film attests to the authenticity of this media event. At the same time, it refers to a historical narrative that has become part of Italy's national memory, and that comes into conflict with Nobile's personal memory in the film.

The state plays an important role in the plot, since both the original expedition and the rescue missions are national prestige projects. Narratives of rescue, as Johannes Lehmann has argued, fundamentally belong to a genuinely modern, biopolitical paradigm, since they portray the state as acting in pursuit of the preservation of life rather than just deciding over life and death (cf. Lehmann 2016). Thus, even if in most films devoted to classic voyages of discovery the personalities of the scientists are in the foreground, biopolitical techniques of government always play a role, at least in the background. As a character fundamentally deformed by state ambition, Nobile is ultimately less sovereign than his role as cap-

tain suggests. The strong bond to the state that characterizes the protagonists of American and Russian films thus becomes fragile and problematic in this European co-production.

The overlapping of personal and national ambitions is even more evident in another historical balloon flight to the Arctic brought to the screen. The Swedish production *Ingenjör Andréés luftfärd* ("The Flight of the Eagle," 1982, Jan Troell), which deals with Salomon August Andréé's infamous breakneck balloon flight of 1897, shows the title character (Max von Sydow) as a man driven by national discourses of heroism and honor who justifies setting off for the North Pole even though he knows that his airship cannot survive the journey. Only when he has crashed in the vastness of the eternal ice and his two colleagues have died does his habitual, purposefully optimistic behavior break down. In this Swedish production, the narrative of rescue is transformed into a narrative of sacrifice: Andréé is left alone in the Arctic as a subject destroyed by the state, convinced that he had no other choice, yet overwhelmed with the futility and guilt he has brought upon himself.

In contrast, *The Red Tent* remains committed to the narrative of rescue. At the same time, the film does not create a heroic narrative, as has often been suggested (Michaels 2006); instead, it deconstructs all human attempts to fill the Arctic space with meaning by allowing national and personal memories, as well as different media and images, to collide with each other. The real antagonist of all these geneses of meaning, however, appears to be, again, the Arctic itself. This becomes particularly obvious in a scene in which one of the three men trying to cross the Arctic on foot dies of exhaustion. Shortly before his death, he asks his comrades to make a grave for him in the ice so that the bears cannot devour his body. The scene clearly has religious connotations, but conflict arises when one of the men tries to baptize his dying friend, who resists, insisting on his atheism. The cave in the ice is not, as implied on a visual level, the tomb of a modern Christ, but simply a hole in the snow. Holding vigil in front of it becomes unbearable for the two survivors. Since all attempts to create meaning ultimately fail in the Arctic, the question of guilt that torments Nobile necessarily remains unanswered at the end of the film. In *The Red Tent*, the Arctic has served its purpose as a place of self-assurance and moral realignment.

### 3 Narratives of sacrifice

The second type of narrative that we find in the cinematic imaginaries of the Arctic during the Cold War revolves around the deaths of human beings abandoned by the state. In the narrative of sacrifice, the protagonists become victims of an

all-encompassing war that is being carried out in secret and is impenetrable to them, or they sacrifice themselves within the framework of a cynical global game whose rules they never fully understand. The Arctic no longer appears as an empty space, but as a political playground, and the movies are less about discoveries and conquests than about tactical navigation in a terrain that seems particularly suited to the hide-and-seek games of the Cold War.

In the narrative of sacrifice, it is usually the interference of the military and the political system that necessitates the sacrifice. Whereas the rescue narratives were defined by a tension between civilization and wilderness, the Arctic now belongs to a global interior in which strategic and tactical, political and individual perspectives come into conflict with each other. From the perspective of the individual, the Arctic space no longer appears as empty; instead, it is depicted as permeated by public and secret infrastructures whose scope and significance only gradually become known. Instead of experiencing oneself as an exclave and thus as a representative of the state, however, the individuals who travel through the Arctic tend to become a *homo sacer* (Agamben 1998), defenseless human beings who are excluded from the symbolic order.

### 3.1 The tactical terrain: *The Bedford Incident*

In the culture of both the USSR and the US, the topos of self-sacrifice initially had the function of binding the subject to his or her own national state: “To be a citizen is to imagine the possibility of the sacrificial act” (Kahn 2013: 121). This form of self-sacrifice, made of one’s own accord, is already being carried out by some of the explorers who are the subject of the narratives of rescue. In the global game of the Cold War, however, the logic of inclusion which was connected to this sacrifice is inverted into a logic of exclusion. Now it is the state that sacrifices its citizens in order to remain intact as a whole. The victims of the global game are no longer representatives of their nations, as the polar explorers were, but faceless pawns whose existence and fate the public will never come to know. The abandonment of the individual by the state can be calculated, but it can also be the result of an accident produced by the logic of enmity, which can have potentially fatal consequences.

A victim of the latter type is the crew of the American destroyer *Bedford*, which is cruising in the GIUK gap between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom in *The Bedford Incident* (US 1965, James B. Harris). The *Bedford*’s captain, Erik Finlander (Richard Widmark), appears as a modern Ahab, mercilessly hunting down a Russian submarine that is called “Big Red” by the crew and can be read as a politicized descendant of the “White Whale” (Couser 1996: 33). Like

Ahab, Finlander runs a strict regime on his ship, and as in Melville, the chase ends in the extermination of the crew by an uncontrollable elemental force, represented here by a nuclear torpedo from the Soviet submarine, a weapon with which these submarines were actually equipped (cf. Maloney 2020: 308–319). Unlike in Melville, however, this destruction is the result of an accident: while Finlander’s goal is just to force the Russian boat to surface, one of his exhausted weapons control officers misinterprets a remark by the captain as an order to attack and fires a missile at the submarine, which responds with a counterattack shortly before it explodes. The captain has no answer to this: “The movie’s finale [. . .] is played out, indeed, by automated *weaponry* while the characters watch, helpless and horrified” (Couser 1996: 33). Like the polar stations, submarine and destroyer function here as exclaves of their states whose fate anticipates that of the power blocs they represent.

*The Bedford Incident* can be interpreted as one of the films that first identify and illustrate the paradigm shift that was taking place in the imagination of the Arctic. The comparison with Melville is revealing because the contrast between Ahab and Finlander becomes apparent in their different relationships to space. If Ahab was still a prime example of the nomadic subject in Deleuze’s sense, and thus a relative of the explorers – a man on an endless journey, “inspired not by feelings that he can share, but by intensities that resonate with virtual relations not yet actualized” (Lorraine 2005: 169) – Finlander’s mission rests entirely on his own state apparatus, which he tries to embody with exaggerated loyalty. He does not thereby become an exclave of the “West” in uncharted waters, but rather appears as a kind of border guard between the Soviet-dominated Arctic Ocean and the Western-dominated Atlantic, navigating not in an unmarked icescape but in a highly political space in which different zones of influence overlap.

Finlander illustrates this role himself with the help of a map which shows the “Denmark Strait” instead of terra incognita, the strategic importance of which for the Cold War is explained in a long briefing. In the further course of the plot’s development, the predominant media are again radar and sonar, which, however, instead of serving to visualize the submarine, confirm the enemy’s location in a space defined by political rather than geographical markers. The horizontal, vectorial movement of the expedition is replaced on the one hand by tactics in a space represented as a two-dimensional coordinate system (Fig. 4) and on the other hand by the vertically organized cat-and-mouse game between the destroyer and the submarine. In *The Bedford Incident*, there is no longer anything to “discover” in the Arctic except a familiar mortal danger that calls for ethical conviction rather than scientific investigation. This is also made clear by the fact that “Big Red” is never actually seen:

The submarine operates as a hidden sign, an unseen trigger for action by the Bedford on the surface of the sea. [. . .] The sub is only glimpsed through its garbage or its snorkel; or heard through sonar. And the very fact that it remains hidden beneath the sea adds to the drama of *The Bedford Incident* by encouraging the US captain and his crew to project a hostile identity on to it. (Seed 2005: 49)

The film, therefore, does not tell of a captain's hunt for a mythical monster in the middle of the world's oceans; instead, it portrays the mechanics of an imaginary war that consists of attempts to locate and hide in a surveyable, limited space of action. Here, icebergs are no longer lofty sentinels in a land hostile to man, but tactical parts of a terrain that – in keeping with Clausewitz (1960) – can represent both protection and obstacles, and which the submarine consequently uses to hide from the *Bedford's* sonar. On the one hand, the dynamic of escalation results from Finlander's paranoid character, but on the other hand, his personality only reflects the paranoid dynamics of the Cold War as a whole, whose logics of surveillance and deterrence produce anything but a stable equilibrium. This is also why the Black embedded journalist Munceford (Sidney Poitier) and the German NATO and former Nazi naval officer Schrepke (Eric Portman), who in different ways point to the heterogeneity of the Western alliance, remain ineffective as correctives to Finlander's delusions.



**Fig. 4:** The Denmark Strait is completely mapped in *The Bedford Incident* (1965). The enemy submarine that needs to be located here is invisible not because it is lost in the vastness of the Arctic, but because it is hiding under icebergs.

The same type of predefined, tactical space underlies a whole series of Cold War fictions in which, time after time, sacrifices have to be made and accepted. In *Fail Safe* (US 1964, Sidney Lumet), for example, bombers circling over the Arctic are mistakenly instructed to destroy Moscow, leaving the US president no choice but to sacrifice New York in return in order to avoid further escalation. The catastrophe is triggered by a computer error, demonstrating that the Arctic as a strategic space is a product of technical surveillance whose inherent rationale cannot be controlled (cf. Nanz 2011). The two-part television movie *World War III* (US 1982, David Greene, Boris Sagal) shows the storm-battered ice deserts of the Arctic as terrain ideally suited for clandestine military action. A Russian commando unit, which can only operate in enemy territory during a terrible storm, targets a new station on the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline. The Soviet Union tries to use this scenario as blackmail to achieve the lifting of economic sanctions against its own country. The film begins with the bloody sabotage of one of the radar stations on the DEW Line, drawing the viewer's attention to the military tracking systems that constantly monitor the Arctic. The fact that the oil station is not yet marked on any map is considered a scandal by the US military, since they always expect a completely surveyed space. At the end of the movie, a small team of military personnel sacrifices itself in the fight against the Soviet forces. The sacrifice serves the purpose of preventing the outbreak of war at the last moment, but the film's open ending implies that the conflict will nevertheless result in escalation, and the sacrifice will have been in vain.

In some cases, the terrain holds obstacles and tactical possibilities, yet also reveals the history of its use. This is the theme of the film *Bear Island* (UK/CAN 1979, Don Sharp), which tells of the entanglements of an international research team in a station on the Norwegian island of that name. The Cold War is present from the beginning because there is also a NATO military camp on the island. A series of mysterious accidents occur at the research station, and tensions grow between the various American and European factions. The station can thereby be read as a metaphor of NATO itself, presenting it as an alliance of convenience dominated by mutual distrust and infiltrated by enemy agents. In the case of *Bear Island*, however, these enemy agents are not Russians, but a network of Nazis operating worldwide who are searching for hidden Nazi gold on the island. The gold lies buried in a partially preserved underground submarine base. The Arctic thus appears no longer only as strategic, but also as historical terrain, whose past, invisible at first glance, continues to influence the present.

*Bear Island* presents a caricature of the rescue narrative, as most of the figures searching for the Nazi gold are pursuing corrupt goals. The means used are terrorist acts of violence perpetrated secretly. The Arctic thus appears as a space that is empty but at the same time permeated by invisible forces that regularly claim inno-

cent victims. The map of the island, which is explained in detail at the beginning of the story, shows only parts of the political structure of the Arctic region, not the whole thing. Both the enemy and the site's own past lurk underneath the surface, the discovery of which shakes up the supposed binary structure of the Cold War.

### 3.2 The historical space: *Orions belte*

The Svalbard archipelago, to which Bear Island belongs, is also the subject of *Orions belte* ("Orion's Belt," NOR 1985, Ola Solum, Tristan De Vere Cole), the most prominent Norwegian contribution to the cinematic imagination of the Cold War in the Arctic. The film tells the story of three sailors who live in the small town of Longyearbyen. To make a living, they take tourists through the Arctic Ocean on their boat to take pictures of polar bears. The familiar Arctic imaginary is presented as a cliché here, since the expectations of the tourists do not correspond at all to the political reality of life for the inhabitants of Longyearbyen.

The film shows Svalbard as a complex cultural and political contact zone of the Cold War, as parts of the island are used by the Soviet Union, which operates the mining town of Barentsburg here, as a result of an international treaty. The conversations of Longyearbyen's inhabitants focus on the presence of the Russians, on the dangers of Norway joining NATO, and thus on the special role of Norway and Svalbard as Cold War sites which are at the same time part of the Arctic theater and home to a whole range of people who go about their daily lives. In this way, the film establishes a distinct European perspective on the Cold War in the Arctic that breaks with the entrenched power games of the superpowers by making visible a space in between the power blocs (Stenport 2015: 173). This in-between status is also represented by the three protagonists, who are introduced as crooks in a permanent, albeit harmless, conflict with the local authorities.

A planned insurance scam prompts the men to take their boat to Greenland. Like the *Bedford*, they are cruising in the highly militarized zone where the superpowers of the Cold War met. When they discover a Soviet listening station on an uninhabited island, they become part of the conflict: In a panicked exchange of fire, they kill a Russian soldier and are then pursued by a helicopter. Their knowledge of the terrain initially helps them to maneuver their ship into the folds of an iceberg and to bring down the helicopter from cover, using the Arctic Ocean, otherwise a natural spectacle for tourists, in a deeply intuitive and tactical way. But soon a second helicopter appears, killing two of the men and destroying the ship.

The remaining crook, Tom (Helge Jordal), escapes the attack. Similar to Jan Baalsrud in *Ni Liv*, he makes the arduous journey home through Spitsbergen on foot. Exhausted, he finally reaches Longyearbyen, from where the local authori-

ties, skeptical of his story, send him directly to Oslo. The Norwegian government, however, is under the influence of the American army, which already knows about the Soviets' activities and wants to prevent them from becoming public at all costs, as this could set in motion an escalation of the Cold War. Tom is offered a new identity; however, he instead flees to inform the public of what is happening. After a long chase, he is shot dead by a secret agent. As the film ends, it remains unclear to which of the three states involved in the affair this agent belongs.

The Arctic space always has several dimensions in *Orion's Belt*. For tourists, it is a natural spectacle; for politicians, it is an area regulated by borders and treaties; for the military, it is terrain to be used strategically and tactically. For the inhabitants, on the other hand, it is above all a social and economic space of action whose specific conditions can be dealt with routinely. The maps shown in the film are therefore not military, but civilian nautical charts. As in *Bear Island*, various traces of the past can be found on the islands of Spitsbergen, but these do not represent traumatically lingering events; instead, they are remnants of many years of use of the land, of a normality that has simply accumulated. On his walk through Spitsbergen, Tom comes across an old, closed mine, whose aerial tramway he uses to return to Longyearbyen (Fig. 5). The industrial ruins bear witness to the long development of the region, whose specific history is sacrificed here to the totalitarian clash of the two superpowers.



**Fig. 5:** In *Orion's Belt* (1985), the Arctic space is made accessible by civilian maps as well as by traces of settlement and exploitation. It is neither a “nomadic” (Deleuze) nor a strategic, but instead a historical space.

In this way, long stretches of the film work to demystify the Arctic. The three friends' exploration of the island where the Soviet listening station is located suggests quotidian elements in the everyday life of the characters. At first, the men are excited about the valuable metal cables they find, as if it were perfectly normal to encounter such remnants of human activity on an island in the Arctic space. The visibility regime that the Cold War introduces to the Arctic, however, turns this normalized everyday Arctic space into an impenetrable and hostile place. This is because the political borders drawn on civilian maps do not correspond to the actual borders drawn in the Cold War. The Arctic is thus not imagined – as in most other fictions of the time – as an empty space; rather, the men move in a politically divided, surveyed, and universally known space whose official political order has been subverted by a clandestine order. What they discover is not an unknown land, but a second, secret state, which, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, is at the heart of any paranoid imagination: “paranoia is at its most elementary a belief in an ‘Other of the Other’, in another Other who, hidden behind the Other of the explicit social texture, programs (what appears to us as) the unforeseen effects of social life and thus guarantees its consistency [ . . . ]” (2015: 33).

From the US point of view, life on Svalbard is in fact nothing but a backdrop used to camouflage military operations. In *Orion's Belt*, Tom appears as a simple citizen whose life is sacrificed to this clandestine war. By threatening to publish his story, he asserts that the actual inhabitants of the Arctic have a right to exist that stands outside of military calculations. But for those in power, the Arctic is just a representation to which the real place must be made to conform, just as the jacked-up boat in the dark boathouse where Tom is shot looks just like a representation of the real boat he lost (Fig. 6). Following this military logic, not even Tom's death is allowed to become public: both his existence and his history must be elided. *Orion's Belt* thus shows the Cold War as an attack not only on the imagination, which must be radically curtailed, but also on cultural memory. In turn, cinema becomes the actor that can, and must, tell these stories that are forcefully excluded from the political imagination by Cold War strategists. The space in which these stories take place is not the thoroughly militarized space of the two superpowers but the territory of the European states of the Arctic, which stands between the two blocs just as the individual stands between their ideologies.

### 3.3 Remembering the frozen war

The attack on imagination and memory that *Orion's Belt* decries becomes the central theme of those films that address the Cold War in retrospect. The investigation of mysterious events on the territory of European countries began already



**Fig. 6:** The representation of space appears as the true problem at the end of *Orion's Belt*: the protagonist has lost his own boat and dies on another, jacked-up one that resembles it.

during the Cold War and continues to be a theme in European cinema. The BBC series *Spyship* (UK 1983, Michael Custance), for example, tells a fictionalized version of the 1974 sinking of the stern trawler *Gaul*, which was suspected of spying on Russian naval operations. In 2015, the Danish film *Idealisten* (“The Idealist,” Christina Rosendahl) dealt with the crash of an American B-52 in Greenland in 1968 and the secret history of Thule Air Base. In these films, Arctic space is portrayed as thoroughly politicized, with the cliché of the untouched Arctic itself becoming a weapon in the war of the imagination. This can already be seen in the spy film *Spy Story* (UK 1976, Lindsay Shonteff), in which the meeting between Russian and British military personnel only seems to take place in the perpetual ice of the Arctic for reasons of secrecy. In fact, the meeting is made public in order to discredit the Russian general, turning the Arctic into a true stage of Cold War intrigues.

While European Arctic cinema about the Cold War often portrays the Scandinavian countries as victims of violent intervention by the superpowers, other forms of cinematic memory dominate American film. Most importantly, a new kind of submarine film began dealing with the imaginary dynamics of the Cold War from 1990 onwards. In *The Hunt for Red October* (US 1990, John McTiernan), *Crimson Tide* (US 1995, Tony Scott), and *K-19: The Widowmaker* (US 2002, Kathryn Bigelow), models and stock footage of submarines are replaced by original boats, and the strategic significance of the “ballistic missile submarine” is placed at the center of the plot. At the same time, the Arctic is constructed as a space for heroes

whose stoic efforts go unrecognized. In *The Hunt for Red October*, for example, the Russian submarine captain Ramius (Sean Connery) sums things up as follows: “It’s a war with no monuments, only casualties.” As a captain within this war, he sees himself charged with the downright prevention of memorability: if his prototype submarine were to come on the scene as an agent, this would set the mechanics of nuclear war in motion; only as long as it remains invisible can peace continue to be assured. For this reason, heroic deeds, too, can only consist in the refusal of any memorable act of war.

This background helps us understand why many of the heroes in these new US memory films are Soviets. After the end of the actual confrontation of the Cold War, Hollywood developed a cinematic culture of memory that was not only intended to serve as a topical political instrument of reconciliation with the former enemy (Rayner 2007: 192), but also sought to transform the postponement of one’s own annihilation into a heroic narrative that can only be meaningfully attributed to an enemy actor who resists the inevitability of war. The best example of this kind of memory film is Kathryn Bigelow’s *K-19: The Widowmaker*, in which the crew of a Russian nuclear submarine become a heroic collective at the very moment they refuse to be rescued by the Americans. This does not happen out of narrow-minded national pride; instead, their decision is motivated by knowing that the imminent explosion of the damaged submarine could destroy a foreign ship and thus trigger a world war.

Set in 1962, the film follows a Russian submarine as it evades enemy submarine surveillance to launch a ballistic missile test in the Arctic. The maneuver is being carried out for the first time and intended to demonstrate the USSR’s nuclear capability to the Americans. The eternal ice of the Arctic is here already transformed into a stage on which certain maneuvers are carried out precisely for the enemy to see them. However, the visibility of a calculated threatening gesture must not cross the line into actual attack. After the successful staging of a violent act that bursts out of invisibility, the boat must therefore disappear again into the depths of the ocean.

As the maneuver progresses, however, the boat is disabled – again at the entrance to the GIUK gap – due to a defective nuclear reactor. Soon it is discovered by an American military ship. Since being rescued by the US is out of the question, the boat has to make a final dive, which means death for many of the men. Since the incident needs to be kept secret from the public, this final dive becomes a conscious choice of forgetting: the heroic act proves to be a self-sacrifice that affects not only the lives of the crew members but also the possibility of commemoration. As the film’s coda shows, commemoration only becomes possible again with perestroika: the survivors of the accident meet in 1989 before the graves of their deceased comrades, with the historical date marking the event as

equally relevant for East and West. In this way, the film commemorates an act of heroism that actually happened and consisted precisely in recognizing the invisibility of the submarine space as a political necessity, at least for the foreseeable future.

This heroic self-erasure is shown as the main imaginative paradox of the Cold War in movies like *K-19*. While *Orion's Belt* tells of an innocent man who is excluded from the order of the state because of his experiences and is sacrificed to the staging of a false normality, *K-19* tells of self-sacrifices by Soviet soldiers who erased themselves from memory in order to preserve the status quo prior to the disaster. Under the ice of the Arctic thus lie buried the failed heroes of truth as well as the successful heroes of the global order. This order required that other heroes be remembered in their place, such as the polar explorers of earlier times, and those who rescued them, while the heroic deed of the crew of *K-19* consisted precisely of renouncing any rescue. Like the ice surfaces of the Arctic, the rescue narratives of cinema formed an unchanging visible stage under which the grand deeds and stories that actually took place, the narratives of sacrifice, lay hidden – until the frozen imaginary of the Cold War finally cracked.

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- Fig. 2** Optical media produce cinematic images  
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*Orion's Belt*, (1985) NOR, Dir. Ola Solum, Tristan De Vere Cole



## II **Broadcasting**



Luciana Radut-Gaghi

# Radio Free Europe and Radio France Internationale

The Tones of Democracy and the Voices of Exiles

With their audiences and influences, international radio stations were an unexpected weapon during the Cold War. The voices heard there conveyed the hope that the nations of the East might not be defeated in these long decades. They defined an era and are surrounded by an aura of mystery and respect. These radio stations are part of the life of every European who has lived behind the Iron Curtain. Several research works have become the main points of reference in this field of study. Research such as that conducted by Jacques Semelin (2009) addresses the influence of the international radio stations on major historical events behind the Iron Curtain. Books like *Airy Curtains in the European Ether* concentrate on the international radio stations as facilitators of a transnational European communication space during the Cold War (Badenoch, Fickers, and Henrich-Franke 2013). The book edited by Anna Bischof and Zuzana Jurgens in 2015 retraces the history of Radio Free Europe (RFE) by analyzing the political context and its influence on journalistic practices, the content of broadcasts, and the reception (in the communication-theory sense) of programs.

## 1 Concepts and approach

My present research proposes a comparative analysis of the cultural transfers effected by international radio stations.<sup>1</sup> My research questions deal with the role of the international media during the Cold War. How did international radio participate in the construction and preservation of the fabric of democracy in the Eastern societies? To what extent did the international radio stations represent the intellectual exiles from the Eastern countries? What were the relations between two of the main international radio stations during the Cold War? “International media” is understood as outlined in the introduction to this book; the concept will, therefore, not be discussed separately here.

There is no one universally agreed definition of cultural transfer; the term is understood as influence, as a political relation, as cultural exchange in a very

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1 A first version of this article was published in French: Radut-Gaghi 2015.

wide sense, or even as cultural universalization (Paleczny 2012). The French philosopher of language Francis Jacques (1996) explores the idea of dialogue between cultures. Joanna Nowicki explains the concept of dialogue itself: “the exchange has to be based on disinterestedness and reciprocal benevolence dominated by the will to seek together the truth that is not known in advance” (2010). Cultural transfer involves “the determination of new senses” (Espagne 1989) created by the relation between two or more countries and cultures.

If one wants to find a method for investigating such transfers, the perspectives of cultural historians offer insightful leads. Simply put, research focuses on the “processes by which ideas flow from one society to another” in a cultural and comprehensive way (Charitonidou 2016). Charitonidou identifies two methods for research on cultural transfers: analyzing the contexts of transfers in the societies between which they take place, and analyzing the vectors for transfers, like books, teachers, travelers. In this paper, radio is considered as one of these vectors of transmission of ideas between two cultural spaces. “To transfer is not to transport, but rather to metamorphose” (Espagne 2013). Precisely this metamorphosis is what interests us in this article.

The international radio stations acted as vectors of cultural transfer in various ways. This issue is addressed here in two different ways: the tones they adopted and how they represented exiles in the diaspora. The former concerns the construction of the broadcasts; the latter involves the symbolic composition of the broadcasting teams. Both contributed to the effectiveness of the transmission of the democratic message of the international radio stations. The general category of the “tones of democracy” deals with the techniques used by the media to captivate, to engage the public, to create emotions, to create and maintain momentum (Hillert et al. 2014). These tones cover the attitudes of the message’s sender. They are part of the mediatization process and allow us to consider the media *dispositif* not only from the Foucauldian point of view of dominance and power, but also from the perspective of the institution of a dynamic relation between the media and the public. These tones are part of the “co-construction of meaning” (Appel et al. 2010: 41) that the media invite the public to participate in. The interest in the diasporic exile personalities present on the waves of the international radio stations comes from their status as idea-carriers (“passeurs d’idées” in French). The main figures among intellectual exiles were writers, literary critics, journalists who had emigrated to Western countries. The aim is to understand how groups of intellectual journalists were formed and functioned, and to what extent they represent the exiles or diasporas of the countries concerned (Brubaker 2005; Nowicki and Radut-Gaghi 2014).

This paper concentrates on two broadcasting stations during the Cold War: Radio France Internationale, RFI, and Radio Free Europe, RFE, and more precisely on their sections in Eastern European languages. A brief historical overview will

allow us to contextualize these media channels and their reasons for establishing sections in foreign languages. Nevertheless, this article does not aim to take an exhaustive approach to all the foreign-language sections; rather, it concentrates on some of them that are considered relevant to the analysis. Instead of exhaustiveness, the focus lies on the comparison of two distinctive ways in which Western media proceeded in transferring ideas, content, and democratic values to the Eastern bloc during the Cold War. The study is organized in two parts covering my approach to cultural transfer: an analysis of the tones and an overview of the exiles. The research is based on existing written material, research reports made by the broadcasters themselves or by academics, as well on a series of interviews conducted by me in 2015 and in 2020. They include an interview with a former director of the Polish section of RFI and four interviews with the audience of RFE in Romania.

## 2 History and archives

From the beginning, it must be said that there are no official written histories of RFE and RFI produced by the institutions themselves. There are short monographs, testimonies, and various writings of the journalists involved. In April 1993, RFI appeared in *The winds of history (1931–1992). Genealogy and landmarks*, Document Radio France Internationale. In 2005, RFI released a CD box set entitled *Si RFI m'était contée: 1931–2004* [If RFI was told to me] on the occasion of its thirtieth anniversary, looking back on more than seventy years of foreign-language broadcasting in France. In 1991, *The French Radio Speaks Polish* appeared, a publication that brings together and analyzes the archival material collected by André Moosmann, who was the head of the Polish section of Radiodiffusion Française from July 1945 to March 1963, then the editor in charge of transmissions to the East from March 1963 to December 1974, the date when RFI was born, after the dissolution of the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française (ORTF). Several works, not very numerous, in national languages, trace individual paths and experiences in the newsroom.

Where Radio Free Europe is concerned, there are some other sources of testimony: *Felietony dla radia Wolna Europa* [Essays for Radio Free Europe], Jerzy Stempowski, Varosvie, Twój Styl, 1995; *Ogród angielski 1: wspomnienia z Radia Wolna Europa* [English Garden 1: Memories of Radio Free Europe], Marek Łatyński, Lublin, Wydawn, Marie-Curie-Skłodowska University, 1997; *Literatura i pisarze w programie rozgłośni polskiej Radio Wolna Europa* [Literature and Writers on the Radio Free Europe Polish Radio Program], Konrad W. Tatarowski, Cracow, Univer-

sitas, 2005; *Wojna w eterze* [The War in the Ether], Jan Nowak Jeziorański, Cracow, Wydawn, Znak, 2000. In Romanian, the sources are *Gânduri peste cortina de fier* [Reflections on the Iron Curtain], Grigore Gafencu, Bucharest, Editura enciclopedică, 2006; the book by Ioana Magura-Bernard, wife of Noël Bernard, *Directorul postului nostru de radio* [The Director of Our Radio Station], Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2007; the diaries of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca; or even *Radio «Europa Liberă» și exilul românesc. O istorie încă nescrisă* [Radio “Free Europe” and the Romanian exile. A story not yet written], René Al. De Flers, Bucharest, Editura Vestala, 2005. In Czech, there are, for example, *Je sedm hodin středověkého času: postavy a příběhy ze začátků Svobodné Evropy* [It’s Seven O’Clock in the Middle Ages: Characters and Stories from the Early Days of Radio Free Europe], František Tom, J. Kanzelsberger, Munich, Evropská Exilová Edice, 1991, and several other works by František Tomáš on the same subject. To these can be added the “internal” books of RFE, the surveys conducted on its behalf, studies, and a large number of research papers. Some of those will be quoted below.

Another significant difference involves the archives of the two radio stations. The strict American control over the content of RFE programs has also led to special attention to their archiving. The Hoover Institution at Stanford University received these archives, which can be consulted, as a donation.<sup>2</sup> Polish Radio and the National Digital Archives of Poland, created in 2008; the Szechenyi National Library in Hungary, originating in 1808; the Czechoslovak Documentation Center, created in 1818; and the Romanian Institute for Investigating the Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile, created in 2009, keep copies in their languages. On the other hand, the Open Society Archives (OSA, also Donald and Vera Blinken Archives) of Budapest gather an impressive number of special studies and thematic research papers produced by the research units of Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) from 1952 to 1992.<sup>3</sup> Freely accessible on-site, the topics of these materials, in forty languages, range from the domestic and international affairs of the Communist countries to developments in the Communist movement around the world. A special section is dedicated to human rights: censorship, war crimes, acts of genocide, armed conflicts, and humanitarian catastrophes.

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<sup>2</sup> The Hoover Institution is a public policy think tank in the US created in 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Established in 1995 and dealing with the history of the Cold War, the OSA play several roles: as a repository of collections, laboratory for archival experiments, research center, and teaching program. The members of the consortium of the research network Europe: a space of communication (cf. Introduction of the book) behind this book had the opportunity to do three days of research at the OSA in November 2019, where they also led a research seminar with Ioana Macrea-Toma and István Rév.

By contrast, attempts to archive RFI broadcasts were disparate. The news content (news bulletins and press magazines) was saved only for very short periods of time on magnetic tapes. The written versions of the broadcast programs, very large, were stored by the newsrooms. This state of affairs has also led to an incredible loss of information that was broadcast to the East. The multiple physical relocations of the offices played an undeniable role in this loss of information (from the Champs-Élysées to the Maison de la Radio in 1964 and to Issy-les-Moulineaux in 2013), which means that institutionalized or centralized RFI archives are almost nonexistent. However, C. Piekarec relates, on the Polish initiative to protect the memory of these broadcasts: “mainly due to being approached by Polish Radio, which addressed its request to the management of RFI, a larger part of our audio archives than what was destined for INA (the Institut national de l’audiovisuel) was digitized and transferred to Polish Radio in Warsaw, where Mr. Andrzej Mietkowski, journalist, and former collaborator with RFE, obtained the means to create a website called “Les Radios de la Liberté,” providing access to the archives of broadcasts by Western radio stations that broadcast programs in Polish.”<sup>4</sup> Digitization of archived broadcasts from other RFI sections is currently underway.

Unlike RDF (the Société de Radiodiffusion Française) and later RFI,<sup>5</sup> RFE had an audience and public opinion research department. As unreliable as the numbers may be, the hierarchy of types of information sought by listeners was as follows: the latest information, unavailable information, learning about the outside world, checking information, variety, listening to official views, knowing one’s enemy.<sup>6</sup> Attitudes towards political regimes (Communism, traditional Western democracy, democratic socialism) were also measured, with easily predictable results. The “diagnosis” of this type of investigation was “the emergence of a new sub-society.” It is thus possible to understand the important role that this international radio station wanted to have in the emergence of this counterculture.

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4 L’Institut national de l’audiovisuel, created in 1975, is in charge of the French radio and television archives. Website: <<https://www.ina.fr/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

5 The Société de Radiodiffusion française, created in 1945, replaced by RTF (Radiodiffusion-télévision française) in 1947, was in charge of the French public audiovisual service.

6 Consulted survey report: “East European Youth and Various Value Systems,” Radio Free Europe – Audience and Public Opinion Research Department, December 1978.

### 3 RFE and RFI – different transfer logics

RFE and RFI represent two types of international radio channel – first, in RFI, the radio stations “representing national interests and cultures” of Western governments and societies, in the words of George R. Urban (1997: ix), a Hungarian writer and journalist at RFE, and RFE director between 1983 and 1986. The historian and political scientist J. Semelin (2009) calls this category “representative radio stations.” The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VoA), Vatican Radio,<sup>7</sup> and Deutsche Welle (DW) can also be included here. “Their goal was to pursue national diplomacy by other means.” Therefore, the interests were primarily those of the countries hosting the foreign sections of these radio stations.

The second type is represented by Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. George R. Urban describes it as being “sponsored by America, but (consisting of) distinct Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, or Ukrainian national channels” (Urban 1997: ix). Semelin calls these “surrogate radio stations.” Journalists identified themselves with the national cultures they addressed, and expressed “the kind of opinion that the free media would have in a free press, a radio, a free television” (Urban 1997: ix). In other words, RFE journalists spoke on behalf of their countries of origin (they presented themselves as a Romanian, Polish, etc. radio station), in contrast to the RFI airwaves, where journalists from Central and Eastern Europe spoke on behalf of France, “us” (“we, the Romanians,” or “we, the Poles,” was forbidden on the RFI antenna).

RFE was “an experiment. It was done quickly, in a bad way,” said Paul B. Henze, the CIA agent who helped to set up the radio station in the 1950s and was later a proponent of it. It was “an impromptu response to the emergency situation that arose in the early 1950s in the form of the threat of an aggressive Stalinist expansionism that threatens the United States and the free world” (Henze 2010: 5). Under rather artisanal conditions at first, RFE broadcast for the first time in Czech on 4 July 1950, then in Romanian on 14 July, in Polish and Hungarian on 4 August, and in Bulgarian on 11 August, all thanks to “Barbara,” a radio transmitter built for military purposes, then used for political propaganda radio.

Regarding RFI, the leaflet published in 2005 (“Si RFI . . .”) mentions the fact that French foreign-language programs are much less direct and avoid propaganda. It was originally designed only for expats, and then for foreign countries “which current events and international diplomacy have designated as targets to be convinced.” Thus, foreign-language programs appear and disappear from the

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7 J. Semelin appreciates that Radio Vatican is a specific category, distinct from religious radio.

French airwaves, sometimes without a trace (unlike the RFE archives, which are very well preserved by the Hoover Institute at Stanford University for sound and the OSA, Budapest, for texts, the RFI archives are lost inside the walls of the institution, as the former channel journalists and books consulted on this topic confess). From 1958 to 1963, the station experienced a gradual decline where overseas broadcasts are concerned. (But a Yiddish program was launched in 1958, while a Russian one was launched in 1960.) “Means, and especially political ambition, are lacking. [ . . . ] Since ‘loosening up, understanding, and cooperation’ will soon be on the agenda, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not want the sections broadcasting to the East to take part in the British-American radio war against the Soviets” (“Si RFI . . .” brochure 2005). In 1963, broadcasts in Vietnamese, German, and English (to those countries) were discontinued.

Radio France Internationale was founded in January 1975. By December 1974, ORTF (Office de radiodiffusion-télévision française)<sup>8</sup> had been dismantled, and fourteen of the seventeen “languages” on air – as the programs were internally known – were no longer supported. RFI focused mainly on Africa. In 1981, during the state of martial law declared by General Jaruzelski, in only three days, the Polish shortwave program reopened. The development of programs in foreign languages began: Russian, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian (even Turkish in 1993). In 1986 (as a result of the new audiovisual law that made RFI a national company, a subsidiary of Radio France), parliament granted independence to RFI. In 1996, there were seventeen foreign languages at RFI. In 2007, RFI was associated with an audiovisual holding company outside France (with France 24 and Monte Carlo Doualiya). Due to low ratings, German, Albanian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, Turkish, and Lao broadcasts have been eliminated; Mandarin, Russian, Persian, and Vietnamese have been moved to Internet radio; at the same time, French, English, Portuguese (for Brazil), Spanish, Hausa, and Swahili are being developed; RFI subsidiaries abroad have been closed – RFI Sofia was sold in 2009. However, RFI Romania still exists.

The projects, the reasons for existence, and therefore the tones of the radio stations studied here were different from one another. André Moosmann, former director of the Polish section of RFI, said that RFE “uses an extremely harsh tone with regard to the Polish authorities, with direct results, giving it a sensational character, the slightest information likely to discredit the Communist regime in Poland, it is deliberately aggressive and advocates the liberation of Eastern countries from the Communist yoke” (in Garçon 1991: 53). René Al. De Flers, an em-

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<sup>8</sup> ORTF replaced RTF (see above) in 1964 and oversaw public radio broadcasting and television, as well as the management of the media transmitters.

ployee of the Romanian section of RFE, confirms the almost relentless tone with which the editors sought anti-Communist testimonies from Romanian citizens traveling to the West. “The tone used by the Polish section of RDF (Radiodiffusion Française) is not as aggressive and as virulent as that of the American stations. The comments that accompany the information remain cautious and moderate,” Moosmann continues (in Garçon 1991: 55). From the perspective of listeners to the Romanian broadcasts, it was less a matter of aggressiveness and more of the “intelligent, sharp, ironic, pleasant tone” of the journalists at RFE, which “even made you laugh at the stupidity of the politicians.”<sup>9</sup>

The result, as one might think, was that RFI was less listened to than RFE. The former director of the RFI Polish section reports a discussion with management that illustrates the hesitations at all levels. “Should the tone of the comments be changed, which was traditionally measured and moderate? So far, our management had not encouraged controversy. Our broadcasts were instruments of influence, not of fight” (Garçon 1991: 55). However, after the events in Hungary of 1956, RFE adopted the editorial line particularly supported by Jan Nowak, the director of its Polish section: “to work for the formation of an independent public opinion which could put pressure on the ruling elites” and “not to push populations towards an open and violent revolt” (Semelin 2009: 28).

However, RFI’s audience in Poland increased after 1981, when the Polish broadcasts returned to the airwaves. After the introduction of martial law on 13 December, the tension in the country was extreme and it seems that the “normal” tone of the RFI journalists was quite appreciated, compared to the dramatization used by RFE. Here is a quotation from Jacek Fedorowicz, a Polish comedian, who illustrates well this contrast in tone:

RFI was the only radio station that, in the darkest moments of the martial law, knew how to easily speak to us, and sometimes even to make jokes, and, curiously, those jokes that theoretically should have shocked us, on the contrary, brought us closer to RFI. It really is a pretty interesting psychological phenomenon. While RFE announced an event with a sinister tone, adding one of Beethoven’s works chosen from his most serious works, RFI told us about it in a normal tone. (Fedorowicz in Semelin 2009: 70)

Casimir Piekarec, director of the Polish section from 1982 to 2005, spoke to me about “the improvised and sudden aspect of the resumption of programs in Polish after an eclipse of more than fifteen years, [which] undoubtedly affected their originality.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in 1982, the clandestine Association of Polish Journalists awarded the honorary distinction of “best foreign radio broadcast in Polish” to

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<sup>9</sup> Interview by the author with R. Radu, September 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Interview by the author with C. Piekarec, January 2015.

RFI, a “modest” newsroom (to use C. Piekarec’s term) in terms of the number of journalists and broadcasting hours, especially compared to the BBC and RFE.

From their beginning until the fall of Communism, the foreign-language programs of French international broadcasting seem to have been composed in very similar ways: an information broadcast of twenty to thirty minutes, dedicated to the international situation and the French internal situation, and a second part dedicated to national news (Polish, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Russian, . . .).

At RFE, several principles were applied to all programs:

- presenting what a free service would have presented in the country, if it had not been under Soviet control;
- focusing on issues that are important to the nations of the countries; avoiding the exiles’ concerns and political controversies about pre-war political rivalries;
- avoiding preaching, using invectives and inciting violence; no promises of imminent liberation;
- detailed reports on the ‘problems of communism’, analyzes of the actions of the Soviet system, reports on communism in other parts of the world;
- describing the situation of open, democratic societies in the West, which have been appointed to support the aspirations of Eastern European people to regain Europe;
- programs on the lives of exiled and similar ethnic communities in the United States and Europe. (Henze 2010: 6)

Therefore, a certain caution in structuring the content of the RFE programs in foreign languages can be observed, as well as an anti-Communist commitment in them. RFE also had a policy of “restoring the true facts of history” (Urban 1997: 143). Historians of various currents were invited on air to discuss the interpretation of events and the course of history.

In crisis moments, such as the Soviet invasion that ended the Prague Spring, a special caution was taken precisely regarding the tone to be adopted. The precedent during the Hungarian uprising in 1956 proved that an overemotional tone could be understood as a promise of American intervention. Thus, in 1968, during the events in Czechoslovakia, when RFE remained the only truthful and reliable media source, caution was preferred. “RFE saw its task as keeping its audiences informed while avoiding even the appearance of encouraging active resistance that might lead to violence,” said Ross Johnson, a former director of RFE who was working in Munich at that time (in Thompson 2018). On the other hand, Nestor Ratesh, a journalist in the Romanian section of RFE, asserted the low “informative value” of the broadcasts of this radio channel, as well as “its overwhelming militant component” (Ratesh 2010: 206).

At RFI, information was also officially important. The foreign-language newsrooms of this station are characterized by a great freedom in the composition of their programs and even their teams. There were almost no constraints. André Moosmann speaks only of an “a posteriori control” of the foreign-language productions. These checks were performed on the French translations of the main summaries, which continued until the end of 2010. We have today no complete translation of the programs of RFI or RFE.

## 4 Exiles in the newsrooms

Cultural transfers over the radio waves originated in well-known personalities from Eastern European nations. It is interesting to consider how foreign-language newsrooms were composed, and to ask whether they were showcases, forums, representatives of the exiles or diasporas of the countries concerned, and whether they possibly represented influential groups.

Paul Henze recounts the unusual way in which the foreign RFE sections were set up. Initially, the Committee for Free Europe<sup>11</sup> was formed to “take care of the political leaders in Eastern Europe who formed governments in exile during the World War II and were left out after the war” (Henze 2010: 4). Without having an occupation now, “something constructive to do” had to be offered to them, Henze continued; one had to “keep them busy.” The first initiative was to ask them to form national councils representative of the political spectrum. But the exiles did not welcome this idea with much enthusiasm. Another idea was to ask them to do research work to be published by the Free Europe Press, a publishing house created for this purpose. Finally, due to the radio experiences of several of them during the war, the idea of radio activity was adopted. “Broadcasts performed by exiles could help maintain high morale in their home country, as they did during the Nazi occupation” (Henze 2010: 5).

Later, each national group formed its own teams. It seems that the background of members was of three types: former diplomats and politicians, journalists, and (former) military. Then, more and more journalists managed to flee Eastern countries, and thus the professionalism of the newsrooms increased. Later, during the

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<sup>11</sup> After World War II, Eastern Europeans arriving in the US organized national committees in order to maintain contact with their home countries and to keep US agencies and politicians informed of the situation. The US government created the Committee for Free Europe in April 1949; it was immediately renamed the National Committee for Free Europe (NCFE) and became the Free Europe Committee, Inc. in 1954.

“stagnation” of Brezhnev’s time, radio newsrooms also received the new generation of intellectuals who had escaped from the countries in question. Thus, at the end of the 1980s, both RFI and RFE newsrooms consisted mainly of professional and intellectual journalists (writers, literary critics, former academics).

It is interesting to examine the potential migrations of journalists between broadcasters – and thus the movement of exiles between international forums. It seems that there are two scenarios. The first involved emblematic recognized voices, journalists who managed to speak at both RFE and RFI microphones, or intellectuals already recognized in their home countries who continued to express themselves on the Western side of the Iron Curtain. Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca are two examples of Romanian journalists who expressed hope and freedom for and on behalf of Romanians who had not left the country. The second scenario is that of journalists who belonged to only one of the two newsrooms. Almost all the newsrooms apart from the Romanian one fall under this type. While migrations from the BBC to RFI or RFE did happen, the same is not true for migrations from RFE to RFI or vice versa. Therefore, journalists were clearly identified by the public with either American or French radio. Coincidentally or not, this difference overlaps with the way in which Communist regimes were demolished – brutally in Romania, but in a more progressive and insidious way in the other countries.

Therefore, the broadcasts and these protectors of freedom of speech, and their interventions in the fall of the Communist regimes, cannot be ignored. In addition to the usual flow of information, the radio content had more important impacts: the simulated trial of Czechoslovak leaders following the trial of Rudolf Slansky, the telephone interviews with the Bulgarian intellectual groups in Rumi-ana Uzunova, the support for dissidents in the countries involved, and other actions which Jacques Semelin (2009) presented in *La liberté au bout des ondes*.

The teams of the foreign sections of the international radio stations were not groups of exiles or diaspora groups with their own identity, not in the sense of the Kultura Institute,<sup>12</sup> for instance. The different personalities and paths, the infiltrations of secret agents, sometimes, and the fears that accompanied the Cold War, the different visibility of the editors involved – all this made these media groups more akin to exile archipelagos than closely welded groups. But in all cases, there is one thing in common. Journalists from the Central and Eastern European newsrooms of the international radio stations had a constant concern for

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<sup>12</sup> *Kultura* was the most important literary and political magazine of Polish dissidents after World War II. Initially, it was a publishing house. It became an intellectual center fighting against the totalitarian regime.

their home countries, in addition to the programs they were able to produce. Their writings and journals are testimonies to this concern, and it is also demonstrated by the analyses of various researchers and confirmed by the interviews I have carried out.

## 5 Conclusion

Radio Free Europe and Radio France Internationale were radio stations from democratic countries broadcasting in non-democratic countries. When one analyzes the theoretical models of the impact of the media on the public, one must recognize that this peculiar situation has rarely been covered. All existing models deal with democratic societies. My research, therefore, has some new insights to offer. First of all, the negative or aggressive tone highlighted in this article is usually associated with a low level of trust in the government (Craig and Kane 2000; Leshner and Thorson 2000) and a negative public mood (Leshner and Thorson 2000). The effects of this tone in the Eastern societies involved a positive result – distrust and a negative mood – and contributed to the end of the Communist regimes.

This specific way of broadcasting had a wider societal role. It participated in the process of “metamorphosis” mentioned in the introduction to this article. International radio stations participated in the creation of an atmosphere, that of the democratic world. They transmitted content, but also participated in the transformation of ways of doing things. These media were vectors of transfer for a political culture and thereby had an educational role in Eastern European societies. This manner of broadcasting transmitted a way of thinking that also had a direct impact on the daily life of both the citizens and the Communist regimes, as can be seen from the widespread bans on listening to international radio stations.

As a final conclusion, the two radio stations studied here were radio stations broadcast from exile. Seen from the perspective of Eastern countries, they were the voices of exiles. Being neither community radio stations nor diaspora radio stations, Cold War international radio communication provides case studies that probably correspond to the phenomenon of transnational media phenomenon but whose main objective was to broadcast to a single country – the home country of the exiles. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech were undoubtedly their main achievements, and opened the path to the rising post-Communist democracies.

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Thomas Wegener Friis and Nils Abraham

## Creating an Alternative Public

### Socialist Media and its Followers during the Cold War

The main history of radio and media during the Cold War deals with the success of Western public diplomacy vis-à-vis the peoples of Eastern Europe. The key players in the story are the two American-sponsored radio stations Radio Free Europe (RFE) and Radio Liberty (RL), but also other international broadcasters, for instance, the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) or Deutsche Welle (DW). By the technical standards of the Cold War era, radio was the fastest and most efficient mass medium. It created a political and cultural lifeline for Eastern Europeans who were not inclined to accept without question the “truth” in the Communist version. These radio stations not only helped to carry Western messages across the Iron Curtain; as far as possible, they also tried to keep in contact with their listeners on the other side, for instance, through interviews with travelers from the socialist countries (Parta 2007: 2; Major 2016: 122).

The story of the Western broadcasters is only half the story of Cold War radio. The West was not alone in trying to establish media communities, notwithstanding the political division of Europe. The countries of the Warsaw Pact also reached across the barbed wire between East and West. From the Soviet Union, Radio Moscow broadcast as an early version of Russia Today, and the East German junior partner started foreign broadcasts with Radio Berlin International (RBI) in 1955, ending them with the unification of Germany on October 3, 1990. Throughout its existence, the RBI program was transmitted in twelve languages (Arabic, Danish, English, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, and Spanish) and thereby communicated not only to most of Europe, but in theory to most of the world. However, the hard reality was that the output produced at the RBI headquarters on Napela Street in the outskirts of East Berlin often traveled the airwaves unheard by the masses of the world.

Despite the intensive research on German Democratic Republic (GDR) history that has been promoted through massive public grants, few researchers have dealt with the history of RBI. The Swedish media historian Marie Cronqvist, as well as the German journalist and historian Anke Hagedorn, have written scholarly articles portraying aspects of the East German foreign broadcasts (Cronqvist 2022; Cronqvist and Bechmann Pedersen 2020; Hagedorn 2014). Even so, the most comprehensive study has been written by Heinz Odermann, the former director of the RBI desk responsible for Africa, the Arabic world, Asia, and South America (Odermann 2003; see also Odermann 1993). This article focuses on RBI's efforts

vis-à-vis the GDR's two Baltic Sea neighbors Denmark and Sweden. The RBI broadcasts are seen not only as a tool of East German foreign policy but also as a part of a transnational Communist media community. Unlike in the Soviet bloc, citizens of Western Europe were at liberty to form their own worldview and to seek information that supported it. Although Western authorities and political parties disapproved of them, alternative worldviews were tolerated, even if perceived as subversion. Even in the age before the Internet and social media, this led to media bubbles in which individuals were able to create alternative realities supported by handpicked media.

The East German “socialist foreign information” [sozialistische Auslandsinformation] – as this propaganda was officially called – aided the creation of a European counternarrative. Whereas RFE/RL promoted an agenda of civil rights and drew attention to unpleasant subjects such as the Berlin Wall and the policy of shooting those attempting to cross to the West, the GDR media responded by emphasizing social rights in socialism and exposing structural problems of capitalism, such as the lack of affordable housing.<sup>1</sup> This article examines the apparatus and the content of the socialist bubble, and discusses the difficulty of the concept of Europe for the GDR and the socialist countries.

## 1 Northern Europe in GDR public diplomacy

From the launch of RBI, the Nordic countries enjoyed special attention. In 1959, RBI produced three daily programs in Danish and Swedish, equaling the three programs in English and French (Classen 2004: 289). The reason for this significance lies in the overall priorities of East German foreign policy. In the second half of the 1950s, the GDR initiated a two-decades-long campaign to obtain international diplomatic recognition. The Nordic countries in general, and the two Baltic Sea neighbors Denmark and Sweden in particular, were anticipated to play special roles in this struggle (Bulla and Rabe 1989: 198; Linderoth 2002: 33; Muschik 2004: 259–260; Abraham 2007: 22; Almgren 2009: 160; Lammers 2005: 113–114; Hedin 2005: 330–339; Griese 2005: 191–193; Putensen 2005: 177–190; Putensen 2019: 84). Ferry lines connected the GDR to both countries; a revival of trade across the Baltic Sea might also have encouraged a more pragmatic policy toward the East German state (Friis 2000: 142). Furthermore, Sweden took a non-aligned position

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<sup>1</sup> SAPMO-BArch (Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv): DY 30/Vorl. SED – 32453: Notizen für Ausführungen vor dem Beirat für Auslandsinformation beim ZK der SED am 20.03.1972.

in the Cold War, at least on paper, and thus would possibly be more lenient toward Communist states and ready to break the West German policy of isolation known as the Hallstein Doctrine (Bulla–Rabe 1989: 198; Linderoth 2002: 294–305; Muschik 2004: 245–250).

The hopes for an early diplomatic breakthrough proved to be in vain, as the Nordic countries did not recognize the GDR until the normalization of relations between the two German states in 1972. Still, optimism paved the way for an intensified effort to reach out to the Nordic public. A major result of this policy was the Baltic Weeks [Ostseewochen], political festivals from 1958 to 1975 in the Baltic city of Rostock. These foreign policy prestige projects were flagships for GDR foreign policy and mobilized the entire political apparatus and regional mass organization to impress visiting citizens of the Nordic countries with the grand accomplishments of socialism (see Carlsen et al. 2018: 158–179).

In both Sweden and Denmark, strong workers' unions existed, as well as Communist parties that represented natural political partners for the GDR. These traditionally and ideologically high prioritized contacts remained a centerpiece for East German foreign policy throughout the Cold War. Also, the public diplomacy did not change in its essence despite the diplomatic breakthrough of the GDR with its admission to the UN in September 1973. The core was socialist foreign information, a centrally directed propaganda effort of all GDR institutions abroad and thus also RBI (Abraham 2007: 45). The East German Institute for International Affairs [Institut für internationale Beziehungen] defined the notion of socialist foreign information as “part of the ideological offensive of socialism and a decisive factor in the international ideological class struggle,” as “truthful information about real existing socialism, about its character, and the achievement of socialist society” (Odermann 1978: 5). These clichés of the language of socialism meant that RBI and the GDR institutions abroad were important actors in the Cold War (i.e., international class struggle) fight for the hearts and minds of the global public.

## 2 RBI and the GDR foreign information effort

The main institutions in the apparatus of socialist foreign information were the International Friendship League of the GDR [Liga für Völkerfreundschaft], the affiliated international publishing house *Zeit im Bild*, the international department of the East German trade unions [Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund] FDGB, and RBI. In 1977, these four institutions accounted for two thirds of the GDR's total budget for foreign propaganda; the RBI share alone was approximately twelve percent.

In comparison to this, the budget for the Foreign Ministry (not counting the cost of running the embassies and consulates) was merely seven percent of the national budget for spreading the message of East German socialism abroad.<sup>2</sup>

As an integral part of the foreign information apparatus, RBI could determine neither its program nor its general orientation independently. The radio – like all other media and press institutions in the GDR – was directed and firmly controlled by the Communist Party, the SED (Röck 1996: 11–18; Abraham 2007: 56; Hagedorn 2014: 42). The Politbüro and Central Committee issued the central guidelines and decisions for the GDR's public diplomacy. The Public Radio Committee [Staatliches Komitee für Rundfunk] was the official authority for radio broadcasting in the GDR. However, it was directly regulated by the SED Central Committee's Department for Agitation and Propaganda. RBI was a special case because it was broadcasting abroad. Thus, its controlling body was the SED Central Committee's Department of Foreign Information [Zentralkomitee, ZK-Abteilung Auslandsinformation].<sup>3</sup> According to the former senior radio official Heinz Odermann, RBI policy was even directly controlled by the SED Politbüro (Odermann 2003: 48; Hagedorn 2014: 42).

Analyzing public diplomacy may in other cases be challenging, because different state actors, opposing political players, and even private interests muddle the picture with a variety of messages conveyed at the same time. Totalitarian Communist states are less complicated in this respect. Due to the centralized command system, all institutions were playing the same tune, just directed at different audiences, some with a specifically defined outreach like the FDGB, which targeted foreign trade unionists, and others, like RBI, with a broader approach.

When RBI went on air in summer 1959, it was to let “the broad masses and individuals in capitalist foreign countries have access to true information concerning the GDR [and] to pave the way for new friendships with the GDR.”<sup>4</sup> A key notion is “true information,” which is central for the understanding of an “alternative socialist public” (Abraham 2007: 68, 69, 135, and 136). It suggested that the image of the GDR and of socialism was deliberately distorted in Western mainstream media. In its effort to create a counternarrative, RBI can be seen as part of

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2 SAPMO-BArch: Vorl. SED 32445: the annual propaganda budget is contained in a letter from the head of the SED Central Committee's Department of Foreign Information [Auslandsinformation], Manfred Feist, to the responsible member of the SED Politbüro, Albert Norden, from 4.2.1977.

3 This responsibility lasted until a few years before the fall of the Iron Curtain (Röck 1996: 12 and 18–20).

4 BArch: DR 6/272: Sommerprogramm 1959 Radio Berlin International (Sendungen in englischer, französischer, schwedischer, dänischer, arabischer und deutscher Sprache), p. 2.

a socialist media troika consisting of both East German and local actors. On the GDR side, the radio was flanked by the cultural work of the International Friendship League, which in Denmark and Sweden communicated either through its own monthly journal, the *GDR Review* [DDR-Revy], or by proxy through the National Friendship Societies [Nationale Freundschaftsgesellschaften], as well as through the GDR Cultural Center [DDR-Kulturzentrum] in Stockholm (Abraham 2007: 71–79 and 109–295; Friis and Abraham 2016: 196–200). The third part of the socialist media triumvirate comprised the party newspapers of the Communist parties, in Denmark *Land og Folk* and in Sweden *Norrskensflamman*. Even though the SED leadership in East Germany did not exert direct control over the National Friendship Societies or the Communist newspapers, both information channels relied heavily on financial and material support from East Germany (Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier 2005a: 349). Ideological kinship ensured that the messages conveyed supported one another. Most importantly for the establishment of an alternative socialist public, the three media outlets reached out to many of the same people. Often, they rejected the explanations of the political mainstream in Scandinavia and sought alternative explanations for the political divisions in Europe. It is a fair assumption that RBI, the International Friendship League, and the Communist newspapers shared large parts of their audience.

The three parts of this socialist media conglomerate, so to speak, not only shared their funding source, message, and audience. The cadres who produced content were also able to shift between the organizations. The process was symbiotic since it promoted the partners' common political goal as well as directly benefiting the participants. This becomes evident in correspondence between the Danish Communists and the East German Communists regarding cadre detail in the joint media effort in the late 1960s. In one letter, the head of the SED Foreign Department, Peter Florin, requested a replacement for the Danish employee at the Danish desk at RBI. The native speaker was needed as a news presenter. The SED deemed this position of “great importance for the formation of public opinion in Denmark” and thus was grateful to its Danish comrades for recruiting the needed personnel.<sup>5</sup> The new Dane at RBI was a later a renowned journalist in the Danish public service radio – John Wilken, who first worked for RBI, then became the GDR correspondent of the Danish Communist daily. All costs, equivalent to two East German salaries, were paid by the East German taxpayers, including a bonus partly paid in hard Western currency, allowing the Danish comrade to

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5 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/20 – 547: letter from the head of the SED International Department, Peter Florin, to Politbüro member Ingmar Wagner (Danish Communist Party, DKP), 29.11.1965.

shop in the privileged dollar-stores.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the arrangement was a win-win situation for everybody involved. The Danish Party was able to finance its foreign correspondent through the GDR state budget, and procured attractive jobs for devoted followers. For the SED and RBI, this was a practical arrangement securing hopefully ideologically dedicated Westerners to be the voice of the GDR to their fellow countrymen. In Sweden, the National Friendship Society, headed by the left-wing Social Democrat member of parliament Stellan Arvidsson, was the local contact. In a letter commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the RBI Swedish desk, both Arvidsson's political support and the recruitment assistance provided by the Swedish partners were recognized as a key element for the success of RBI in educating a "broad audience" about "politics and society in the GDR."<sup>7</sup>

### 3 An alternative public

Did the malcontent working classes in the capitalist world tune in to RBI, then? With the Cold War being more than a generation ago, it is not easy to estimate the exact outreach of the RBI broadcasts. The former leading RBI cadre Heinz Odermann assessed that he and his former colleagues probably served up to fifty-four million listeners; however, RBI estimated around ten million in 1971 (Odermann 2003: 145–146). Considering that GDR statistics were rarely humble when it came to evaluating its own accomplishments, it is safe to assume that the actual numbers were significantly lower. As RBI not only broadcasted to Denmark and Sweden but also the fast-growing populations in the Third World, only a fraction of all its listeners lived in the Nordic countries. In 1965, the first secretary of the SED (Communist Party) of the city of Rostock, Karl Zylla, gave a more sober, though of course subjective, assessment after a visit in Copenhagen. In his talks with leading comrades of the Danish fraternal party, he had got the impression that "the broadcasting of 'Radio International' shows no effect as it only has very few listeners."<sup>8</sup> Just a few years before, a friendly soul had tried to encourage the RBI Denmark desk with an explanation for the presumable very low number of

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6 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/20 – 547: Vorlage für das Sekretariat. Betr.: Akkreditierung und Bezahlung des DDR-Korrespondenten des Zentralorgans der KP-Dänemark "Land og Folk," John Wilken. 15.2.1968.

7 ARAB, Förbundet Sverige-DDR, Vol. 18: Brief des Intendanten des Radio Berlin International, K. Fischer, an den Präsidenten des Freundschaftsverbands Schweden-DDR, Prof. Dr. Stellan Arvidsson vom 18.06.1986.

8 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/20/ 547: "Bericht über meine Reise nach Kopenhagen vom 14.-19.5.1965."

recipients, suggesting that the RBI program was competing with Danish television in the evening hours.<sup>9</sup>

The low number of listener clubs [Hörerklubs] in Western Europe points to the conclusion that RBI had a limited group of devoted fans in the northern parts of Europe. According to the official statistics in 1977, 726 RBI listener clubs existed worldwide, but only 16 of them were in Europe.<sup>10</sup> The clubs were the socialist equivalents of customer-loyalty schemes and delivered additional content through the quarterly *RBI Journal* (until 1982). The Swedish historian Cronqvist uses letters from listeners to approach the question of who the RBI audience was. Individual listeners felt encouraged to write in, either to programs like the “International Letterbox” or to the RBI listener clubs (Cronqvist 2022: 145; Odermann 2003: 23).

The letters from such ardent listeners were utilized for propaganda purposes and as feedback to RBI for understanding its audience better. Listeners’ responses to RBI’s program are the equivalent to the popular trick in written propaganda known as “others about us” [Andere über uns]. This methodology involved self-praise, or the presentation of GDR positions disguised as the opinion of individual Westerners. An example is the contribution of the Swede Sture Jonsson from Salt-sjö-Boo to the February 1975 edition of the *GDR-Review* [DDR-Revy], the GDR’s socialistic foreign information magazine, published monthly in seven languages. In the column “Our readers” [vår läsare], Sture Jonsson wrote as an enthusiastic comment: “A lot has happened since we were last in contact. But the most important is that the GDR has turned twenty-five years and has accomplished such great achievements. Oh, I am so happy that socialism has outmatched capitalism.”<sup>11</sup> As a supposedly neutral person from Sweden, Sture Jonsson thus gave a testimony of the GDR’s success for the recipients of public diplomacy. Whether Sture Jonsson was a real person cannot be determined. The question can legitimately be asked for the equivalent radio method, questions from listeners, as well. At any event, a former Danish RBI employee between 1975 and 1978, Alice Persson, described the challenge of creating a letterbox section given that hardly

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9 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/2.028 – 52: RBI an Politbüromitglied Albert Norden: Auszüge aus Hörerbriefen des Monats Oktober 1963. 13.11.1963. p. 6.

10 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/2 1658: Anlage Nr. 2 zum Protokoll Nr. 8/77 vom 22.02.1977. Betr.: Stand der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der DDR im nichtsozialistischen Ausland und die Schlussfolgerungen für ihre weitere Verstärkung.

11 “Mycket har hänt sedan sist vi hörde av varandra. Men det viktigaste är att DDR fyllt 25 år och på den korta tiden hunnit med så stora framgångar. Oh, vad det glädjer mig, att socialismen visat sig överlägsen kapitalismen.” Jonsson, Sture (1975) “VÅR LÄSARE – Kommentarer,” *DDR-Revy*, February, 54. The *GDR-Review* was published monthly between 1956 and 1990 in Swedish, Danish, Finnish, English, French, Italian, and German, with up to 867,000 copies per year. Abraham (2007) *Die politische Auslandsarbeit der DDR in Schweden*, 409–410.

any Danes wrote in to the radio. In her dramatized autobiography, Persson described the solution in a dialogue with another Danish colleague:

You've got to invent listeners, and the questions.

I glared at him: Excuse me?

Yes, nobody actually writes. Somebody is probably listening as best they can. You have heard the radio yourself and the jamming they [the West] apply. The reception is terrible. Just look through the *Neues Deutschland* [the SED central daily] and *Berliner Zeitung* [the daily of the SED East Berlin district organization]. Find out what happens in the capitalist world, especially in Denmark and Norway. Then make up some questions and answers. [ . . . ]. (Persson 2016: Ch. 13)

In her memoirs, Persson also presents an example of what such a fictive question looked like, and how she used it to present the official propaganda perspective of the East German Communist Party:

And here is a letter from Ole Jensen [a typical Danish name] from Copenhagen: I find it intriguing that nobody strikes in the GDR. How do you avoid conflict on the labor market? Surely someone in the GDR is unsatisfied with their salaries?

I explained that there are no conflicts of interest between employers and employees, and thus nobody feels the urge to go on strike. Everybody has what they need, a fair salary, free kindergarten, and free health insurance. What more can people possibly want? (Persson 2016: Ch. 13)

An interesting “listener survey” was made for the responsible Politbüro member, Albert Norden, a few years after RBI went on air. The survey was largely comprised of quotes from grateful Westerners, allegedly from the month of October 1963, and it seems characteristic in two ways. First, it demonstrated the bias of GDR propaganda. Even though the declared aim was to reach a large audience abroad, the East German apparatus was politically so rigid that it was unable or unwilling to adapt its message to that audience. On the contrary, the political message was fixed, and the listeners needed to conform with this. Because Western media consumers had other choices, this approach meant “preaching to the converted.” Second, the survey showed that the benchmark for success was set quite low.

Norden would certainly be pleased by listeners confirming his and the regime's worldview; the listeners from Copenhagen wrote about West German rearmament: “Too much is written [in the Danish press] about the so-called German Question. The howling of the [Western] propaganda turns facts upside down. People are told lies spiced up with half-truths [ . . . ] The fact that twenty years after the terrible Nazi era, Nazi beliefs still exist [in the West] is not only sad, it is ex-

tremely dangerous.”<sup>12</sup> This was a perfect reflection of the message that Norden and the SED had been sharing with the world for years with such enthusiasm. Similarly, a Mr. J from Th. confirmed Norden’s image of Western society, branding the Western press as fake news (or worse): “most of our media is totally reliant on pretty Nazi-infected [West] German sources.”<sup>13</sup> Finally, a Mr. S. A. wished that the “the new West German government [the conservative Ludwig Erhard, taking over from Konrad Adenauer] will be more sensible and recognize the GDR.”<sup>14</sup> These listeners’ voices were an echo of the GDR’s arguments in its international recognition campaign, which painted a black-and-white image of the supposedly Nazi West Germany and the progressive and peace-loving GDR. Thus, such quotes left the Politbüro with the heartwarming impression of a Western public firmly on the same side as the GDR leadership. The survey did not, of course, quantify the radio audience, but it did at least outline a sketch of the listeners that RBI had – or maybe wished it had.

The low criteria for success of the expensive broadcasting operation were evident in other comments. One listener was simply quoted for mentioning that reception of RBI was good on medium wave in Copenhagen – only about 150 kilometers from the GDR. That people not too far away were able to hear RBI might seem like a very humble benchmark, as the first Danish-language broadcast had been made almost a decade earlier. A mere three listeners were reported to have posted their music requests across the Iron Curtain. Two listeners expressed thanks for having received the *DDR-Review* upon request, and “a young man” had asked specifically for information on GDR agriculture, political parties, working hours, and salaries, stating “he needed it for discussions at school.”<sup>15</sup> For a mass medium, these examples seem almost like ridicule, but they nonetheless served as proof of its successful outreach.

The interaction between RBI and the written propaganda of the International Friendship League was systematic. The aim was to draw listeners into the socialist bubble and then follow this up with additional arguments. As documents from the Swedish National Friendship Society show, this inspiration went both ways, as the Swedish friends of the GDR pledged to promote RBI at public events and to

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12 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/2.028 – 52: RBI an Politbüromitglied Albert Norden: Auszüge aus Hörerbriefen des Monats Oktober 1963, 13.11.1963. p. 7.

13 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/2.028 – 52: RBI an Politbüromitglied Albert Norden: Auszüge aus Hörerbriefen des Monats Oktober 1963, 13.11.1963. p. 7.

14 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/2.028 – 52: RBI an Politbüromitglied Albert Norden: Auszüge aus Hörerbriefen des Monats Oktober 1963, 13.11.1963. p. 7.

15 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV A 2/2.028–52: RBI an Politbüromitglied Albert Norden: Auszüge aus Hörerbriefen des Monats Oktober 1963, 13.11.1963, 6.

assist with radio contributions.<sup>16</sup> RBI representatives usually took part in special weekend seminars held in the GDR by the International Friendship League and the Swedish National Friendship Society. These meetings were aimed at organizing future cooperation as well as flattering these Swedish friends of the GDR.<sup>17</sup> Official delegations from Sweden, often made up of trade unionists as well as local politicians and social workers, which traveled to the GDR year after year, facilitated by the Swedish National Friendship Society, were used for RBI interviews, as well as for the written propaganda of other institutions of GDR public diplomacy.<sup>18</sup> In the official conception of the SED's central committee Department of Foreign Information, after international recognition the National Friendship Societies were also to be used to analyze better the effectiveness of RBI and other GDR media in the target countries.<sup>19</sup>

The tandem between the League and RBI supports the assumption that the two institutions to a large degree shared the same audience. The members of the Friendship Societies can largely be divided into a small group of businesspeople interested in trade with the GDR and a core group of left-wing political sympathizers. An analysis of the composition of the Swedish National Friendship Society showed that in the 1980s, the majority of its members belonged to one of the Communist parties in Sweden, followed by a significant number of Social Democrats. Also, a majority of those members without political party affiliation tended to the political left (Abraham 2007: 314–315). Neither in Sweden nor in Denmark were the National Friendship Societies able to attract masses of supporters. In Denmark, the society counted around 1.000, and in Sweden between 1.000 and 1.600

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**16** SAPMO-BArch: DY 13 2482: Liga für Völkerfreundschaft: Protokoll über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen der Freundschaftsgesellschaft DDR-Nordeuropa der Liga für Völkerfreundschaft und dem Verband Schweden-DDR für das Jahr 1978, 9.

**17** SAPMO-BArch: DY 13 2698: Liga für Völkerfreundschaft: Konzeption für die Durchführung eines Wochenendseminars mit Mitgliedern des Hauptvorstands des Verbandes Schweden-DDR vom 30.10. bis 02.11.1980 in Sehran (Bezirk Schwerin), 31.07.1980; ARAB, Förbundet Sverige-DDR, Vol. 2: Rapport från seminariet i Berlin 03.07.09.1986.

**18** SAPMO-BArch: DY 13 2720: Liga für Völkerfreundschaft: Konzeption für den Aufenthalt einer Studiendelegation des Verbandes Schweden-DDR zum Thema "Die sozialistische Demokratie im Betrieb – soziale Sicherheit der Werktätigen" 15.10.–22.10.1978; ARAB, Förbundet Sverige-DDR, Vol. 28: Brief der Sekretärin der Freundschaftsgesellschaft DDR-Schweden in der Liga für Völkerfreundschaft, Renate Zimmermann, an den Verband Schweden-DDR, 15.04.1983; DY 13 3042: Liga für Völkerfreundschaft: Bericht über den Studienaufenthalt einer Delegation des Verbandes Schweden-DDR zum Thema "Staat und Kirche in der DDR" vom 04.–11.06.1983. For an overview of the Swedish delegations to the GDR between 1973 and 1989, see Abraham 2007: 537–544.

**19** SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/2 1440: Anlage Nr. 5 zum Protokoll Nr. 12/73 vom 27.03.1973. Konzeption für die Gestaltung der Auslandsinformation der DDR gegenüber jungen Nationalstaaten und kapitalistischen Ländern nach der Herstellung diplomatischer Beziehungen, 8.

members (Horstmeier 2014: 219–224; Abraham 2007: 308). Both societies were financially dependent on the GDR's International Friendship League and worked closely together with their East German partner organizations. In their organizational form, they followed a pattern, with a president who was not a Communist – often a public figure – and a secretary who was a Communist (Friis and Abraham 2016: 199–200; Almgren 2009: 412–414; Abraham 2007: 326–348). Like the GDR institutions, the objective of these societies was to spread a “true picture of the GDR” (Linderoth 2002: 138–160; Abraham 2007: 297–301). As keepers of such GDR truth, they fulfilled this role by analyzing and constantly criticizing the coverage of the GDR in the local media as well as the image of the GDR in schoolbooks (Abraham 2007: 393–398; Almgren 2009: 287–293 and 414–416).

In her analysis of RBI, Cronqvist mentions that a sizeable portion of the Swedish listeners were “actively seeking out the East German station, either for ideological reasons or simply in order to hear ‘another side of the story.’” To support this, she quotes a grateful letter from early 1989 that states: “I value the opportunity to be informed not only by our own media and their Western perspectives” (Cronqvist 2022: 144).

This impression corresponded well with the internal image of RBI and with the core group of members of the Friendship Societies. It aligns with the recurring aim of the GDR foreign propaganda work to reach out to “progressive movements and politically engaged listeners” in the West.<sup>20</sup>

During the Cold War, the limited impact posed a problem for the effectiveness of GDR propaganda in Scandinavia. The former RBI employee Alice Persson even claimed that “no Danes, not even our comrades [in the Danish Communist Party] know the station [ . . . ] In reality, we are struggling hard for a few pseudo-listeners” (Persson 2016: Ch. 24). This judgment appears somewhat harsh, but it would be more fitting to describe RBI as a specialty channel than as a mass medium. It was a channel serving people of a distinct political persuasion.

The low number of listeners does not stop us regarding RBI as part of a transnational media community. On the contrary, the common group of media consumers who regularly listened to RBI programs, as well as reading League publications and likely also local Communist media, constituted a community of shared beliefs. Even though this group was a minority in their home countries, its members were enabled to participate in a much bigger transnational, alternative media community originating in the Eastern bloc. They could deselect their local media, which in

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<sup>20</sup> SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/2 1658: Anlage Nr. 2 zum Protokoll Nr. 8/77 vom 22.02.1977. Betr.: Stand der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der DDR im nichtsozialistischen Ausland und die Schlussfolgerungen für ihre weitere Verstärkung. p. 4 and 5. [fortschrittliche Kräfte und politisch engagierte Hörer].

their view spewed out capitalist propaganda, and instead participate in the well-regulated socialist ideological community.

## 4 The message

Seen from a contemporary perspective, the message of the GDR's public diplomacy largely qualified as "alternative facts," though of course the participants in the Cold War were not acquainted with that notion and its negative connotations. The East German institutions claimed their role was to produce a "truthful image," but the ideological bias often distorted realities beyond recognition.

In 1971, the Polish emigrant Zygmunt Nagorski, the program director at the influential Council for Foreign Policy think tank in New York, gave this very fitting description of the information war between East and West: "Themes on both sides are almost the same i.e. peace, independence, economic development, racial equality, and cultural freedom but interpretation diametrically opposed" (Nagorski 1971: 132). Nagorski, who explicitly mentioned RBI as part of his definition of the Soviet apparatus, had personal experience in the field, having served as information officer at the US embassies in South Korea, Egypt, and France (Hevesi 2011). The themes of the GDR propaganda actually fitted this very general description. Terms like "peace-loving," "international reliant," "economically successful," "anti-Fascist," "social and compassionate," and "supportive of culture" were constantly being attributed to the GDR.

The overall goal of the GDR's foreign propaganda was to depict the alleged supremacy of socialism over capitalism. The core ideological message was an alternative interpretation of political, economic, and social life in the GDR. It was branded as a self-determined socialist German state with positive political values and a successful development. West Germany was portrayed as the antithesis, dominated by old Nazis and warmongers, and haunted by the downsides of modern capitalism (Abraham 2007: 481–487).

RBI described how this was translated into radio in, for instance, the concept for the summer program in 1959: "the policy of the GDR as a peace-loving, anti-imperialist, and socialist state has to be explained [. . .] It should be exhibited that the GDR with its highly developed industry today on rank five in industrial production in Europe with triple the growth of West Germany or other capitalist states [. . .] In contrast, the danger of [West] German imperialism and militarism

should be exposed, especially for the Western European, Scandinavian, and anti-imperialistic countries.”<sup>21</sup>

Through the decades, East German foreign propaganda or public diplomacy had a clear and recurring pattern. By and large the content could be divided into two categories: the GDR and the Soviet Union as bringers of peace and international stability, and promotion of the socialist model and criticism of capitalism. These two overall messages were unified by the constantly repeated claim that socialism equaled peace (Abraham 2007: 46–48; Röck 1996: 25–26).

The propaganda revealed, of course, a discrepancy between the reality and the GDR’s self-presentation to foreign audiences. It praised the superior qualities of socialism, yet thousands of GDR citizens tried to escape this alleged success. The free media in Sweden, for instance, repeatedly criticized this evident contradiction and the cruel situation at the border (Abraham 2007: 464–465). In doing so, the majority of Sweden’s media contrasted with the ideological messages of the GDR’s public diplomacy.

On the radio or in written propaganda, the political message was embedded in a mixture of less obviously political subject matter like culture or sport, even though these subjects were also set in an ideological context. Due to the capacities of the radio transmitters and short transmitting time periods, RBI could not offer an overall daily radio program. In 1977, the daily broadcasting time for all programs in Europe combined was sixteen hours and thirty minutes. Reception in some countries was bad; in Rome and Paris, it was almost impossible to pick up RBI at all.<sup>22</sup> The SED Central Committee’s Department of Foreign Information assessed reception in Denmark and Sweden as between good and satisfactory; only in the northern parts of Sweden was it excessively poor.<sup>23</sup> In Sweden, RBI offered a news broadcast every day with current domestic and external news from the GDR. In the mid-1980s, RBI’s Swedish program contained formats like “GDR Magazine with Information about the GDR’s Economy, Technology, and Culture,” “The Country We Live In – on people and Everyday Life in the GDR,” “News from Socialist Countries,” “In the Name of Life – Campaigns for Peace,” “The GDR and the

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21 BArch: DR 6/272: Sommerprogramm 1959 Radio Berlin International (Sendungen in englischer, französischer, schwedischer, dänischer, arabischer und deutscher Sprache), 2.

22 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/2 1658: Anlage Nr. 2 zum Protokoll Nr. 8/77 vom 22.02.1977. Betr.: Stand der Öffentlichkeitsarbeit der DDR im nichtsozialistischen Ausland und die Schlussfolgerungen für ihre weitere Verstärkung, p. 4–5.

23 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/21/10: Abteilung Auslandsinformation: Information für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED, Berlin 16.04.1979 p. 2 and attachment “Hörbarkeit in Schwerpunktländern.”

Nordic Countries,” “Music Review,” and “Sport News.”<sup>24</sup> In this way RBI offered its Swedish listeners an opportunity to receive news and wide-ranging information directly from the GDR – of course always with a certain ideological perspective on current and fundamental political questions.

An advantage to the credibility of RBI was the use of specialized editorial teams. Also, the Danish and Swedish programming rested on people with local knowledge. This enabled the regional differentiation of RBI's broadcasts.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the model enabled the Danish and Swedish desks to refer to local, current political issues and thus create identification with their audiences. An example of how the general political line corresponded with local knowledge was RBI's general commentary preceding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) double-track decision in December 1979. The fight against the modernization of the Western nuclear arsenal was one of the foremost important leitmotifs of socialist-camp foreign policy in the last decade of the Cold War (Ploetz 2004: 305). It was a major issue for East Berlin and fueled the 1980s peace movement. In the RBI commentary, the reluctance concerning NATO among Danish leftists in general and members of the ruling Social Democratic Party in particular was thus a big story, since it could be presented as independent Westerners seemingly representing the same point of view as the GDR. The commentary appreciated how the peace movement had evolved into a broad mass movement of artists, trade unionists, and peace activists. The picture drawn was that of an overwhelming opposition to NATO, even including the bourgeois media. This image was naturally distorted, since it presented a minority viewpoint of the left wing as the social mainstream. However, the local expertise of the RBI editors made it more credible, for instance, by naming those the members of the Social Democrats who were skeptical of NATO, thereby keeping up with political events in Denmark.<sup>26</sup> In this way, the political commentary went beyond just stating the GDR position.

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24 RA (Riksarkivet, Stockholm), DDR-Kulturzentrum Vol 1: GDR Cultural Center program for January and February 1986, RBI program survey and commercial.

25 SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/ J IV 2/21/10: Abteilung Auslandsinformation: Information für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED, Berlin 16.04.1979 p. 2. There existed eight further regional editorial offices within RBI. In addition, three central offices produced general programs.

26 SAPMO-BArch: DZ 9 Vorl. SED 539: RBI manuscript broadcast “Bis zur Stunde, Liebe Hörer,” without date (1979).

## 5 The European question in the socialist world

The transnational socialist media appealed to their alternative public for unity across the Iron Curtain. However, that unity was not primarily defined by geographic terms such as common European values. From a Marxist–Leninist point of view, the most important common denominator was class interest. Thus, the working class, represented by their avant-garde in the Communist parties in the West, were natural allies for the Party and government in the GDR. This also became evident in GDR media, where Nordic governments were remarkably less visible than the tiny Communist parties in opposition (Gamrauf Madsen 2006). The leaders of these parties were treated as the true leaders of their nations, no matter how small and how little real influence the parties actually possessed (Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier 2005b: 341). The ties between “true representatives” of the working class were thus perceived as vital, whereas transnational categories such as “European” were secondary.

In the understanding of class loyalties transcending the Iron Curtain, the concept of Europe as a uniting factor was difficult to both grasp and handle for the Eastern European Communists. Therefore, it is no mystery why the idea of a united Europe was predominantly Western European and the Eastern bloc’s response was hesitant. As the director of the Institute of Political Economy at East Berlin’s Humboldt University, Dieter Klein, concluded in his 1965 analysis of the early EEC (European Economic Community), this initiative did not constitute a true European project but rather an extension of the interests of capitalist monopolists. The supposed correct response to this was “the establishment of the unity of the working class,” meaning a strategic alliance between Communists and Social Democrats (Klein 1965: 203). This response to Western European integration was neither particularly innovative nor a serious effort to brand the notion of “Europe” in a socialist sense, since “unity of the working class” was one of the ideological crown jewels of the Communist movement as a key to general improvement of the state of the world.

The Communist movement to some extent tried to address their insufficient European agenda with a “European Communist and Workers’ Parties” summit series in the latter half of the Cold War. At the same time, the summits sought to mend the divisions within the Communist movement between Moscow loyalists and Euro-Communists (Dörr 2011: 55). Prior to the first summit in Karlovy Vary in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in April 1967, one of the most influential Nordic Communist leaders, Ib Nörlund from the Politbüro of the Danish Communist Party, appealed to his brothers-in-arms in Eastern Europe to develop a common European economic, technological, and cultural cooperation as an alternative to the EEC. The aim was to “reclaim the flag of Europeanism.” In other words, the

Danish comrades were attentive to the fact that the Communist movement was losing the battle when it came to defining this political agenda.<sup>27</sup>

The statement of the Karlovy Vary meeting could have been the answer, as it claimed to show the way to “peace and progress in the struggle for European security.”<sup>28</sup> Even though it addressed both the division of Europe and social progress, its core message was the call for a European security conference. This was an important step on the road to the Helsinki Conference of 1975 and to European détente. No matter how laudable a project the defusing of tensions in Europe was, the development from Karlovy Vary to Helsinki demonstrated that the European agenda of the socialist countries was not particularly ambitious. It reduced European rapprochement to the absence of hostilities between the blocs, and it neither included the question of integration nor intensified human relations.

The shortcomings of the socialist countries’ approach were evident in a speech that the SED Politbüro member Albert Norden gave to guests from the Nordic countries at the Baltic Week in Rostock in 1973. He attacked Otto von Habsburg and the International Paneuropean Union, which he accused of “misuse of the notion of European politics.”<sup>29</sup> According to Norden, a sound European path could be found in the foreign policy of the socialist countries, which supposedly went beyond “a breather between wars.” However, the closest he came to describing it was that Europe was “awaiting a major change [Wende] because the idea of peaceful coexistence is going to be the principle of neighborliness and cooperation of the European countries.” He accredited the National Friendship Societies with a vital role in this change due to their “propaganda for the truth about the GDR” (Norden 1974: 479). In an anthology of his own articles and speeches published in 1972, Norden’s boss, the chairman of the SED, Erich Honecker, also shows how meaningless the Communist concept for Europe was. Of the twenty-four contributions selected, only one addressed Europe, a speech to graduates of the East German Military Academy the previous year. However, the sixteen-pages-long manuscript

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27 Arbejderbevægelsens Arkiv og Bibliotek (ABA, Archive of the Danish Labor Movement): Box 286: note for Warsaw meeting, January 1967.

28 Statement by the Conference of European Communist and Workers’ Parties, Karlovy Vary (26 April 1967): <[https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/statement\\_by\\_the\\_european\\_communist\\_and\\_workers\\_parties\\_on\\_security\\_in\\_europe\\_karlovy\\_vary\\_26\\_april\\_1967-en-e8fe5ae4-27cc-4e0f-a48a-c8c82cb548e6.html](https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/statement_by_the_european_communist_and_workers_parties_on_security_in_europe_karlovy_vary_26_april_1967-en-e8fe5ae4-27cc-4e0f-a48a-c8c82cb548e6.html)> (accessed 20 December 2020).

29 The International Paneuropean Union is the oldest European movement working for a unification of the European states. It was founded by Richard Graf Coudenhove Kalergi in 1922. The movement still exists and stands for “[. . .] a politically, economically and militarily united Europe as a community of law, peace, [. . .] freedom and Christian values.” Pan-Europa – The parent idea of a united Europe: <[http://www.international-paneuropean-union.eu/#/EN/History\\_of\\_PEU](http://www.international-paneuropean-union.eu/#/EN/History_of_PEU)> (accessed 12 December 2022).

ended up only mentioning Europe a few times and largely reduced it to a commitment to “peace and security” (Honecker 1972: 246). The European policy of the GDR was, in other words, more or less the question of absence of war, or “a breather between wars.”

If the concept of Europe was largely reduced to a question of coexistence, European security could be used to argue for anything. This was, for instance, the case in the RBI evening commentary on 13 August 1989 (the twenty-eighth anniversary of the construction of the Berlin Wall), when the closing of the GDR borders was celebrated as “a historical compromise [. . .] and a [way] to ensure European security” (Odermann 2003: 107). Comparably shallow were the repeated calls for Europe to be a nuclear-free zone or a zone free of chemical weapons, as these were neither serious suggestions nor based on any preparedness for European cooperation.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the European concept did not evolve beyond propaganda semantics. And it left the playing field of European integration to the Western European countries.

Only a few years before the collapse of Communism, the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev pursued a more active use of the European idea and launched the phrase “Common European Home,” describing the shared continent inhabited by people of different social systems (Loth 2020: 439). The implications of this new phrase remained vague; however, the foreign expert Herman Axen of the SED Politbüro did acknowledge that new interpretation of the EEC in particular. The advice he delivered based on the new Soviet policy was to some extent old wine in new bottles, for instance, in explaining the link between socialist peace propaganda and a European agenda. However, it also had innovative elements, as the interpretation of the “common home” saw a way for the Western European states to recognize the “basic interest of all capitalist states in Europe to pursue their own policy instead of leaning on US political and security interests.” A new “socialist European policy” was open to intensified economic cooperation, formal relations between the EEC and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), and an active dialogue with, for instance, the European Parliament.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV 2-2.115 – 28: Abt. Auslandsinformation: Information für das Außenpolitischen Kommission beim Politbüro des Zentralkomitees der SED. Betr.: Erfahrungen in der Zusammenarbeit mit den Friedensbewegungen in den kapitalistischen Ländern bei der weiteren Entfaltung ihres koordinierten Wirkens für Abrüstung und Entspannung, 22.6.1987.

<sup>31</sup> SAPMO-BArch: DY 30/IV 2-2.115 – 28: Vorschläge für eine sozialistische Europapolitik, 1987; Wüstenhagen, Jana (2001) “RGW und EWG: Die DDR zwischen Ost- und Westintegration,” in *Die DDR und der Westen. Transnationale Beziehungen 1949–1989* ed. Ulrich Pfeil (Berlin: Chr. Links), 135–150, here 147.

This was a change from a strict rejection of European institutions as capitalist tools, and it represented an attempt to develop a new European agenda. An analysis by the East German Communist youth organization took one step further and praised the integration of the EEC states as an “innovation in the history of capitalism” creating “the possibility of developing the EEC into an independent global player, which might serve peace and [further] détente.” This was deemed the objective for “the Marxist youth initiatives of the 1990s” if European integration was correctly combined with the Soviet concept of the “Common European Home.”<sup>32</sup> However, time was running out for the Communist regimes in both the GDR and the Soviet Union, and the eleventh-hour new socialist European agenda was reduced to a dead end of history.

## 6 Conclusion

Even though the most famous European media communities transcending the Iron Curtain during the Cold War were created by Western broadcasting, they were not alone. The losing team in the fight for the hearts and minds of the people of Europe, namely the Soviets and their Eastern European satellites, also tried to create communities with like-minded people in Western Europe. The case of RBI as part of both GDR propaganda and a socialist media bubble demonstrates the weakness of this project. It was an ideologically inflexible political package that was offered, and the group of Western listeners remained small. Despite the low numbers of interested Swedes and Danes, such a community was created and nurtured at an annual cost of millions of marks. And regardless of their number, these people did constitute an actual transnational community based on shared beliefs and common values.

The broadcasting of RBI was closely directed by the Central Committee of the SED and coordinated with the other institutions responsible for East German foreign propaganda. The downsides of Communist propaganda were plentiful; nevertheless, the central regulation also gave the advantage that the message was repeated, again and again, by all East German channels. The core of it stayed the same for the forty years of the GDR's existence: naming the advanced and superior nature of socialism. The East German propaganda and its Western allies claimed to present “a true image” of the GDR where the Berlin Wall and political

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<sup>32</sup> SAPMO-BArch: DY 24 – 116203: Haupttrichtungen, Bedingungen und Probleme der westeuropäischen Integrationsprozesse und deren Konsequenzen für die marxistische Jugendarbeit in den 90er Jahren.

suppression were of no significance; instead, the focus was shifted to the economic and social “accomplishments of socialism,” the alleged anti-Fascist nature of the regime, and, last but certainly not least, the peaceful nature of one of the most militarized states in Europe.

The so-called peace policy was also the core of the fragile European agenda of the socialist countries. “A breather between wars” was not a high ambition for European cooperation or integration. The reason for this low benchmark for European policy and the use of Europe in political agitation was the Marxist–Leninist nature of East German foreign policies. Throughout most of the Cold War, cooperation based on the simple fact that people inhabited the same divided continent was not a valid argument for common values. Instead, the socialist regime wanted communities to build upon “class interest.” In this respect, the small but selected RBI audience in the West was important from a political point of view.

As the deep crisis in the Communist bloc forced Mikhail Gorbachev to reform the Communist system and to rethink the notion of Europe, the regimes passed the point of no return and were only surviving on borrowed time.

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Will Studdert

## “Refined and Experienced Opponents?”: The BBC’s German East Zone Programme in the Cold War

The BBC German Service was Britain’s main avenue of communication to the citizens of the German Democratic Republic during the Cold War. Between 1949 – the year of the foundation of the two German states – and 1975, it broadcast a nightly “German East Zone Programme” (GEZP),<sup>1</sup> with thirty minutes of content specially tailored for East German audiences. While not as popular as its livelier American-sponsored rivals such as “Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor” (RIAS), it profited from the valuable reputation for objectivity that the BBC had gained among its large German listenership during the war and was widely listened to.<sup>2</sup> The GEZP pursued a non-interventionist policy that did not actively seek to agitate for regime change, and yet it consistently sought to undermine the GDR’s political system and discredit its leaders.

Despite its prominent role in Anglo-GDR relations, the German East Zone Programme has been largely overlooked in the historiography of Cold War broadcasting to date. Patrick Major broke the first ground on the subject with his article *Listening Behind the Curtain: BBC Broadcasting to East Germany and its Cold War Echo*, which provides an excellent introduction to the broadcasts, their listeners and the “transmitter-receiver” relationship of mutual influence between the BBC and its audience. Locating the broadcasts themselves, especially the letterbox program “*Briefe ohne Unterschrift*” [Letters without Signature] in the context of the high politics of the Cold War and the East German public discourse, Major shows how their content was also shaped by the changing demographics of the listeners themselves. This was followed in 2017 by an impressionistic account of *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* by the writer Susanne Schädlich (2016), which (re-)introduced the program to a broader German-speaking audience. Most recently, Emily Oliver (2019a) has provided a valuable analysis of the perspectives and voices adopted by the GEZP in its first decade, as well as audience responses to its

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<sup>1</sup> While, as noted below, the broadcasts were renamed the East German Programme in the 1960s, for consistency it is referred to throughout this chapter as the GEZP.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with newly-arrived East German refugees conducted in 1958 found that between one quarter and one third of those asked “usually” listened to the BBC, while the RIAS figures were approximately double that. See Major (2013: 257).

output, tracing a gradual disillusionment among East German listeners at the BBC's non-interventionist mantra over the course of the 1950s.

This chapter will draw on Ministry for State Security (Stasi) files, the BBC's written archives and British Foreign Office papers to work toward to a multifaceted understanding of the German East Zone Programme and the ways in which it was exploited, for very different purposes, in Britain and the GDR. Firstly, it will look at the German Service's agenda toward the GDR in the early post-war period, and explore the advantages offered by radio as a medium for reaching an audience on the other side of the systemic divide. In doing so, it will also address the advantages and attendant risks of letter writing, which became the principal means for contacting the BBC available to East Germans, and the "broadcaster-listener loop" between the German Service and its audience. This will be followed by a reappraisal of the Stasi's anti-BBC campaign, "*Operative Vorgang*" (OV) "Werfer," and its main target, the broadcaster Austin Harrison, in the light of the BBC's relationships with the Information Research Department (IRD), the Foreign Office's covert anti-communist propaganda section, and the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). Finally, it will look at the BBC's use of youth-oriented music programming in the 1960s and early 1970s, including the ways in which young East Germans used British pop-cultural propaganda to assert agency, exploiting the airwaves as an alternative forum for cultural, social and even romantic purposes.

## 1 The post-war BBC German Service

In 1946, following the establishment of Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (NWDR) in Hamburg, which was intended to be an "objective" German radio station modelled on the BBC, a move was made to close the BBC German Service. The Foreign Office made the urgent case for preserving it as a means of "projecting Britain," arguing that, if this were done via the new German station, there would be a resulting loss of trust as it would appear to be an instrument of British propaganda.<sup>3</sup> Of course, NWDR was by no means independent of British control; the British served as a regulating authority, employing and supervising broadcasters on the new German station, which was to serve as a tool of political and cultural reeducation in accordance with British (and American) goals in their zones of occupation. Nonetheless, Sir William Strang, political advisor to the Commander-in-Chief in Germany, Bernard Montgomery, wrote that the BBC German Service's continuation provided evidence that Britain had not "surrendered on the ideolog-

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<sup>3</sup> TNA FO 945/537 Control Office for Germany & Austria, 25 May 1946.

ical front” or abandoned democratic elements in Germany. Moreover, he argued, the German Service “is the most effective of our propaganda weapons and it is important that it should be fully available in our coming battles here.”<sup>4</sup>

“Month after month,” stated a Listener Research Unit report on German audiences dated 6 June 1946, “the BBC receives thousands of letters from its listeners in Germany. By this means it is kept constantly in touch with the shifting currents of German opinion and the changing moods of the German audiences, and it is provided with the background against which program reaction must be assessed and output planned.”<sup>5</sup> This early tacit acknowledgement of the importance of audience feedback and its direct impact on the content of programming was accompanied by an exasperated description of audience trends in the western zones. The 2,035 letters received from Germany the previous month had indicated a sharp rise in anti-British sentiment, and many correspondents had included “sometimes veiled but often explicit” threats that their growing disillusionment at British occupation – which they claimed to have originally viewed favorably – would turn them toward communism. “This new German national sport of weighing up the rival merits and personal advantages of democracy (by which Military Government is usually understood) and communism is evidently gaining in popularity,” observed the report. “For our correspondents in the eastern zone the choice is clear: they, they assure us, would cast their votes for democracy.”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the report found that, based on an analysis of substantial quantities of mail received from the Soviet zone of Germany, “the BBC probably has a larger potential audience there than in any other zone.”<sup>7</sup> However, there were serious obstacles to overcome in reaching that audience. The Soviets had confiscated short-wave radio sets capable of receiving the BBC, and a separate report on 3 July noted that the medium wavelengths shared with other European Services were “quite useless for German services because they are too weak to give effective listening, even in the British zone, still more in the Russian zone.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, reception on the available longwave 1796 was “unsatisfactory if not impossible in Eastern Germany.”<sup>9</sup> Officially, Germans in the Soviet zone were now dependent on small radio sets of the “Volksempfänger” type, although unofficially “large numbers” had man-

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4 TNA FO 945/537 Sir William Strang, Cabinet Distribution to Foreign Office, 4 June 1946.

5 TNA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 1.

6 TNA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 2.

7 TNA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 1.

8 TNA FO 945/537 BBC Service to Germany, Minute Sheet (signed Wilberforce), 3 July 1946.

9 NA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 2.

aged to hide their larger radio sets and could still listen privately to the BBC under World War II-type conspiratorial conditions.<sup>10</sup>

In lieu of newspapers, radio played an important role in the immediate post-war period as a means of communication between the Allied military governments and German society in their respective zones. Berliner Rundfunk had begun broadcasting (originally as “Radio Berlin”) under the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) as early as 13<sup>th</sup> May 1945, followed successively by the regional stations Potsdam, Leipzig, Dresden, Cottbus and Erfurt (Maršolek 2001: 228). The US-sponsored RIAS was founded as a western counterpart to Berliner Rundfunk, and by 1949 it had been joined by six main broadcasting stations in West Germany, which required permission from the Allies in order to operate and were organized on a federal model according to the borders of the new zones of occupation (Maršolek 2001: 228). These included Bayerischer Rundfunk in Munich, Hessischer Rundfunk (Frankfurt/Main), Süddeutscher Rundfunk (Stuttgart) and Radio Bremen in the American zone, Südwestfunk (Baden-Baden) in the French zone and the aforementioned Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk (Hamburg, Cologne, Hanover) in the British zone (Komska 2014: 6).

The problems persisted, and further issues with frequencies and reception arose in the wake of the Copenhagen Plan which reallocated ca. 120 medium wavelengths to around 600 European countries in 1948. While only two medium-wave licenses were allotted to Germany, foreign stations such as Voice of America, the American Forces Network, and Radio Free Europe were not obliged to adhere to the Plan and often claimed these coveted medium-wave slots, thus disrupting German broadcasts. However, this short-term conflict of interests had the unintended effect of leading West Germans to specialize in short-wave (UKW) radio approximately a decade before it became popular in the United States.<sup>11</sup> The historian Yuliya Komska points out that such transgressions “undermined the myth of discrete national voices” on the air, with radio’s greatest asset being its ability to bypass national and political boundaries as a truly international medium. Logistically and geographically, West Germany was fast becoming of central strategic importance in the new Cold War of the ether (Komska 2014: 7).

For the British, too, radio was increasingly “the sole method” of reaching a large portion of the population of the Soviet zone and counteracting communist propaganda, due to the increasing difficulty of importing printed matter such as newspapers and periodicals from West Germany.<sup>12</sup> However, in October 1950, Sir

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<sup>10</sup> NA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 2.

<sup>11</sup> As pointed out by Alexander Badenoch, cited in Komska (2014: 7).

<sup>12</sup> TNA FO 953/814 Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick to Office of G.O.C., Berlin, 6 October 1950, 2.

Ivone Kirkpatrick, the UK High Commissioner for Germany, wrote that only 25–30% of medium-wave radio sets in the East Zone could pick up German broadcasts from London. Two months previously, Andrew Gilchrist of the Foreign Office had proposed to Kirkpatrick’s office in Wahner Heide that they take advantage of the Soviet habit of periodically opening the inner-German border by making large numbers of shortwave radios available at low prices in West German border towns, thereby increasing the number of potential listeners to British broadcasts in the Soviet zone.<sup>13</sup> This plan did not come to fruition; as George M. Warr noted in his reply to Gilchrist, the closest sizable town to the border was Braunschweig, at least one hour’s drive away, and even cheap radio sets in West Marks would be expensive for East Germans, especially after the necessary currency conversion.<sup>14</sup> The exchanges nonetheless offer a clear early indication of the importance that both the Foreign Office and the British authorities in Germany attached to reaching East German listeners over the airwaves.

## 2 A trusted source?

Initial technical problems notwithstanding, the BBC was able to capitalize – especially in the early years of the Cold War – upon its wartime reputation as a trusted source which represented its listeners’ best interests. As Patrick Major has shown, while the corporation was viewed as rather stuffy by comparison to its American competitors, in East German listener polls it regularly scored higher in terms of trust and sought to set itself apart with its objective reputation (Major 2013: 258). Although British propaganda, as the Listener Research Unit claimed, was “governed by truth,”<sup>15</sup> the Hungarian writer George Urban, who worked for the European Service between 1947–1960, has pointed out that this entailed “a penchant for speaking the truth but not the whole truth” (Urban 1997: 54). It was not, according to the historian John Jenks, a case of “truth for truth’s sake,” but a pragmatic strategy to win credibility with its audience. Information that was considered inconvenient could simply be omitted from the narrative (Jensk 2006: 4). By contrast with openly anti-communist and anti-Soviet western broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe, a later undated Soviet intelligence report grudgingly observed that “the BBC hides behind a mask of respectability and objectivity.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> TNA FO 375/85350 Andrew Gilchrist to Michael Warr, 19 August 1950.

<sup>14</sup> TNA FO 375/85350 Michael Warr to Andrew Gilchrist, 1 September 1950.

<sup>15</sup> TNA FO 945/537 Evidence on the German audience for British broadcasts, 6 June 1946, 1.

<sup>16</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XXII 1346, “Sowjetische Aufklärungsergebnisse zu BBC London,” undated, 297.

Nonetheless, the German Service's tone toward the East German authorities, especially in the 1950s, was noticeably sharper and more hostile than in its output to other Eastern bloc countries. This can be attributed to the fact that the British government did not recognize the Ulbricht regime and therefore the conventional rules of diplomacy were deemed not to apply, which was also reflected in the provocative name "German East Zone Programme," although it was eventually re-branded less antagonistically as the East German Programme in the mid-1960s. In 1959, a report by Ralph Murray of the British Foreign Office, himself a former head of its clandestine anti-communist Information Research Department, found that, although the GEZP was excellent, "we must recognise that it is propaganda openly attempting with considerable skill and detailed material to discredit the East German regime in the ears of the inhabitants of the [Soviet] Zone. It runs a line, in fact, which we could never pursue in respect of a country with which we had more developed relations."<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, while the BBC was financed by a Foreign Office grant-in-aid, its international standing also depended on its editorial independence from the official government line, as set out in a 1946 government White Paper, which declared that "the corporation should remain independent in the preparation of programs for overseas audiences." (Cited in Webb 2015: 165–166) The historian Alban Webb (2015: 180) has demonstrated that, although the BBC could not simply ignore the needs of the government at times of crisis, its relative autonomy sometimes led to conflicting interpretations of major international issues such as the Suez Crisis. "While Whitehall may have imagined British broadcasting [. . .] as an expression of government will," notes Webb, "the BBC saw itself as an institution whose very creed was a manifestation of the long-term national interest"; this relative independence of the official government line set it apart from foreign broadcasting systems which "followed the needs of the moment and earned a corresponding lack of trust."<sup>18</sup> For George Urban (1997: 58), the BBC's European Service constituted "a Foreign Office within the Foreign Office," a self-contained power in the land with "something like an agenda of its own."

The German East Zone Programme's often-belligerent attitude toward the GDR was also a result of the influence of its team of émigré German and Austrian broadcasters, some of whom, such as Carl Brinitzer, Bruno Adler and Robert Lucas, were veterans of the BBC's wartime anti-Nazi broadcasts, or disillusioned former communists like the poet Erich Fried. Some of the most popular early features were re-workings of popular anti-Nazi sketches, with different names and premises but es-

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17 TNA FO 1110/1240 Ralph Murray to P. Hancock, June 5, 1959.

18 TNA FO 1110/1240 Ralph Murray to P. Hancock, June 5, 1959.

essentially the same methodology. Besides the long-running letterbox program “*Briefe ohne Unterschrift*,” the most successful broadcasts of the 1950s were “*Die zwei Genossen*” [The Two Comrades] and “*Der verwunderte Zeitungsleser*” [The Baffled Newspaper Reader]. *Die zwei Genossen* was a weekly situation comedy authored by the Austrian writer Bruno Adler, which featured a cast of recurring characters visiting a cynical Party functionary during his office hour. Delivered in heavy “Berlinerisch,” it was reminiscent of Adler’s popular World War II feature “*Frau Wernicke*,” which starred a verbose Berlin housewife, while the structure of naïve questions being put to a cynical protagonist mirrored his successful wartime double act “*Kurt und Willi*,” exposing both the apparatchik’s hypocrisy and the shortcomings of everyday life in the GDR to comic effect (Major 2013: 261). Meanwhile, *Der verwunderte Zeitungsleser* was the work of the Austrian Jewish writer Robert Lucas, whose wartime “*Private Hirnschal Letters*” had mocked the banality of Nazi propaganda in the satirical tradition of the Good Soldier Švejk; with Lucas’ sights now set on the GDR, his baffled newspaper reader dissected official East German media reports in the same faux naïf manner. The intention of both broadcasts was to drive a wedge between the Ulbricht regime and citizens of the GDR by exposing the chasm between political dogma and the realities of everyday life to comic effect (Major 2013: 261).

### 3 The “Broadcaster-Listener Loop”

As a tool of disseminating information and propaganda, radio offered numerous advantages by contrast to other media, first and foremost in terms of its ubiquity. At the beginning of the 1950s, there were 77 radio sets per 100 households in the GDR (Fischer n.d.); by contrast, television was still very much a nascent medium, with only 1.2 television sets per 100 East German households in 1955 (Weidenbach 1990). Accordingly, the same year, the Information Research Department described the BBC German Service as “our best publicity medium for the Soviet Zone.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the German radio landscape was unique in being characterized by a shared language across the systemic divide (Komska 2014: 6); broadcasts to West Germany could be picked up in the East, and vice versa, leading J.C. Rennie of the Information Research Department to argue that no “Iron Curtain in the usual sense” existed between the two countries.<sup>20</sup> Radio was also the cheapest means of

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<sup>19</sup> TNA FO 1110/741 Excerpt from Barnes’ letter to Rennie re: Liaison with the BBC German Service, 14 July 1955.

<sup>20</sup> TNA FO 1110/741 J.C. Rennie, “Liaison with the B.B.C. German Service,” 7 June 1955, 2.

spreading information among millions of people, and in spite of increasing television ownership gradually driving radio listening figures down over the course of the 1960s (Major 2013: 270), it remained the most effective propaganda medium throughout the entire lifespan of the GEZP, right up to its discontinuation in 1975.

An additional benefit of radio over print media was that it could become part of a daily routine. About 40% of East German listeners to the GEZP interviewed by the BBC in West Berlin in 1961 said that they listened every day, with many tuning in at 8pm for the news, followed by a popular feature such as *Die zwei Genossen*, *Der verwunderte Zeitungsleser* or *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* (Major 2013: 267). The use of entertainment as a means of encouraging repeated listening to break down resistance to a message was a tried-and-tested propaganda technique, and had formed a central part of both Nazi and Allied psychological warfare methodology during World War II. As the opinion pollsters Ruth and Henry Durant wrote of the notorious British Nazi propagandist William Joyce (“Lord Haw Haw”) in 1940, audiences “tuned in to have a good laugh,” but after regular listening began to think “there may be something in what he says” (Durant and Durant 1940: 444). This was especially the case when the material broadcast was designed to resonate with the pre-existing views and prejudices of various portions of its listenership (Studdert 2019: 28–33).

In the early 1960s, Politbüro member Albert Norden, described at the time by the BBC as “the GDR’s chief propagandist,”<sup>21</sup> had several meetings in East Berlin with Richard Crossman, a Labour Member of Parliament and veteran of Britain’s World War II psychological warfare apparatus, and the two men also corresponded about East German grievances relating to the BBC German Service. On 28 January 1963, Norden wrote that “what the BBC is doing is direct meddling with the internal affairs of our State. The BBC calls systematically for the overthrow of the existing social and political system and for the removal of members of the GDR’s government.”<sup>22</sup> However, as Emily Oliver points out, a significant difference between the wartime anti-Nazi broadcasts and the post-war German East Zone Programme was that, while the former served an auxiliary function to military intervention with the goal of the destruction of the Third Reich, the post-war BBC agenda was explicitly non-interventionist. The BBC’s director-general William Haley argued in 1946 that the BBC “did not exist to throw out Governments or change regimes,” a policy that set it apart from the liberationist agendas of American-backed stations such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and RIAS

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21 BBC WAC E93.1.1 R. A. L. O’Rorke, memo re: Correspondence Professor Norden – R. Crossman M.P., 12 February 1963.

22 BBC WAC E93.1.1 Norden to Crossman, 28.1.1963.

in the early years of the Cold War (cited in Oliver 2019a: 3–4). His assertion that the BBC’s function was not to interfere with the domestic affairs of any other nation (Oliver 2019a: 3–4), however, must be taken with a large grain of salt in exploring the work of the GEZP, which, as the Stasi accurately noted, persistently attempted “to undermine the political and moral unity of the GDR’s population and to bring them into conflict with the politics of the government of the GDR.”<sup>23</sup>

The non-interventionist approach was a result of the perceived necessity of maintaining the geopolitical status quo to avoid the risk of global conflict, and throughout the 1950s the GEZP performed a complicated balancing act, attempting to discredit the GDR regime in the eyes of its citizens without agitating for its total abolishment (Oliver 2019a: 3). This risked alienating listeners hostile to Ulbricht’s government who wished for action rather than words, and indeed there is evidence of increasing disillusionment on the part of audiences in the GDR as the decade progressed (Oliver 2019a: 11–12). Moreover, it is possible that, by providing an outlet for dissident viewpoints and thereby making life more bearable for opponents of the regime, the GEZP actually helped to stabilize the GDR by channelling discontent that may have been expressed more directly in political action under different circumstances.<sup>24</sup> *Briefe ohne Unterschrift*, for example, created what Patrick Major has described as an ethereal democracy, “a substitute public sphere which did not exist in the state-controlled media landscape of the GDR” (Major 2013: 270). It provided a forum in which a plurality of East German viewpoints could coexist, and listeners could express their own views or debate those of their fellow citizens. For the BBC German Service, the ether served not as a touchpaper for revolution but as a means of both fostering disenfranchisement with the regime and providing an outlet for it.

The BBC German Service’s relationship with its audience clearly fits the “dynamic-transactional” model of media impact proposed by Werner Früh and Klaus Schönbach (1982), which holds that the relationship between communicator and recipient is neither a question of stimulus-response nor audience gratification, but rather an exertion of mutual influence in which both parties are simultaneously active and passive participants. Listeners themselves possessed and exercised agency in a variety of ways, making use of the few channels open to them to express their views to the broadcaster. Until the building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961, East Germans were able to pay personal calls to the BBC’s office at Savignyplatz in West Berlin to air their views, and visitors from the GDR were

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<sup>23</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XX, Nr. 10227, Teil II, “Bestätigung (von BBC-Deckadressen),” 8 July 1965, 286. The statement refers to *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* but can be taken as representative for the GEZP’s output as a whole.

<sup>24</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XX, Nr. 10227, Teil II, “Bestätigung (von BBC-Deckadressen),” 8 July 1965, 286.

polled at events in West Berlin such as the annual Green Week or Berlin Trade Fair. On occasion, the BBC was also allowed access to new arrivals at the Marienfelde refugee camp (Major 2013: 259, 266), and while these demographics were not representative of the GDR public in general, they did allow for a picture of listening habits and feedback on individual programs. Over the years, the BBC's various Berlin Correspondents, such as Austin Harrison, Peter Johnson and William Treharne Jones, who were able to visit the GDR freely with military identification cards, also sought out the opinions of ordinary citizens and integrated these into dispatch programs such as *Brief aus Berlin*.

Following the building of the Wall, opportunities to express views on the BBC's programs were largely restricted to the postal route. The Stasi's Abteilung "M" was increasingly effective at intercepting letters and identifying their authors and contacting the BBC could have serious personal repercussions. A listener imprisoned for seven years for writing to the corporation subsequently – according to his Stasi file – offered to collaborate fully to combat "enemies of the GDR." "In this statement," Hauptabteilung XX suggested, "there may also be a certain desire for revenge," because in conversation he spoke amongst other things of the "criminal activity of the BBC," which leads "innocent people" to commit crimes against their government whilst themselves sitting far from the gunshot."<sup>25</sup> The postal route was also subject to interference or exploitation by the British themselves; the British Services Security Organisation (BSSO) in West Berlin was illegally opening mail from East Germany to build a picture of East German public opinion (Major 2013: 268), and, as will be shown below, the BBC routinely shared mail received from listeners in the GDR with the Information Research Department and MI6.

## 4 OV "Werfer"

While East Germans who engaged with the BBC were pursued by the Stasi as "hostile liaison points of political-ideological diversion," close attention was also paid to the activities of the BBC journalists themselves. To the Stasi, notes the historian Timothy Garton Ash, "the distinction between journalist and spy was not clear-cut. For them, a Western journalist and a Western spy were both agents of Western intelligence-gathering and both alike threats to the security of the communist system." (Garton 1997: 56) As "intelligence gatherers" for the BBC, and by extension, its East German audience, the corporation's Berlin correspondents

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25 BStU, MfS, HA XX 17939, 15.

were therefore automatically suspicious. The journalist Kai Schlüter observes that Stasi files “reflect a filtered view of reality. It is the view of a political secret police that is acting on behalf of the ruling SED and cultivates its own view of the enemy.” While many details may be correct, “the reports also contain misunderstandings, mistakes, falsifications and sometimes lies.” (Schlüter 2010: 8) Furthermore, rivalries between individual Stasi employees could also lead to events being played down or exaggerated, depending upon the author’s agenda (Schlüter 2010: 8).

The Stasi files contain scattered references to the corporation through the 1950s and 1960s, but there is no evidence of any consolidated attempt to monitor and subvert the BBC until 1971, when it instigated the anti-BBC campaign OV “Werfer.” Originally the term “Werfer” [Thrower] was applied to Austin Harrison, then acting Head of the BBC German Service, in an observation report dated 9 March 1967, who was described as “throwing” three envelopes into a letterbox on the first page of the observation, perhaps to test the effectiveness of the postal route to the BBC’s cover addresses. Born in London in 1916, Harrison worked for Reuters between 1946–1950 before joining the BBC, first working as a news editor before becoming the Berlin correspondent in 1953, joining the German Service on his return to London in 1955. In 1957 he took over the *Briefe ohne Unterschrift*, which ran from 1949 to 1974; the program had been previously presented by Carl Brinitzer and Christopher Dilke, but it was Harrison’s name, distinctive voice and dry personality that would become indelibly associated with the broadcasts. Indeed, his celebrity appears to have preceded him on his annual visits to the Leipzig trade fair, with the West Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* later claiming that “numerous” listeners recognized him in Leipzig from the sound of his voice alone.<sup>26</sup>

*Briefe ohne Unterschrift* was structured around anonymous letters on a variety of topics from GDR citizens, discussing a wide range of issues from everyday life to high politics. It is no coincidence that Hauptabteilung XX/2, which was responsible for “Werfer,” covered so-called Political-Ideological-Diversion (PID) and Political Underground Activity (PUT), as well as the analysis and comparison of handwriting. As early as 1954, the BBC German Service had begun switching PO Boxes to protect correspondents from the GDR, before eventually settling on the use of fake names and cover addresses that were usually bomb sites. This method paralleled the popular strategy of *Doppelbriefe*, in which NGOs and civic initiatives in the GDR seeking accurate information would seek to bypass Stasi postal

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<sup>26</sup> BSTU, MfS, ZAIG Nr. 23265, Excerpt from *Tagesspiegel* 28 September 1978, *Zum Anfang eine Chamberlain Rede*, 246.

controls by sending a letter in a double envelope to non-suspicious private individuals in the west, who in turn would re-address the envelope and forward it to the relevant institution. The Stasi noted in 1971 that the West Berlin post offices 12, 31 and 52 were used for the BBC, and correctly assumed that this indicated an arrangement with the Deutsche Bundespost,<sup>27</sup> which indeed forwarded all such letters to the BBC. The BBC gave its listeners tips for keeping what the Stasi called “conspiratorial rules,” such as omitting details or place and including nothing that might allow the letter to be traced back to its author. They were also encouraged to use a codename.<sup>28</sup>

Despite such precautions, the letters continued to be regularly intercepted and forensically analyzed by the Stasi’s Abteilung “M.” From 1967 onwards, they were assisted by an employee from Hauptabteilung XX/2 to aid the identification of the letters’ authors.<sup>29</sup> Stamps were carefully removed and analyzed for saliva samples and blood types, which were then compared with the files at local hospitals and doctors’ surgeries. Letter writers who could be tracked down were prosecuted, resulting sometimes in lengthy prison sentences. Nonetheless, a considerable number of letters continued to get through, with Hauptabteilung XX/2 estimating in 1968 that in some cases approximately 50% of letters addressed to cover addresses for the BBC and RIAS reached their destination. Hot spots in which the mail interception was considered particularly unsatisfactory were Berlin and the districts of Leipzig, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Dresden, Potsdam, Halle and Erfurt.<sup>30</sup>

Paradoxically, a frequent claim made in the Stasi files is that the letters were written and posted in the GDR by BBC employees themselves, although, by the Stasi’s own count, between 1957 and 1968 only 67 alleged forgeries were identified. The majority of these, posted in Berlin, Leipzig and Halle, were claimed to be fakes based on analysis revealing “English” paper types, writing styles that were unusual in Germany, foreign envelope varieties and multiple simultaneous postings.<sup>31</sup> While the letterbox format was certainly open to manipulation, and some “positive” letters about life in the GDR may well have been written by the Stasi themselves, the sheer quantity and variety of the correspondence held at the BBC

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27 BStU, MfS, HA XX 21378, Konzeption zur Bearbeitung der Deckadressensystem der BBC und des RIAS, 29 April 1971, 27.

28 BStU, MfS, HA XX 17299, 4.

29 BStU, MfS, HA XX 11410, Wirksamkeit der Zusammenarbeit mit der Abteilung M, 26.3.1968, 153.

30 BStU, MfS, HA XX 11410, Wirksamkeit der Zusammenarbeit mit der Abteilung M, 26.3.1968, 152.

31 BStU, MfS, AOP, Nr. 26487-80, Band 8, 8 –9, HA XX/2 Sachstand Bericht im OV “Werfer,” 23.11.1972.

Written Archives in Caversham, as well as the Stasi’s extensive documentation of its campaign to intercept letters and prosecute their East German authors, is proof of the authenticity of at least the vast majority of the letters. Nonetheless, suspicions also existed on the British side. A British Foreign Office employee who had spent some time listening to the program in May 1959 wrote that the German Service:

are getting about 200 of these [letters] a month and they are very skillful in the ways in which they adapt [them] to illustrate current points about the weaknesses of the East German regime. The low standard of living in the Eastern Zone is constantly being discussed. [ . . . ] On occasions I find it difficult to believe that the BBC’s German Service have not at any rate extensively re-written letters so that they can indeed make the point they want to.<sup>32</sup>

The goal of OV “Werfer” was described in 1973 as “the gathering of criminal evidence for the effective control and liquidation of [ . . . ] enemy liaison points of the BBC correspondents Harrison and Jones in the GDR, as well as forming the starting point for commencing political measures against the BBC programs.”<sup>33</sup> The “liquidation of enemy liaison points” involved identifying and prosecuting GDR citizens who were seen to be helping the BBC; however, given the threat that the BBC German Service allegedly posed to the GDR, and the regular presence of its correspondents on East German soil, the question remains as to why no single Stasi operation was dedicated to it until 1971, 22 years after the instigation of the German East Zone Programme. A possible explanation for the dearth of files on the BBC and Austin Harrison between the 1950s and late 1960s is that the Stasi’s foreign intelligence service, the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung (HVA), which was legally allowed to destroy its files following the Round Table negotiations of 1989–90, may have covered Harrison in the interim due to his alleged secret service activities.

## 5 The BBC, the IRD and MI6

The allegations that Harrison had a secret service background dated back to a 1950s Stasi operative procedure [*Operative Vorgang*] codenamed “Bumerang,” in which it was alleged that he had helped recruit two GDR citizens for MI6. According to the Stasi, Harrison also provided assignments to an East German refugee

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<sup>32</sup> TNA FO 1110/1240, T. Peters, 3 June 1959.

<sup>33</sup> BStU, MfS, AOP Nr. 26487-80.

working for British intelligence at Berlin's Olympic Stadium, who subsequently joined the staff of the BBC in 1959 and broadcast "malicious commentaries" attacking the GDR on a weekly basis.<sup>34</sup> The Stasi's most prolific informant attached to OV "Werfer," the writer Rudolf Harnisch (IM "Carolus Winter"), claimed in 1972 that Harrison still "describes himself as an active officer" in the secret service.<sup>35</sup> The Stasi's assessment dated November of the same year concluded that Harrison was a "refined and experienced opponent"; these alleged facts from his past proved that he was "a specialist for political-ideological subversion work, who carries out his duties in the closest collaboration with the English secret service and is also, with probability bordering on certainty, carrying out his current job on behalf of the English secret service, or as their employee."<sup>36</sup>

In the absence of corresponding British sources, it is difficult to test the veracity of the Stasi's claim. However, the Foreign Office files at the UK's National Archives do show that, as the BBC's West Berlin correspondent in the 1950s, he worked closely with the Information Research Department (IRD), a clandestine section of the British Foreign Office. The IRD existed between 1948 and 1977, and its role was the gathering of information from various sources, to be recycled into anti-communist content and issued to journalists and organizations without being traceable to the British government. Internal IRD correspondence from 1955 noted that the BBC was "U.K. based and so susceptible to direct control," and it regularly allowed Harrison "access to suitable refugees for recording talks on the Soviet Zone," whilst providing him with much of the material he used for his Berlin dispatches. It appears to have been a fruitful collaboration, since it was concluded that "Harrison's imminent transfer to the BBC in London may help IRD's liaison with the BBC."<sup>37</sup>

The IRD also received material from the BBC German Service, in the form of a fortnightly report on the content of the *Briefe ohne Unterschrift*, including excerpts from the letters, which therefore became potential fuel for Britain's anti-GDR propaganda (Oliver 2019b). Whether or how this material was used by the IRD is a matter of conjecture, but, as Emily Oliver (2019b) has noted, "the fact that the BBC readily passed on information in this way leaves a bad aftertaste to a story about a radio programme which inspired so much hope in its regular listeners." The IRD was funded, like the secret services themselves, by the so-called "Secret Vote," whose spending limits were decided by a Secret Vote Committee

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34 BStU, MfS, 5917/67 Band I OV "Bumerang," 103.

35 BStU, MfS, HA XX 11912, 27.

36 BStU, MfS, HA XX 11912, 27.

37 TNA FO 1110/741 Excerpt from Barnes' letter to Rennie re: Liaison with the BBC German Service, 14 July 1955.

(which Whitehall legend had it was “so secret that it never actually met” (Aldrich 2013: 596)) headed by the Prime Minister. Accordingly, the IRD also had close links with MI6, and especially its anti-Soviet section IX, and there was a “steady traffic of personnel” between the IRD and MI6 during the 1950s (Wilford 1998: 357). At the very least, the IRD was able to exert direct influence on Harrison’s broadcasts from Berlin by handpicking his interviewees for maximum impact, whilst also supplying much of the broadcast material, and receiving summaries of the contents of letters from his East German listeners for *Briefe ohne Unterschrift*. However, despite his proximity to the IRD, no evidence is available to corroborate the Stasi’s claim that Harrison was a secret service operative.

The Stasi’s exaggerated accusation that the BBC was a center of secret service-controlled psychological warfare against the socialist states was consistent with its inability or unwillingness to differentiate between espionage and the intelligence gathering involved in critical journalism, but high-profile revelations in the Soviet and East German media in late 1968 and early 1969 did demonstrate that an informal arrangement also existed between the BBC and MI6. On 17 December 1968, the Soviet weekly *Izvestija* published confidential documents, which had been leaked to the KGB by a Soviet agent at the BBC’s West Berlin office and described in detail the nature of the relationship between MI6 and the BBC. The material was translated into German and published in the GDR magazine *Horizont* in February 1969, before being taken up by local newspapers. According to *Izvestija*, the BBC was obliged to air pre-arranged tunes or sentences at certain times to aid MI6 in the recruitment of Soviet travelers abroad by proving an official’s bona fides as a representative of the British government. MI6 also reserved the right to “inspire” news items on the BBC’s domestic programs or foreign-language broadcasts, or to ask the BBC to place a particular emphasis or slant on its handling of a news item. Significantly, given the format of *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* and the fact that the BBC regularly passed on the letters’ contents to the IRD, any BBC mail received from Eastern bloc countries was to be given first to MI6, which would then return it unmarked to the corporation once it had been processed.<sup>38</sup>

The authenticity of the highly credible documents was not refuted, either publicly or in the BBC German Service’s own internal memoranda on the *Izvestia* and *Horizont* revelations, and appears to be confirmed by a file note referring to “Berlin Office spies” in relation to the articles.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the arrangement was broadly consistent with the BBC’s wartime relationship with MI6, which had used

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<sup>38</sup> For the *Izvestija* revelations, see BStU, MFS, ZAIG 9551 Vol. 1.

<sup>39</sup> BBC WAC E39.1.1 File note re: “Berlin Office” files, undated.

the corporation's airwaves as a means of sending coded messages to agents in the field on the European mainland. This was also a reciprocal agreement from which the BBC profited in the form of valuable intelligence on matters such as the reception of BBC programs in the Eastern Bloc and problems with Soviet jamming, which MI6 forwarded to the BBC via the Foreign Office. The revelations subsequently provided a perennial frame of reference in the Stasi files from 1968 onwards, the "hard evidence" on which the anti-BBC operations rested. It subsequently emerged that the UK's domestic counterintelligence and security agency MI5 also exerted influence behind the scenes at the BBC; in 1985 *The Observer* newspaper in Britain published detailed revelations of the MI5 employee vetting station in Room 105 at Broadcasting House. According to the report, BBC employees euphemistically referred to MI5 as "the College" (Reynolds 2018), and there were also unverified rumors among German Service staff that the German Audience Research department in Room 727 of Bush House was working with the secret services (Major 2013:268).

## 6 "Beat Boys" and "Beat Girls"

A file at the BBC Written Archives Collection at Caversham entitled "Attacks on the German Service" offers evidence that the German East Zone Programme also had its domestic critics. One letter from a naturalized German refugee from the Third Reich complained of the BBC's continued use of the "Soviet Zone" to describe the GDR was a "propagandist cold-war device," since most media commentators either referred to the country as the GDR or, more neutrally, East Germany.<sup>40</sup> In a letter published in *The London Times* on 30 March 1968, a listener named Judith Todd in London proposed the BBC European Service, and especially the GEZP, as an effective remedy for insomnia." With its "obsolescent cold war attitudes," she wrote, "this has all the hypnotic effect of a splendidly boring fairytale."<sup>41</sup>

The GEZP was not, however, merely a Cold War anachronism, and it was forced to make concessions to the Zeitgeist and changing audience demographics over the course of the 1960s. With their orientation toward musical programming, young East Germans listened to more radio and watched less television than their parents' generation (Lietz, Honeit, and Rauhut 2006: 194), which had been the origi-

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<sup>40</sup> BBC WAC E39.1.1. Attacks on the German Service, Frank von Carlshausen to Tom Driberg, MP, 2 August 1965.

<sup>41</sup> BBC WAC E39.1.1. Attacks on the German Service, "Judith Todd, 'Lullaby of the Air,'" cutting from *The Times*, 30 March 1968.

nal targets of the early post-war GEZP broadcasts. Programs such as *Die zwei Genssen* (1949–1963) were discontinued and the BBC attempted to harness the cultural cachet of bands such as The Beatles and the Rolling Stones by producing “beat music” programs and musical request shows such as “*Platten à la Carte*,” “*Friday Fanclub*” and “*eine kleine Beatmusik*.” In 1972, *Der verwunderte Zeitungsleser* was also cancelled, and the Stasi’s Leipzig-Borna district office noted that “individual changes to the BBC’s German-language program indicate that there is an effort to make the broadcasts more effective and that certain rigid traditional forms are being abandoned.”<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that the BBC had expanded its transmission capacity and was now also broadcasting on the mediumwave 276-metre band/1088 KHz was cited as an indication that it had stepped up its ideological campaign against socialism.<sup>43</sup>

For the Stasi’s Hauptabteilung XX, the building of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 marked a watershed in the attempts of western broadcasters such as the BBC and RIAS to exert ideological influence on the GDR’s population, and especially its youth.<sup>44</sup>

In programs specially tailored for young people, the aim is to create a permanent circle of listeners, skillfully exploiting age-related interests and inclinations, who are then taught step by step to only obtain information from Western publications and thus inevitably come into contradiction with social conditions in the GDR and the social organizations of the GDR. Lately there has been increased activity on the part of hostile broadcasters in relation to the youth of the GDR.<sup>45</sup>

The Foreign Office actively attempted to encourage this shift toward more youth-oriented programming. Hauptabteilung XX wrote that Austin Harrison had stated “many times” in a personal conversation with a Stasi informer that the British Foreign Office exerted direct influence on BBC programming, and had directed the corporation to broadcast beat music in increasing volumes to countries in Eastern Europe, because the English (sic) government had recognized its ideological and psychological impact on youthful listeners.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, there is evidence in the British files that the Foreign Office was wary of the German Service’s overt anti-communism and petitioned it to capitalize on the international appeal of beat music (Major 2013: 265), and the use of Anglo-American cultural products as a means of both attracting and subverting a German audience also dated back to wartime propaganda strate-

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<sup>42</sup> BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig KdFS Borna 00141, 18.

<sup>43</sup> BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig KdFS Borna 00141, 18.

<sup>44</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XX 10067, “Feindtätigkeit unter Jugendlichen (westliche Sender),” 243.

<sup>45</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XX 10067, “Feindtätigkeit unter Jugendlichen (westliche Sender),” 243.

<sup>46</sup> BStU, MfS, HA XX 18489, 11 April 1969, 444.

gies. Both the BBC and clandestine (“black”) British broadcasting stations such as *Soldatensender Calais* and *Kurzwellensender Atlantik* had heavily utilized jazz music, which was well known to be popular with German audiences; a BBC report in August 1942 found that “young people, even fanatical Nazis, would go to considerable lengths to listen to our light musical programmes, especially jazz.”<sup>47</sup> In doing so, it was able to exploit the cumbersome ideological guidelines and anti-jazz decrees that weighed down the Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft’s entertainment broadcasting. While “beat” may have replaced jazz as the subversive musical idiom of choice, the methodology for attracting youthful listeners remained broadly similar. An important difference to wartime broadcasting, however, was that listeners had been given a voice by the letterbox/request format and were able to assert their own cultural tastes and personal agendas to play a part in shaping both the content and delivery of the broadcasts.

A prominent example was the BBC program *Platten à la Carte*, which was broadcast every Monday night between 9pm and 9.30pm (Wodtke 2020). According to the Stasi monitors, by the beginning of 1972 the program had been overhauled as a music request show targeted especially at youths in the GDR, who were asked to write to cover addresses that matched those used by *Briefe ohne Unterschrift*. There was a marked increase in correspondence over the course of that year, and soon 10 to 15 requests being read out per episode. These included greetings from “beat groups” and individual listeners, and the Stasi found that the audience appeared to be largely the same youths who wrote to the popular RIAS request show *Treffpunkt*. By the early 1970s, the BBC was receiving six times as many music-related letters than “serious” mail from the GDR (Major 2013: 265); the letters intercepted by the Stasi were predominantly of a trivial “puzzle, greeting and (musical) request” nature than political in tone.<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, in the eyes of the Stasi, the cumulative impact of such apparently trivial western entertainment presented a serious threat to the stability of the GDR. As would occur a generation later with the punk subculture in East Germany, young beat fans were prone to congregating in public places, where they were highly distinguishable by their appearance. In many cases, the Stasi claimed, these groups had a pronouncedly subversive character, and cited as an example a group of three trainee mechanics in the Halle district, all seventeen years old, who formed a “gang” in 1964; they were arrested for allegedly daubing agitational slogans and swastikas in public places, tearing flags, disrupting film screenings, vandalising pas-

47 TNA FO 898/41, “European Intelligence Papers Series 2, Number 9,” BBC Studies in European Audiences, 25 August 1942. Cited in Studdert, *The Jazz War*, 73.

48 BStU, MfS, HA XX, Nr. 11410, “Klassifizierungssystem für beschriebene Briefumschläge, die an westliche Rundfunkstationen gerichtet sind,” 1 December 1969, 71.

senger trains and committing other damage to property. According to the Stasi, the three youths uniformly sported Beatles hairstyles and western clothing.<sup>49</sup>

In broadcasting beat music, the BBC was both catering to popular demand and seeking to cultivate young people’s attachment to British and western culture, in keeping with the non-interventionist mantra articulated by Arthur Haley. The Stasi asserted that even apparently harmless groups of young people were isolating themselves through their behavior, and increasing affinity for western music, leading to an orientation toward “other negative and hostile influences of political-ideological diversion.”<sup>50</sup> However, while such apparently benign musical programs were certainly part of a strategy of cultural propaganda designed to achieve precisely such a distancing of the GDR’s youth from the regime, contrary to the Stasi’s simplified view the corporation was not a pied piper causing the young people of the GDR to dance to its tune. It was responding, often against its own elitist instincts and with some nudging from the Foreign Office, to changing demographics and the clear desire of its East German audiences for entertainment rather than political and ideological education.

Moreover, this youthful audience also exploited western broadcasters for their ends, with self-proclaimed “Beat Boys” and “Beat Girls” in the GDR using the GEZP’s music programs and other popular shows such as *RIAS Treffpunkt* as a forum not only for requesting songs, but also for forging pen friendships and even romances with other listeners, in some cases across the systemic divide. Hans-Jürgen Ebert, a young BBC listener in Lindow, wrote in to request The Ohio Express’s 1968 hit “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy.” While he did not hear it played on *Platten à la Carte*, a local girl named Bärbel did, and “took note” of him for the first time; not long afterwards, they became a couple and later married (Wodtke 2020). An undated episode of *eine kleine Beatmusik* taped by Stasi monitors sometime around 1974 includes a romantic song request from “Mick Jagger in Kleinkühnau,” dedicated to “sweet, tender Marion in Dessau.” The Stasi appeared overwhelmed by the sheer volume of letters it intercepted relating to popular culture; an HA XX/2 report dated 1 December 1969 acknowledged that little had been achieved in the attempt to improve the evaluation and processing of such correspondence because they so outnumbered those with “politically inflammatory” content [Hetzschriften], and it found no operative use for the individual letters.<sup>51</sup>

The use of the airwaves as an unorthodox social forum took a further turn from September 1971 onward, when the Stasi noted that *Platten à la Carte* started

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49 BStU, MfS, HA XX 10067, “Feindtätigkeit unter Jugendlichen’ (westliche Sender),” 259.

50 BStU, MfS, HA XX 10067, “Feindtätigkeit unter Jugendlichen’ (westliche Sender),” 257.

51 BStU, MfS, HA XX, Nr. 11410, “Klassifizierungssystem für beschriebene Briefumschläge, die an westliche Rundfunkstationen gerichtet sind,” 1 December 1969, 71.

broadcasting letters from inmates at West Berlin and West German penal institutions, who “express the desire to correspond with youths from the GDR, mainly with girls.” The Stasi initiated postal control measures and ascertained that numerous youths in the GDR had responded to the call, with the prisoners passing on the addresses of East German penfriends to fellow inmates if they had too many. On holidays or following release, individual West Germans would visit their new friends in the East, which was viewed by the Stasi as a calculated act designed to “spread anti-socialist behaviour and ways of life among the youth of our Republic, leading to western decadence and the glorification of criminality.” Nonetheless, to the Stasi’s disappointment, there was no evidence of “an exploitation of such correspondence partners by intelligence services or their involvement in other subversive activities.”<sup>52</sup>

## 7 Conclusion

The German East Zone Programme was unique among the BBC’s European Services for its belligerence, a result of both Britain’s lack of diplomatic recognition of the GDR, and its cadre of émigré writers who were veterans of the German Service’s anti-Nazi broadcasts during World War II. The broadcaster-listener loop, however, allowed the BBC access to the changing views and demands of its listeners, which it had paid close attention to since listeners were able to directly contact the corporation following the fall of the Third Reich. While the Foreign Office’s Information Research Department and MI6 may have gleaned details about everyday life in the GDR through letters passed on by the BBC, by the early 1970s these letters were far outnumbered by those relating to popular culture, which itself provided an important message on how best to reach and exert influence on new generations of post-war listeners.

Writing about the radio landscape in divided Berlin of the 1960s, Heiner Stahl notes that young listeners understood and made use of the transnational character of the newly-emerging pop culture much sooner than the broadcasters themselves did, and it was their expectations and demands that brought about the changes in youth programming on either side of the Berlin Wall (Stahl 2010: 25). While the comparatively stuffy BBC German Service continued to rely on its reputation for objectivity and reliability, and to some degree persisted in “narrow-casting” to an educated East German elite rather than seek to appeal to a mass audience, it too was forced to reckon with changing tastes and demographics

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52 BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig KDFs Borna 00141, 18.

(Major 2013: 274). As has been shown above, young East German listeners instrumentalised the BBC in this regard, exploiting the ethereal democracy to cast their votes for popular music in the form of a barrage of listeners’ letters to the corporation. Confounding both the paranoid mindset of the Stasi and the didactic instincts of the “guardians of the broadcasting flame” at the BBC’s headquarters at Bush House (Major 2013: 274), they rejected attempts at ideologisation, education, and politicisation. And in a pluralistic, transnational broadcasting landscape, better entertainment was always just a turn of the dial away.

“We do not aim at short-term visible results, but at a long-term objective – namely, to influence the fundamental outlook of our listeners,” wrote Fritz Beer of the BBC German Service to Lindley Fraser in 1949 (cited in Oliver 2019a: 4). Indeed, Emily Oliver (2019a: 4) has pointed out that the German East Zone Programme was part of radio’s shifting role from a “short-term subsidiary weapon of psychological warfare” in World War II to “an instrument for sustaining long-term political resistance” in the post-war European status quo. However, Beer’s words would also prove prophetic with regard to the popularity from the mid-1960s onwards of popular music programs such as *Platten à la Carte*, *Friday Fanclub* and *eine kleine Beatmusik*. The Stasi correctly surmised that repeated listening to such programs would inevitably bring young East Germans “into contradiction with social conditions in the GDR and the social organizations of the GDR,”<sup>53</sup> and further alienate them from what Stahl (2010: 76–77) reasonably calls the Socialist Unity Party’s “dull, passionless and helpless” [späßfrei, lustfern und hilflos] designs for their leisure hours.

As the number of letters to *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* dwindled and musical requests soared, it was also clear that times were changing politically as well as culturally. By 1973, Britain had established an Embassy in East Berlin, and by 1975 the East German Programme was discontinued and only an all-German Service remained. *Briefe ohne Unterschrift* was taken off the air in July 1974, to be replaced with a new program called “britisch betrachtet.” Despite this “normalization” of radio relations, the BBC German Service did not cease its efforts to exert influence over East German listeners; the continued importance of East Germany as a propaganda target was pivotal in saving the German Service from Margaret Thatcher’s budget cuts in the 1980s (Major 2013: 266), and the Stasi continued its heavy surveillance of BBC correspondents and their contacts. Nonetheless, after gathering dust for some five years, the dormant “Werfer” file was finally closed on 21 October 1980, with the concluding summary observing that the subversive activities of Austin Harrison had ceased and no further operational opportuni-

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53 BStU, MfS, HA XX 10067, “Feindtätigkeit unter Jugendlichen (westliche Sender),” 243.

ties were available to the Stasi.<sup>54</sup> Harrison, the original “Werfer,” passed away the following year, leaving, like the German East Zone Programme itself, a complex legacy steeped in the intricacies of British cultural propaganda in the Cold War.

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Anna Mazurkiewicz and Anna Podciborska

## “I Wanted to Know the Truth”

### Listeners to Western Radio Broadcasts in Poland during the Cold War: A Pilot Study

Pluralism and freedom of the media are the best way to ensure people’s resilience to misinformation. During the Cold War, American-sponsored Cold War radio stations broke the Communist state monopoly, alerting people to disinformation and providing a viable alternative news source. While extensive literature exists on the Western radio broadcasts to Poland and other countries of the region, and while some data regarding their listenership (mostly quantitative) have been compiled, there is very little information about the actual impact they had on ordinary people (i.e., the qualitative component is lacking). The current pilot study seeks to address this gap. This study was inspired by the Cold War Communication Project, a program within the Library of Congress’s Radio Preservation Task Force (RPTF) that investigates the chains of communication between the United States and the Soviet-controlled nations. This early summary of preliminary project findings was prepared for the “Media of East/West European Border Traffic during the Cold War” project at the Europa-Universität Flensburg.

The history of the American-financed radio stations Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty has been researched in terms of their administrative history and prominent exile personalities (mostly within national historiographies). The most comprehensive and relatively recent publications on the topic (in English) include works by A. Ross Johnson (2010), Arch Puddington (2000), and Richard Cummings (2009). As was the case among radio staff during the Cold War, scholars today also ponder the question of radio’s listenership. The works that directly inspired the current project are publications by Eugene Parta (2007, 2011) and A. Ross Johnson (2017).

On surveying the available literature, it seems as if research on common listening patterns has been conducted more thoroughly for the history of Radio Liberty (broadcasting to the Soviet Union) than in the case of Radio Free Europe (RFE). Simo Mikkonen’s articles (2010a, 2010b) clearly stand out among recent work. The one publication covering listenership in the Soviet bloc countries *in extenso* is the volume edited by A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta: *Cold War Broadcasting. Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. A Collection of Studies and Documents* (2010). The methods employed for audience research in this publication include mostly quantitative data taken both from RFE’s own research agency and from foreign-radio-listening surveillance in the former Communist

bloc. There have been some attempts to assess the qualitative context among specific groups of listeners. One example can be found in the series of interviews conducted by Jane Curry with members of the Polish Communist elite. Some of her interviewees mentioned the impact of RFE and other Western stations on their opinions, sometimes actions (Curry 2015).<sup>1</sup> Both published and oral history accounts by anti-Communist dissidents also attest to the impact of the information received or transmitted back to Poland with the help of Western broadcasters. However, little to no qualitative information is available on how ordinary listeners responded to the programming broadcast to Poland. While there is research and productive academic exchange on the impact of RFE broadcasts during crises (in particular during the Hungarian Revolution), there is very little to no discussion of the changing generations of listeners, of their routines and general attitudes formed over the four decades when the broadcasts were available across the borders of the Soviet bloc and across social, gender, and economic strata.

In order to investigate the research potential of collecting oral histories to contribute to our understating of Western radio broadcasts behind the Iron Curtain, Anna Mazurkiewicz and Anna Podciborska encouraged students of history at the University of Gdańsk to interview their families and friends.

During the pilot study, the students participating in the project were divided into two groups. The first group conducted interviews with randomly selected people, mostly students' family members and friends over the age of fifty. Using the questions formulated in Ross Johnson and Eugene Parta's edited volume on radio broadcasting, a questionnaire was suggested for the students to use during the interviews. They were encouraged to check whether their interviewees listened to foreign broadcasts at all, and if they did, to ask about their motivations, the circumstances in which they listened, what specific content they found memorable, the possible consequences of listening to Western radio stations, and whether this new source of information influenced their worldview and the way they perceived the Soviet-controlled media. The 2020 group consisted of twenty-four students, who conducted twenty-nine interviews altogether. In the following years, the groups were significantly smaller; twelve students conducted interviews in 2021, and only ten oral histories were collected by ten students in 2022. The oldest interviewee was born in the late 1920s and the youngest in the late 1960s. Although most interviewees were from the northern part of Poland, there were some who lived in other parts of the country.

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1 Jane Curry Collection at the Hoover Institution Archives, California.

The second group of the study, consisting of twelve students in 2020, seven in 2021, and eleven in 2022, analyzed and compared the content of foreign and domestic media on selected topics: Stalinism; the Polish crises of 1956, 1968, and 1970; Hungary 1956; Czechoslovakia 1968; the election of Pope John Paul II (1978) and his visit to Poland (1979); the introduction of martial law (1981); the murder of Father Popiełuszko (1984); and China in May–June 1989. The students selected these topics themselves as being of interest to them. They juxtaposed and examined the news coming from Radio Free Europe (by listening to audio recordings available online at Radia Wolności) with the regime-sanctioned TV programs aired at the same time (TVP1 and *Dziennik Telewizyjny*) and publications in the Communist press (*Dziennik Bałtycki*, *Dziennik Małopolski*, *Dziennik Polski*, *Dziennik Popularny*, *Echo dnia*, *Echo Krakowa*, *Gazeta Współczesna*, *Gazeta Krakowska*, *Express Poznański*, *Głos Wybrzeża*, *Głos Pomorza*, *Wieczór Wybrzeża*, *Słowo Ludu*, *Trybuna Ludu*, *Trybuna Robotnicza*, and *Życie Literackie*).

Since the project is in its early stages, the preliminary findings presented below are still to be verified and confirmed, as well as territorially differentiated. The questionnaire used by the students is a subject to further expansion and change pending the development of a research project based on the pilot study presented here.

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## Questionnaire

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### Motivations

First contact with foreign radio. Describe your sources of information (news) at the time.

Did you trust the foreign broadcasts? Which ones did you listen to?

How did you evaluate domestic media?

(Why search for external sources?)

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### Circumstances

Who listened?

Were they alone?

Where did they listen?

When, what part of the day?

Was it easy to find the foreign radio stations on the radio dial? Which were easy to pick up?

How did you identify a broadcaster/particular station?

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### Content

Most memorable broadcasts?

Timing? Crisis?

Were there any printed versions of broadcasts available (transcripts/reprints/reports)?

Did you try to verify the information you heard from abroad? How?

Whom did you tell/share the information with?

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(continued)

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### Questionnaire

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Were there striking, observable differences between the various broadcasters that one could pick up on the radio?

Did you consider news (free information) as the most important element of foreign broadcasts reaching your home?

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### Surroundings

Did anyone/anything interfere with the free reception of broadcasts from abroad?

Was it common to listen to foreign broadcasts? Alternatively, was it taboo to discuss them?

What were the penalties and repercussions for listening to foreign broadcasts?

Were you – personally – afraid as you listened? Of what?

Were you aware of your home government's actions to restrict access to the foreign broadcasts?

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### Consequences

How did you use the information from foreign radio?

Did it influence the way you perceived domestic media? How?

Did the broadcasts influence your political views, shape/change the ideas you had? How?

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Among the Western radio stations available in Poland (Voice of America, BBC, Radio Luxembourg, RFI, DW, and RFE), Radio Free Europe was most popular but also most commonly subjected to jamming because of its special character. According to the Free Europe Committee, the station was to speak with the voice of émigrés communicating messages of hope, the broadcasters providing news and cultural content bypassing Communist censorship. The Polish section of RFE went on air on 3 May 1952, with Jan Nowak (Zdzisław Jeziorański) in charge until 1976. Four other persons ran the Polish section until its operations were closed down in 1994 (Machcewicz 2007: 41–43, 52; Nowak-Jeziorański 1992: 51–53).<sup>2</sup>

The first finding of the pilot study that demands attention from researchers is related to the media landscape in the Polish People's Republic. Notably, all interviewees mentioned both Polish and Western media. Where the state media were concerned, they referred to TV, press, and radio. A few of the older respondents mentioned “radio by wire” or “radio with no dials,” which can be thought of as a loudspeaker with a single channel streaming radio messages. Such radio entertainment with political propaganda was often called “kołchoźnik” – for its widespread use on collective farms, or “toczka,” which is a regional expression for the same single-channel radio. Purchasing the first radio with dials was such an extraordi-

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<sup>2</sup> The first broadcasts to Poland were aired on August 4, 1950. However, for the first two years its programming was prepared and prerecorded in New York City and the tapes sent to Germany.

nary event in their family history that the respondents often not only remembered specific brands, but at times were also able to describe the equipment in detail.

When it comes to Western broadcasters, RFE was the closest to Polish sentiments and "the most trusted one, even when you were listening to more buzz, whistling, and static than you could hear information" (K.H.-7-2021).<sup>3</sup> RFE was occasionally confused with other radio stations: some of the oldest respondents referred to it as available in the late 1940s (professional RFE broadcasts to Poland began in May 1952). Only a few considered RFE to include anti-Communist propaganda and compared the received information with other sources if in doubt. According to the majority of the respondents, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was deemed the most objective and occasionally used to verify the news. Only one person claimed the BBC to be a "purely political station" broadcasting from London in pursuit of specific goals (I.D.-3-2022). The Voice of America (VOA) was the least known of the Western broadcasters. Radio Luxembourg was quite popular as a source of entertainment, mentioned mostly by the 1960s generation. By listening to Radio Luxembourg, which was quite accessible and not considered as risky as listening to RFE, young people could acquaint themselves with Western culture and music popular outside the Iron Curtain. One respondent mentioned Radio Vaticana Italia; none of the interviewees discussed Radio France Internationale or Deutsche Welle.

From what the first group of students found, in most cases the respondents grew up aware of the alternative news sources. They learned about Western radio stations at a very young age from their parents or grandparents. Listening was common, yet it was not public knowledge. Although the youngest were sometimes excluded due to fear of the consequences if the children revealed the secret, listening to foreign broadcasts was a multigenerational activity:

Everybody was sitting down near the radio, the static was awful, but we listened stubbornly. The state [state media] only said what "Komuna" [the Communist government] wanted, and to get some truth you had to listen to Free Europe . . . My grandfather, my father, all the kids, we all listened. There was a lot, truly a lot of politics discussed in my home, but my parents always reminded us: "don't you dare mention it at school." (K.L.-10-2021)

Most commonly, the families and occasionally also close and trusted friends would gather in the evenings and listen to the foreign broadcasts in quite a festive manner. One of the respondents, a priest, admitted: "well, the seminary was not a

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<sup>3</sup> The interviews were coded to include the interviewer's initials, the number assigned to the interview, and the year of the interview; an initial *K* at the end of the code (for Polish *kwerenda*) denotes students' searches of press sources.

favorable environment for the current ‘political team,’ so we often listened to the radio with my friends” (P.D.-4-2022).

Why did Polish people listen to Western broadcasting? Many said it was an opportunity for a little taste of freedom and normality – “For me, Radio Free Europe was the epitome of the word ‘freedom’” (K.T.-11-2021). They were seeking the truth, and Western radio stations became their main source of information. Some listened in fear, and some with malice as a sign of protest. Since such activities were deemed dangerous, youths often listened for the adrenaline rush, the thrill of doing something illegal. It was the “forbidden fruit.” Listening to the Western media was a way to escape, even for a moment, from the reality of life created by the state. Many interviewees admitted that reaching for external news sources was crucial during distressing events in the country’s history, such as the declaration of martial law in 1981, or in December 1970, when RFE was the only source of knowledge for families about the fate of the striking shipyard workers, referred to as “hooligans” by the state media (M.G.-6-2022). One interviewee described the horror her family faced when one of her brothers, a shipyard worker, was protesting while another brother, a Polish People’s Army soldier, was ordered to break the strike – “Can you imagine? One brother shooting and killing the other brother. My mother could have lost two of her sons in December ’70” (K.J.-8-2022).

A few respondents became sentimental and some excited while describing their motivation for listening to RFE. One, the daughter of a soldier (Polish Armed Forces in the West), called listening “a patriotic duty” (K.J.-8-2022). Both during the Cold War and now, reminiscing, they were moved by the mere fact that someone, somewhere, on the other side of the Iron Curtain knew, remembered, and cared about them. RFE broadcasts were a proof that the Free World was observing them carefully:

Listening was such a bizarre experience. It was shocking that we could hear about something happening in Puck, my town, on RFE. That’s also what made RFE trustworthy, believable. Something was happening here in the afternoon and they would already be talking about it in the evening. We tried checking this multiple times, we wanted to know what source they had here, in Puck. But it was so incredible. You would be taking part in some event here, and then, the same evening, you would be listening to a forbidden station and hear them say “this and that happened in Puck” or “this person was punished for that.” It was shocking! That’s also what attracted us to RFE. (I.D.-3-2022)

Some respondents described an insatiable thirst for knowledge they could only satisfy with RFE because these broadcasts provided them with a dose of news and history that was inconvenient to the Communist authorities and thus manipulated, censored, or hidden from the public eye. Foreign broadcasts, with RFE being emphasized here, gave Polish people an insight into the intellectual world

of the West. Listeners understood that this world was far more compelling than how it was described in the state's misleading portrayal. Moreover, one of the respondents claimed he listened to RFE also for linguistic reasons – he contrasted the eloquent, instructive language of RFE presenters to that of figures seen as authorities in the Polish People's Republic (K.A-1-2020). This respondent's remarks are even more significant considering the fact that striving for the language of the Western media was included in the 1957 guidelines according to which the presenters were also to avoid sarcastic or ironic tones when criticizing the Communist authorities (Machcewicz 2007: 68).

The news was the most valuable part of the broadcasts. Some respondents mentioned history and a few mentioned culture-related programs. The most memorable events (in the respondents' opinion) reported by the Western media made quite a diverse list. Among the most commonly mentioned were outbreaks of public discontent, strikes, and demonstrations – March 1968, December 1970, Radom and Ursus in 1976, Solidarity in 1980, after the imposition of martial law in 1981, the Bydgoszcz strike in 1988. Respondents also remembered the moment when they heard about the election of Pope John Paul II, Reagan's Christmas message in 1981, or learning about the murder of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko in 1984 or Gorbachev's ascent to power. The other type of memorable news was defector stories (Józef Światło 1953, Andrzej Czechowicz 1971, Ryszard Kukliński 1981). What should be noted here is that these events were truly unforgettable, as some of the respondents were children when they learned about them for the first time, listening to foreign stations with their families. As for the names of the broadcasters remembered by the interviewees, Jan Nowak Jeziorański was the only name they recalled:

Jan Nowak Jeziorański . . . it was such a name back then! Golly! An ideal man! Our "Courier from Warsaw." He was the link between Warsaw and London during the Warsaw Uprising [ . . . ] It was extraordinary. It was in him that we put our trust. That's why we were always looking forward to RFE's broadcasts. (I.D.-3-2022)

Polish people did fear the repercussions of listening to foreign broadcasts, especially in the 1950s:

Of course we knew it was dangerous! Snitches were wandering around. Here is an example: our postman was a snitch. He snitched on one of our neighbors and he got arrested. He went to jail for quite some time, got sick with tuberculosis, and died there . . . So, we, the young, were always reminded that we couldn't say anything about it [RFE] at school. (S.K.-8-2021)

Later, the fear subsided; however, listening was still surrounded by a secretive atmosphere. One interviewee admitted being too petrified of the new occupiers

of Poland to listen to RFE at home because his father was one of the victims of the Nazis in the Piaśnica massacres;<sup>4</sup> thus, he only listened to foreign broadcasts at friends' houses (I.D.-3-2022). Although the penalties were unknown, they were considered real due to the collective memory of the 1950s. One respondent remembers that while purchasing a radio receiver from abroad in 1985, he bravely asked the seller whether the receiver picked up RFE well; however, he also remembers that in the 1950s, when his father was listening to RFE, he had to stand at the front door and observe whether the neighbors were coming to eavesdrop (P.B.-4-2020). People feared persecution, ORMO (the Volunteer Reserve of the Citizens' Militia), outsiders visiting the village, neighbors eavesdropping, or children revealing the secret at school – “you couldn't listen to RFE, it was forbidden. The militia would stop by your window and eavesdrop trying to catch those who listened to RFE” (K.H.-7-2021), “you always had to be careful, some stranger could be close and find out you were listening to Free Europe, and what would you do then?” (S.K.-8-2021). They imagined they would get arrested or have problems at work or at school, thought about the consequences they had heard of, such as being forced to join the Party to show loyalty.

Was it illegal to listen? According to the decree of June 13, 1946, “Regarding Crimes Particularly Dangerous during the Rebuilding of the State,” article 22: anyone who disseminates false messages that may cause significant damage to the interests of the Polish state, or reduce the prestige of its supreme organs, shall be subject to imprisonment for up to five years.<sup>5</sup> Listening at home was not public dissemination, but if the news from a Western broadcast were to be spread in a workplace, the punished person would face up to two and a half years in prison (1952). This law was annulled as of January 1, 1970, on the basis of the act of April 19, 1969, “Provisions Introducing the Penal Code” (article VI p. 4). Although many believed that it would be difficult to prove someone was listening to a forbidden station (underground publications – *samizdat* – and leaflets or brochures were more hazardous), they also suspected that the Communists would always find a pretext for persecution, and they did not actually know what they could end up in jail for. Despite the fear, they continued listening. They refused to self-censor themselves and give up their inner sense of freedom.

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4 This massacre claimed the lives of over twelve thousand people. In the popular narrative, it is sometimes referred to as the “second” or “Pomeranian Katyń.” Obviously, the Katyń massacre was perpetrated by the Soviets. The memory of the two totalitarian systems that were installed in occupied Poland affected the post-war generations for decades.

5 O przestępstwach szczególnie niebezpiecznych w okresie odbudowy Państwa. Dz. U. z 1946 r. Nr 30, poz. 192; zm.: Dz. U. z 1947 r. Nr 65, poz. 390, z 1949 r. Nr 32, poz. 238 i Nr 45, poz. 334, z 1955 r. Nr 46, poz. 310 oraz z 1958 r. Nr 18, poz. 76.; Art. 22.

The respondents interviewed in the project admitted they "generally believed" and trusted the external sources of information, and only a few mentioned cases of attempting to confirm the received news with different sources (with only one person mentioning the underground press as a way to verify new messages). In fact, some said, the only way to verify information was by observing daily life in Poland, confronting their reality with what they heard about Poland and about the Free World in foreign broadcasts, and with what was said by the state. For instance, they compared the Communists' descriptions of "rotten capitalism" with some Western goods that wealthier Poles could buy in a Pewex shop. Tired of the Communist propaganda of success, they not only distrusted the Polish media; some despised it for all the lies, manipulations, and censorship. A few of the interviewees would watch and listen to the state media solely for the purpose of commenting on it, ridiculing the content, and exposing the lies. However, as one of the respondents noticed, the regime media often criticized issues such as racism in America, whereas RFE would "keep denying there is such a problem" (M.G.-6-2022).

As for jamming, it certainly made it more difficult to listen to foreign broadcasts (especially RFE) and exacerbated the nervous atmosphere of an illegal activity. However, the respondents admitted that jamming was not discouraging enough to stop listening. The vast majority described it as static, whistles, squeaking, or buzzing sounds; one interviewee, who lived very closed to the eastern border, remembered RFE as being "constantly jammed by the Russian Woodpecker" (K.T.-11-2021), a radar system used in the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and 1980s. Ordinarily, during the gatherings to listen to a Western broadcast, someone would be appointed responsible for manipulating the radio receiver's knob to catch a better signal. Interestingly, some listeners would be so eager to receive information from beyond the Iron Curtain that they constructed copper and brass antennas for their radios so as to pick up the signal better (O.L.-19-2020).

The underground press was much more perilous than listening to the radio. Many respondents mentioned samizdat (by the 1970s). As reported by the interviewees, samizdat became more accessible during the martial law period, and many of them recalled brochures and leaflets of Solidarity. One of the respondents admitted that she was personally involved in the distribution of the underground press. None of the respondents, however, had heard of or read transcripts of the Western broadcasts. No one mentioned "na Antenie" published in Munich. Might this be because the Polish authorities were so mobilized to collect all possible material from RFE's balloon operation that they promised monetary rewards for anyone who brought them the transcripts and leaflets (Machcewicz 2007: 98)?

An almost ubiquitous response concerning the radio was that everyone listened, but no one shared this fact. It was a universal phenomenon, yet disclosed solely to a few trustworthy people. Listening to the Western sources was merely

assumed, since in private conversations people knew facts that were not disclosed by the Polish media.

Ordinary Party members also listened to foreign broadcasts to broaden their horizons and compare the news to the official Party information line. One respondent revealed that his father worked at a university, belonged to the PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party), and even gave agitation lectures to new Party members. Despite his position, Communist activities, and anti-capitalist views, RFE broadcasts were listened to regularly in the house (S.D.-5-2020). Another respondent's father, who had a quite high-ranking position in the PZPR, also systematically listened to RFE and felt apprehensive that his son might confess such a secret at school. As one of the respondents pointed out, it was obvious that government officials listened to foreign broadcasts since the "false information from hostile Western radio stations" was constantly denied in the regime media's official programs, especially by *Dziennik Telewizyjny*" (B.K.-9-2022).

How did Western media influence Polish people? Before having contact with foreign radio stations, some of the respondents had a neutral attitude towards the information presented in domestic media. Others' perception of state media had already been shaped by their upbringing and the political views of their family members:

It wasn't as if I used to have different views in my life, that suddenly I was listening to RFE and suddenly I had different opinions. It was not so. I had the same views as my home environment, experienced during the war and post-war times, and my father always told me things about life. (P.D.-4-2022)

Because foreign broadcasts provided Poles with an additional frame of reference, the manipulations and propaganda of the regime became conspicuous. Some respondents experienced a complete loss of trust towards domestic media, and some, who already wished for systemic changes, were mobilized further. Internal resistance grew among Poles who recognized the lies of the Communist authorities, and since they felt a sense of community, they spoke out against the regime more boldly. Some protested, and others encouraged their friends and relatives to seek information from alternative sources to the state media. Providing Poles with reliable information about the situation both in the country and in the Free World not only sustained moral resistance towards the regime, but also galvanized faith in and hope for independence:

If it wasn't for what Radio Free Europe was saying, we would never have gotten Poznań, there would have been no December, there would have been no August 1980. The people were slowly uniting, it was a process . . . It was 1980, Solidarity, that proved how all of this [Communism] was despised by the people, this moment, Solidarity, shows that [Radio] Free Europe had done its job. (A.F.-4-2021)

Western broadcasts helped create a new consciousness in an enslaved society. As the respondents say, RFE contributed to the awakening of Poles from “the Communist dementia.” Listening itself was a symbol of passive rebellion – but rebellion nonetheless – against the government and its attempts to monopolize the information market. It opened the eyes and ears even of those who had been previously seduced by the Communist propaganda of success – “They said on TV that everyone was so happy, that they were happy about the alliance with Russia, and when watching it, you could only see how they were crying about how much they [the USSR] were taking away” (P.D.-4-2022). Listening to broadcasts such as that of VOA for Christmas in 1980, with discussions about Americans decorating Christmas trees, buying gifts for their loved ones, and purchasing delicious foods, aroused sorrow and hatred towards the Communist system. Poles longed even more for the normality that was so lacking in the everyday life of the Eastern bloc countries.

Moreover, Western broadcasts were extremely helpful for the circles of those actively fighting against the Communist system. They publicized information on various actions and events directed against the authorities, such as strikes or hunger protests. Foreign media also played a vital role for the repressed. One of the respondents, an opposition activist who participated in actions such as “Walerianka” during parliamentary elections in the 1980s, was arrested; before she had even been brought to the pre-trial detention center, RFE was already broadcasting information about the event (M.K-12-2020).<sup>6</sup> The interviewee declared RFE to be an immense support for all prisoners because it stopped their unlawful arrests and persecution from being forgotten (M.K-12-2020). It was more difficult for the authorities to harm them because the world, thanks to RFE’s information broadcasts, was interested in their fate.<sup>7</sup> The Western media contributed to the formation of an opposition in Poland. As one of the respondents said, “the radio was our window to the world . . . We knew there was another life and we wanted to pursue it, to freedom . . . The radio gave us the courage to strive for freedom” (M.K-12-2020).

Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the First Solidarity and post-war Poland’s first democratically elected president, when asked about Western broadcasts stated:

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<sup>6</sup> The respondent came up with, and with friends participated in, an initiative called “Walerianka.” The group poured valerian extract around polling stations – hence the name of the event – in an effort to boycott the parliamentary elections in 1985. Since valerian root attracts cats, the extract worked and soon many stray cats surrounded the polling stations.

<sup>7</sup> RFE gathered and made available information on East Central Europe. The archives of the RFE Research Institute are available at the Open Society Archives in Budapest.

[s]ince I was a little kid, I used to listen to RFE. To begin with this was [sort of] compulsory. There was some kind of [primitive] battery-powered radio that my parents owned [at our home] in the countryside. They used to listen, and we would eavesdrop. But the quality of the signal was very poor – cracking and squeaking – but the information got through. Again, without this propaganda, without this information, it would be very difficult for us to navigate, see what was happening [what to watch out for], where to be careful, where and how to have discussions, but this was a huge help that was provided by the free press, free radio.<sup>8</sup>

Many respondents ascribed their ability to learn about Polish history to the foreign broadcasts, and especially to RFE. Most commonly they mentioned that RFE allowed them to learn the truth about the Katyń massacre, which in the Polish-Soviet historical rhetoric was either covered up or ascribed to the Germans. Some of the respondents were teenagers when they listened. It was only because of the external media sources that they realized that the authorities were manipulating and covering up historical facts. RFE told them a different story than the one they heard at school.

A lot of interviewees chosen for this project also made references to the present, commenting on the media (TVP vs. TVN). When asked about the news sources in the Polish People's Republic, they said they were “just like today,” (referring to the Law and Justice rule in 2015–2023) but they disagreed about which media told the truth and which manipulated and lied. Some respondents reported that listening to foreign broadcasts had a profound impact on their political views (this was mostly claimed by those who considered themselves conservatives). Others believed that although it was all about getting truthful information, the habit had stayed with them to this day, and hence they still used multiple media sources and verified the news they received.

What was not mentioned by the respondents? None of the persons questioned in the project mentioned the names of any exiles or any awareness of the role played by exiles in the foreign media broadcasts. Only few individuals noticed the US interest in broadcasting behind the Iron Curtain, quite aware that every message, or every part of the communication chain, is marked by a certain amount of subjectivity. They had difficulty naming any specifics of what that interest might have been other than labeling it as anti-Communist propaganda, though. None of the respondents spoke of a broader Cold War context.

Projects such as the one directed by Curry are of immense importance. Not only do they provide us with insight into the chains of communication that changed

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lech Wałęsa recorded for the participants of an international workshop, “From POISON PEN to FAKE NEWS. Disinformation from the Cold War Until Today,” organized by the Lech Wałęsa Institute (Poland) in cooperation with the Langeland Cold War Museum (Denmark) and Václav Havel Library (Czech Republic). The workshop took place at the University of Southern Denmark in early March 2020. Both authors took part in facilitating the workshop.

the course of history or with information on propaganda techniques and public diplomacy tactics; they also enable us to discover the exceptional life stories of dozens of (seemingly) ordinary people that would otherwise remain unknown. Out of fifty-one randomly selected individuals interviewed for this project, there were both those who symbolically opposed Communism by listening to the foreign broadcasts and those who actively fought against the regime. There were those who disseminated the underground press, organized events, and protested against Communist rule. There was a member of Solidarity and the Socialist Workers' Union; there was a child of Home Army soldiers who organized samizdat readings in a basement; and there was a secretary of the Solidarity committee at the rolling-stock repair plant who ran radio broadcasts on events happening in Poland and around the world. The latter was later persecuted for illegal broadcasting and distribution of leaflets. He was sentenced to a year and a half, and spent five months in jail and the rest of his time suspended (S.L-18-2020).

As discussed before, the second group of Polish students involved in the project analyzed certain events and the way these were presented by both the Western and domestic media. The students noted that what mattered in these communication chains was not only what was communicated and how, but also what information was withheld from the Polish public. The state media were "bending" the reality to the regime's ideological line in an often hypocritical and cynical way by accusing foreign journalists and radio presenters of attempting to manipulate and overinterpret information. Although the Free World media sometimes did not speak of some matters or just brushed some of them aside, they never went so far as to provide news that was distorted for the purposes of the accompanying ideological narrative they were alleged to have.

RFE broadcasts often provided more in-depth, detailed information. Not only did the reporters keep listeners up to date on the events; their commentaries and statements were also extensive, meticulous, and thorough. RFE also often presented the accounts of eyewitnesses of the discussed events, and radio announcers' talks were marked with an emotional tone, with metaphors and comparisons being used.

Thanks to the Western broadcasts, the public could easily notice the amount of propaganda embedded in the state media such as *Dziennik Polski*. RFE programs highlighted elements considered important and necessary, emphasizing the need for patriotism and social solidarity during events such as the 1970 Polish protests (K.K-5-2020-K). According to RFE, Poland was not so much a Communist country as it was ruled by the Communists – it would indicate, that the Communist regime was not internalized in Poland, but rather that it was alien to the Polish state (P.W-12-2020-K). This idea was also accentuated by contrasting Communism with Christianity, emphasizing the foreignness of the Communist system to Poland and the bond between the Polish people and the Christian faith (P.W-12-2020-K).

Contrary to foreign broadcasts, the domestic media often reported the events of the previous day and mostly presented only basic information without providing details. The Communist-controlled TV, radio, and press reports were usually in an official form, without the use of many stylistic means or any emotional background, and sometimes had a tone that did not befit the significance of the reported events. As expected, the state media chose not to present some news that would be considered important. The reports were quite short; they included downplaying of the news, contradictory information, manipulation, and lies. It seems that at times, the domestic media would try to relieve social tensions by limiting the amount of propaganda and censorship when discussing events of particular importance to Poles. However, on the other hand, with breakthrough events, such as the election of Pope John Paul II, the regime would add narratives indicating that they were made possible by the Communist state's exceptional actions (P.W-12-2020-K). Moreover, reporting on even the smallest, seemingly insignificant occasion was always an opportunity to remind Poles either about the value of socialism and the USSR or the corruption of the West and the German crimes in World War II (and those crimes the Communists attributed to the Germans).

Any information that was not aligned with the Communist version was considered counterrevolutionary propaganda, invented by the Federal Republic of Germany or the United States. Contrary to RFE, the domestic press often emphasized that the socialist system was inextricably linked with Poland and Polish citizens. The state media also stressed the possibility of interaction between the Church and the state and between Christianity and socialism (sometimes also Communism), and juxtaposed the "decay" of the West with the prosperity and modernity of the Polish people living under the Communist system.

While the random sample collected in the pilot study may not be representative of the population across Poland, it does point to an array of possible research questions. The results of the pilot study clearly indicate a great research potential, not just among Poles. It can be assumed that if similar interviews were to be made by students at several universities across Eastern and Central Europe, scholars would be able to identify areas where people's responses to the breakdown of Communist state media could be correlated with the emergence (and support for) the democratic opposition. While we know of obvious differences in audience responses based on earlier studies, we have yet to learn what factors contributed to them. The urgency of such a research agenda is obvious: adults who listened to the Western radio broadcasts in the 1950s and early 1960s, when democratic opposition was not yet in place and when dissident voices were violently suppressed, are now in their seventies and eighties. This paper, therefore, is ultimately a call for cooperation and further study.

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### **III Circulation of European Ideas**



Matthias Bauer and Iulia-Karin Patrut

## A Romanian Renegade: The Case of Petru Dumitriu

The Romanian writer Petru Dumitriu (1924–2002) is a typical exponent of the conflicts and pitfalls of Europe during the Cold War period. Highly acclaimed for his early novels, written in line with Communist doctrine, Dumitriu became the head of the State Publishing House for Romanian Literature in the 1950s. Many of his books were translated and, shortly after the originals, published in East Germany.

After his break with the Party establishment in 1959, Dumitriu became a dissident and persona non grata in his homeland. He settled in West Germany, wrote essays in German as well as in French, and reflected the split between Communism and humanism in *Rendez-vous au jugement dernier* (1961) or *Incognito* (1962). Despite his radical criticism of the oppressive regime in Bucharest, many Romanian exiles in Paris did not accept him – among them Mircea Eliade, who had been involved in right-wing nationalism before 1945 and remained extremely hostile to anyone who, initially, had supported socialism. To exiles like Eliade, Dumitriu was not reliable, whereas the *nomenclatura* in Bucharest accused him of betrayal.

In fact, a close reading of his early novels, especially the sweeping epic *Cronică de familie* (1949, reprinted several times), reveals that the author depicted the prerevolutionary society of Romania in a way that is neither compatible with the brutal understanding of socialist realism nor with the post-avant-garde style of Western modernism, namely, the *nouveau roman*. It comes as no surprise that Dumitriu, in his seminal essay *Die Transmoderne* (1965), criticized both extremes in favor of a wide-ranging representation of history and contemporary reality and distanced himself from the capitalist economy and lifestyle in *L'extrême-occident* (1964).

Leading the in-between existence of a disillusioned intellectual who again and again faced (and suffered from) the double-bind situation of the Cold War, the career of Dumitriu, who was both culprit and victim, mirrors the repressive system of Stalinism but also the disinterest of the West in looking more closely behind the Iron Curtain and its yearning for self-affirmation (which was coupled with ignorance of the East). In this respect, the silencing of Dumitriu's voice after 1969 and his recent posthumous rediscovery in Romania are more than telling, since the interview messages he sent via Radio Free Europe or the Voice of America were largely ignored in his lifetime.

This paper will outline the ups and downs in Dumitriu's career, including his spectacular flight through the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin and his efforts to communicate across the Iron Curtain. It will also use this career as an example of the potentials and difficulties of transmitting ideas between the blocs and, thereby, question the openness to dissident voices that is held to be a major achievement and advantage of the West.

## 1 Breakaway from conformism and corruption

The division of Europe after World War II has been a division of perception and knowledge. Since there was no free flow of information in those countries that belonged to the Warsaw Pact and official information available from them was held to be pure propaganda on the other side of the Iron Curtain, reality in East and West has been constructed in different, often even opposing ways. This division becomes evident in the selective translation and distribution of literature, especially in the GDR and FRG. As long as, for instance, the narratives of Petru Dumitriu could be read as contributions to the establishment of a socialist society in Romania, they were published only by far-left publishing houses in Vienna or in East Berlin and barely noticed in the FRG. After his break with Communism and his flight to West Berlin, things were turned upside down: Dumitriu now became well known to those who had scarcely had access to his work before – and a writer inaccessible not only in his homeland but also in the GDR.

Interestingly, there is at least one novel that, regarding content and style, genesis, and reception, can be called a work of transition: *Cronică de familie*. The first volume was adapted as a film in the East.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, another episode, from the second volume, was made into another movie in the West.<sup>2</sup> An early chapter was published in German in the GDR, but the German version of the first two volumes of the novel came out in the FRG. Interestingly, they were all derived from the French edition and not from the Romanian original. In 1960, *Die Bojaren. Der Familienschmuck* was published, and in 1962 its sequel *Die Bojaren. Freuden der Jugend*. The third volume of this semifictional chronicle has, to date, not been translated into German.

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1 *Bijuterii de familie* (1958) Dir. Marius Teodorescu. Cin. Alexandru Rosianu. Release dates: Romania, April 28, 1958; East Germany, August 21, 1959; Soviet Union, November 1, 1959.

2 *Un été inoubliable* (1994) Dir. Lucian Piutlie. Cin. Calin Glibu. Release dates: France, May 1, 1994 (Cannes Film Festival); US, November 11, 1994.

Compared to the books Dumitriu had written in Romanian and published from 1946 to 1959 – most of them also published immediately in the GDR – the chronicle reveals a rather skeptical, sometimes even pessimistic review of Romanian history from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century. Much of the book was still consonant with the Marxist interpretation of modern times, especially the critical portraits of members of the old elite, their moral decay, and their counterrevolutionary attitude. The depiction of the peasants and their exploitation also followed, more or less, the official outline.

However, whereas in *Drum Fara Pulbere* (1952; *Der Kanal*, published in Vienna, 1953) the agents of the Communist Party in Romania were depicted as people of superior moral and political consciousness, they have lost these extraordinary features in the chronicle. *Drum Fara Pulbere* tells the heroic story of the first attempt to link the Danube with the Black Sea in the late 1940s and early 1950s in such a way that the canal-building becomes an emblematic mirror of the contemporary construction of a socialist society in Romania. Not surprisingly, most members of the old elite are involved in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy against this construction work. In an interview recorded in 1993, Dumitriu pointed out that the plot of *Drum Fara Pulbere* was designed before the Communist Party established a prison camp at the construction site and recruited many workers from that camp. He wrote the first chapter before that happened, and recalled in the interview: “Then, there was no way out. I had to complete the novel. [. . .] Later on, I had the impression that, instead of me, the Party was the real author of this book” (Pruteanu 1995: 45, 51).<sup>3</sup>

As this confession reveals, he certainly felt pressure to accomplish his work in line with the Party’s doctrine since he would otherwise face severe repercussions. What is more, the quotation displays the shame he felt in retrospect after he had distanced himself not only from Communism but also from writings like *Drum Fara Pulbere*. In fact, he admitted: “My own contributions [. . .] were disgusting. I forgot them completely. They were not poetry, they were only political gestures” (Pruteanu 1995: 31).<sup>4</sup>

In this respect, the transition from the Romanian to the French language and the publication of *Rendez-vous au jugement dernier* in 1961 and *Incognito* in 1962 are worth a closer look. On the one hand, these two novels continue to tell the story of Romania; on the other hand, they break away from the doctrine of social-

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3 “Primul capitol i-am scris când încă nu era acolo nici o colonie penitenciară, și I-am publicat înainte de a scrie urmarea. Mă angajasem să dau în fiecare lună un capitol. [. . .] Autorul moral e Partidul Comunist și toată starea de lucruri din țară.”

4 “Eu aveam oroare de propria mele producții. De-aia le-am și uitat masiv. Nu erau literatură, ci niște gesturi politice.”

ist realism and overcome the ambivalence of *Les Boyards*. But that does not mean that they lack any kind of ambiguity. Rather, they exhibit a shift from an ideologically biased narration to an aporetic revision of modern nihilism. A brief summary of Dumitriu's biography and the backstory of his family will help to explain this shift and its relevance.

Petru Dumitriu was born on May 8, 1924 in Baziaș, a small village near the Romanian–Bulgarian border where his father, an officer, was stationed. His mother was Hungarian by birth. Both parents spoke French and raised their son and his sister in this language. As an adult, Dumitriu, who learned Latin at school, was able to speak Romanian, French, Italian, Spanish, English, and German. Thanks to a grant from the Humboldt-Stiftung, he studied philosophy in Munich, but he had to return to his homeland when in August 1943 Romania ended its collaboration with Nazi Germany and became an ally of the Soviet Union. Dumitriu received the Romanian State Award for Literature in 1949, 1952, and 1955 for his early writings. His then highly acclaimed works furthered his career, though he never enrolled in the Communist Party. In 1956 he was appointed director of the Romanian State Publishing House, ESPLA, and in 1958 elected president of the publishing board at the Romanian Ministry of Culture. Despite these functions, his secret doubts about the regime grew to such an extent that he, together with his second wife, decided to leave the country. In 1959 the couple obtained permission to travel by car to Prague and East Berlin to collect book royalties. They used the Buick which Dumitriu had received for his efforts. On this occasion, they crossed the Brandenburg Gate in January 1960 and, after something of an odyssey in West Berlin, settled in Frankfurt am Main. Since the couple left their recently born daughter behind, their escape must have been a traumatic experience. Although the family was happily reunited two years later, the marriage did not last. To Dumitriu's readers in the East, his sudden disappearance must have been a great puzzle since they were oblivious to his discomfort and his secret doubts about Communism. What had caused the famous writer to give up his privileged life in Bucharest and start all over again in the West? There were no answers to these questions in the East.

Of great importance is an episode from the life of his parents that Dumitriu embedded in *Les Boyards*. This episode helps to explain his growing resistance to the authoritarian regime in Romania. His father, supported by his mother, refused to liquidate some Bulgarian peasants who were captured in the course of a border conflict that followed World War I. Dumitriu's father demanded a written order, which he did not receive. Unfortunately, this act of insubordination was not enough to save the peasants. All of them were killed – a clear indication of the cynical misuse of power and the pre-fascist mind set of the military elite in charge. Because of his refusal, Dumitriu's father remained a subaltern officer

and, during World War II, was forced to take part in risky military operations that ruined his health.

Even worse, after the Communists took over in 1947 he was accused of harboring counterrevolutionary convictions and sent to prison. In the above-mentioned interview, his son remembers how the trial, evidently an example of political persecution, influenced one of his early works, the novel *Vânătoarea di lupi* [Wolfsjagd] (1950). Dumitriu believed that this novel, in which he describes a similar trial, might contribute to his father's release (cf. Pruteanu: 20). This somewhat naive hope sheds light on the precarious situation of the Dumitriu family and the pitfalls of Romanian history. Caught in between irreconcilable ideologies and torn between moral demands and accusations of guilt, the parents, free from debt, more than once paid a high price for living in times of violent transition. The backstory of the Dumitriu family told in *Cronică*, however stylized it may be, contributes to the overall picture of a society that is not just divided by extreme power asymmetries. The most harm is done by the radicalization of ideologies that discredit empathy and solidarity. Without exception, all members of the widely branched Cozianu clan, who represent the old Romanian elite, exemplify at least one of the character flaws that flourished in the feudal society that the Communists tried to overcome.

All the tragedy of those European countries where this attempt was made are crystallized in the fact that the same flaws subvert the Communist project of a socialist society. In *Rendez-vous au jugement dernier* and in *Incognito*, the outcome of this project is presented as a consequence of the nihilism that was shared by the feudal elite and the leaders of the Communist Party. Both groups neglected the will of the people they subjected and believed that they had the right to deny the existence of everybody on the wrong side of history. In this respect, Dumitriu's chronicle and the first two novels he wrote after his flight resemble very much the view advocated in Albert Camus's famous essay *L'homme révolté* (1951). According to Camus, the totalitarian regimes of the East and West in Europe are historical results of the inversion of idealism that took place in the nineteenth century: if it is rational to believe that history is bound to the logic of ideas, it is legitimate to infer that it is also rational to fight and probably even to kill those who oppose the ideal course of events, the conceivably unavoidable progression towards utopia.

Whereas in *Rendez-vous au jugement dernier* the reader is introduced to the internal conflicts of the Communist Party and the way its agents fight one another, so that even the slightest movement of empathy and solidarity is suppressed or perverted, *Incognito* displays, again by using a family plot, how three brothers diverge from one another due to their different attitudes and engagements in politics. These three brothers, in many respects comparable to Dostoevsky's famous Karamazov brothers, are – among others – self-projections of the

author himself, who works through the options he had in post-war Romania (cf. Pruteanu 1995: 103). There is Erasmus Ionescu, at face value a convinced Communist, who, at the end of the book, is suffering from terminal cancer because he always kept his real views to himself. Then, there is his brother Christian, apparently an economic leader who has not compromised himself but lacks conviction; and there is, last but not least, Sebastian Ionescu, a renegade who has not only decided to opt out of the system but, hoping for a spiritual regeneration, takes responsibility for himself and others. Part of his tortured journey through the contemporary hell is his imprisonment in the very camp that Dumitriu intentionally left out of *Drum Fara Pulbere*, a concession that he felt to be a corruption of his own moral standards. It is reasonable to assume that this feeling stimulated a process of reflection which, together with the experience of his father's persecution and his own insights into the *nomenclatura*, finally convinced Dumitriu to leave Romania.

By embedding a traumatic episode from his parents' lives into one of his narratives, and by passing judgment on his own compromised past in the literary terms of a disguised confessional novel, in *Incognito* Dumitriu impressively dramatizes the transition that is already at work in *Cronică* and ratified in *Rendez-vous au jugement dernier*. Not surprisingly, *Incognito* was enthusiastically received by many readers with anti-Communist convictions in the West. As a consequence, Dumitriu felt the temptation to play the role of a convert. Only shortly after he was held in the West to represent the literary achievements of a Communist society, his writings were considered as testimony for the moral and political supremacy of the capitalist world.

## 2 No escape from ignorance and isolation

In September 1964, *The New York Times Book Review* published a review of Dumitriu's novel *Incognito* entitled "A Saint Walks the Floors of Hell. The Hero of a New Novel Carries a Candle Through the Darkness of Stalin's World" (Fremont-Smith 1964: BR1), thus presenting it as a juxtaposition of Communist hell and Christian hope. *Incognito* was a major success not only in France and Germany but also in the United States. One of the readers of the German edition supported Dumitriu with a monthly stipend; another offered him jobs with extremely good salaries, which caused a scandal in 1986. The German Minister of Post, Christian Schwarz-Schilling, was accused of paying his poet-friend Dumitriu too much money for a small book, the *ABC der Neuen Medien*. As a matter of fact, Dumitriu had earned his living from other sources than writing literature for years: he was

in public relations, worked for several companies, and translated books from German into French, among them Eugen Drewermann's *Die Strukturen des Bösen* (cf. Pruteanu 1995: 126). Looking back to these occupations, Dumitriu admitted that they made him lose his autonomy and drift into a schizoid existence.

This schizoid existence is already reflected in the novel *The Extreme Occident*, which followed *Incognito* in 1964. The story takes place in a nameless city that could be anywhere in Western Europe – an urban scene of high modernism, where wealth – to quote from the cover of the English edition – “is no longer a goal in itself; where people are desperate under a terrible new freedom” that most of the book's characters can only misuse in a sadistic or masochistic manner since it is only in this way that they can feel alive. Dumitriu is clearly confronting his readers here with an outcome of nihilism that the victims of the socialist states behind the Iron Curtain would have difficulty understanding, whereas many contemporaries on the other side of it were used to this mindset and lifestyle but, for psychological reasons, eager to resist Dumitriu's ruthless unmasking of the extreme Occident.

This ruthlessness can be found again, transposed into the world of historical novels, in the trilogy *L'homme aux yeux gris – Retour a Milo – Le Beau Voyage* (1969). Born in Europe at the beginning of early modernity, the protagonist, a Jew named Gabriel, whose parents are tortured and killed by the Spanish Inquisition, experiences the division of society, either between different Christian confessions or between the Christian and the Muslim world. Traveling to France, the Netherlands, and Germany, the Middle East, and Russia, across the Mediterranean Sea, and, again and again, beyond civilization, Gabriel faces only cruelty or betrayal, and becomes more than once a murderer of beloved friends. The spiritual journey of this sinner strives for true compassion, empathy, and solidarity. According to the author, Gabriel is another ruthless self-portrait: a rebel and heretic, an emigrant and wanderer in a diegetic world that resembles contemporary Europe. This world is shaken by political convulsions and yearning for unity; it is always expanding violently and because of this violence destroying itself. In this respect, the novel stresses the moral, ideological, and linguistic limitations of the East and West respectively.

This description echoes two other statements about Europe in *Incognito* and *Les Boyards*. The first is uttered by a figure called Arthur Zodie, who, during a public Communist Party rally in Bucharest in the final section of *Incognito*, meets a certain Mr. Martin, who could be anyone raised in England or France, Germany, Spain, or Scandinavia. Their dialogue is an absurd one. As in so many instances when two people from East and West met in those days, it becomes “an exchange between deaf people, a dialogue between an adult and an adolescent – or an old man: between the mature or adult man, who is smarter or more cunning, wiser

or more generous, and the confused, semi-conscious adolescent who is obsessed by his visions or a disillusioned old man without verve and incapable of believing anymore” (*Incognito*: 545, our translation).

It is quite likely that Arthur Zodie articulates the doubts of Dumitriu himself. Can a man from behind the Iron Curtain convey his experience to someone who has never been exposed to the scene that this curtain conceals? Looking back on his own efforts, Dumitriu was tempted to deny that this is possible. The problem is not so much a problem of description or narration per se. Rather, it is a problem of expectation and reception. Summing up his experience with Radio Free Europe, Dumitriu said that he felt himself forced to provide a reductive and simplified frame of understanding, coupled with a cheap pose of unmasking the East (cf. Pruteanu 1995: 112–113). He was neither willing to compromise himself in such a way, nor was he willing to accept the worldview of the far left in the West. Germany, he could tell from the 1960s and 1970s, was full of pro-Communist and pro-Soviet people who conceived of him as a betrayer of their ideals, an enemy they had to boycott (cf. Pruteanu 1995: 96).

If Dumitriu the first was silenced by the knowledge that he could either speak out and bring about his own ruin or stay calm under the repressive conditions of socialist society, “Dumitriu the second is the product of society in Western Europe. He has nothing to say. He is not able to say anything. Won’t he say something? No: he has nothing to tell [ . . . ]. What could I tell these people? They are not open-minded” (Pruteanu 1995: 102).<sup>5</sup>

Dumitriu’s ceasing to speak out so resolutely after 1969 is rooted in this experience. Either the people in the West were not interested, or they were only interested in ignoring his story – the story of a dissident. People were not appreciative of narratives that reflected a transition from the East to the West if such narratives resulted in a disillusioned view of Europe in its entirety. In a time when the *nouveau roman* was the last cry of Western literature – because, according to Dumitriu’s essay *Die Transmoderne* (1965), this type of narrative denied that words could convey anything other than the structure of language (cf. Bauer 2019) – there was no attention for a writer like Dumitriu who had something important but unpleasant to convey, neither in the East nor in the West. Looking back on his misfortunes in 1993, Dumitriu asserted that only a few readers were able to enjoy and decode the adventures of Gabriel and the way he tried to blend historical and fictional worlds. It is, indeed, not straightforward to understand how Du-

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<sup>5</sup> “Dumitriu al II-lea e fructul societății occidentale. N-are ce spune. Nu știe să spună. Nu vrea să spună? Nu: n-are ce spune – nici societatea, nici autorul. Ce vrei să fac cu ei, cu ăștia? Nu se deschid!”

mitriu illuminated the contemporary state of affairs in Romania by incorporating the scenographies of El Greco or Rafael, Giordano Bruno, Montaigne, or Shakespeare (cf. Pruteanu 1995: 194).

What is plain to see in all his novels, especially in *Cronică di familie*, is the corruption of ideals and the disastrous consequences of nihilism. Serban Romano, one of the characters in this narrative, identifies the totalitarian states of the twentieth century with symptoms of decline. He explains that this decline was caused by an irrational philosophy that inspired the fascist movement, not only in Romania. Writers like Thomas Mann, Serban continues, had shown what relations exist between democracy, liberty, and rationality on the one hand, and irrationality and tyranny on the other hand. Now, referring to the late 1930s and early 1940s, it seems that rationality vanishes, as if democracy is erased from the political map of Europe (cf. *Die Bojaren. Freuden der Jugend*: 433).

If this analysis, sustained by history, is accurate, the transitions reflected in Dumitriu's narratives – from democracy to tyranny, from rationality to irrationality, from a feudal to a fascist or a Communist society, from the Eastern world behind the Iron Curtain to the extreme West, from false conformism to speaking out, and from unmasking to ceasing to speak out – are another story of Europe, a story relatively seldom heard and acknowledged during the Cold War, now nearly forgotten, but still worth exploring. The story of Dumitriu's ruined career, of his alleged corruption and loss of integrity, of his flight and exile, his self-accusation, often disguised in his literary works, and his quest for a regeneration of Europe that escapes the pitfalls of both idealism and nihilism, blind faith and deafness, needs further investigation and, as this paper suggests, reevaluation.

As an example of the difficulties of communicating across the Iron Curtain and employing the media of literature as well as the media of broadcasting to transmit experiences that challenge ideological assumptions and misconceptions, the case of Dumitriu, who died on April 6, 2002, yields a rather skeptical account of the potentials of cross-border information and the power of modern media to bypass the Iron Curtain. As was argued above, the problem is much more a sociological and psychological than a technological one. An effective explanation could take recourse to Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance: if people face a severe discrepancy between their expectations and specific information, they tend either to ignore the information or to frame it in such a way that it no longer presents a challenge. The radical, brutal, and cruel method of excluding and annihilating everybody who does not fit in with a forced consensus – the method of Gheorghiu-Dej or Ceaușescu in Romania – was, of course, an extreme one that caused the loss of many lives and, ultimately, was unsuccessful. However, this is no excuse for the indifference in the West that discouraged Dumitriu so much that he stopped writing for nearly ten years.

It was not until 1979 that he published a new book in France: *Au Dieu inconnu*. After that, he wrote several novels, among them *La Liberté* (1983), *La femme au miroir* (1987), and *La Moisson* (1989), as well as essays like *Comment ne pas l'aimer! Une lecture de l'Évangeli selon saint Marc* (1981), *Zéro, ou le point de départ* (1982), or *Walkie-talkie, marcher vers Dieu, parler à Dieu* (1983). Dumitriu has remained a searcher for truth and meaning, a “voice” with a strong will to communicate. Today, more than twenty years after his death, the circulation of his ideas and narratives about a divided Europe that suffered from inverted idealism on both sides of the Iron Curtain depends on those who believe that the future of Europe demands an analytical review of the past and a readiness to question complacent but misleading certainties like those that prevailed on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War.

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Joanna Nowicki

# “Fifteen Minutes with Jacek Kaczmarski” on Radio Free Europe (1983–1995)

A Voice Impossible to Scramble

During the Cold War, some poets or writers played a major role in writing or singing what was suppressed by censorship. The bard of Solidarity, Jacek Kaczmarski, who became an icon for a generation of Poles, was known since his first appearance on stage in 1977 at the Student Song Festival, where he won first prize for “Oblawa” [“Hunting Wolves”].

The young wolves applauded, and Kaczmarski quickly became the voice of the rebels of his generation. It was with “Mury” [The Walls], a cover of a Catalan song “L’Estaca,” which became a second, informal Polish national anthem, that his status as a poet was confirmed (it is revealing that this same song was taken up by the Belarusians demonstrating their opposition to the Lukashenko regime).

At the time of the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981, Kaczmarski chose exile. However, his voice was not silenced, thanks in part to Radio Free Europe (RFE), which offered him the opportunity to host a program entitled “Fifteen minutes with Jacek Kaczmarski.”<sup>1</sup> The author-composer took this opportunity to voice his convictions, hopes, and anxieties, which were widely shared by his compatriots in Poland and abroad. A volume published after the fall of the Wall (Grabska and Wasilewska 2012) entitled *The History Lesson of Jacek Kaczmarski*, matches his texts with the paintings that inspired him, and offers a commentary to this history lesson. Another important volume (Kaczmarski 2017) brings together all his texts in a carefully constructed anthology. A Jacek Kaczmarski Foundation maintains a rich website listing his recordings and poems.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 The jester

Why take an interest in the RFE program entrusted to Jacek Kaczmarski between 1983 and 1990? This chapter will attempt to answer this question by offering an analysis of the main themes treated by this anti-regime poet at this time in the

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1 For an example see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Reoq7vFCTSk>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

2 <<https://www.fundacja-kaczmarski.org>> (accessed 22 February 2023).

tragic history of his country, themes that he chose to illustrate through his sung poems, each time with a personal commentary. His interest lies in the fact that he is an author from a muzzled culture – one who “shouts with meaning,” to use his own expression, on the waves of a radio station broadcasting from abroad, in his own language, and uses the exegesis of his own poetic words to explain his intention to his compatriots: one that follows the “Manifeste de l’homme libre”<sup>3</sup> broadcast during the setting up of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) in Berlin in 1950 (cf. Commentaires 2007).<sup>4</sup>

I would like to start with the theme song of the show – a song called “Zbroja” [Armor] – and introduce the spirit of the show: “because the guitar is a weapon – they shoot at the bodies and at the words” [bo gitara to jest bron, strzela do cial i slow].<sup>5</sup>

The commentary on this work provided by Jacek Kaczmarski is that it is a metaphor for talent. For it is talent that gives the artist the strength to stir up the crowd, but at the same time obliges him to play certain specific roles:

Zbroja [Armor] is a self-ironic text but also declarative: since you have armor, you don’t take it off. This armor is talent and memory. It is indeed memory which is essential (“we have an armor of memory to defend ourselves”), it is what can save us when all the rest is lacking. I remember being inspired while I was composing this text by Beethoven’s “Ruins of Athens” march – even if the music is not similar, a spirit of strength, a chivalrous ethos lives in it.<sup>6</sup>

Since power aims at words, the artist questions this particular role, the role of the poet in the fight against the manipulation of art by authoritarian political regimes, notably in a song entitled “Ze sceny” [From the stage]:

[. . .] For you, it’s only a moment, for me a whole life; singing is not enough for me, I spend my time shouting with meaning; who’s going to cut off my microphone? Before disappearing, I would like to amuse you a little . . .<sup>7</sup>

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**3** The manifesto of the congress was drafted by Arthur Koestler, with amendments added following a motion proposed by the historian Hugh Trevor-Roper and philosopher A. J. Ayer. See *The Liberal Conspiracy*, Appendix A, pp. 249–251, for the text of this manifesto. Coleman, Peter, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe*, New York: Free Press, Collier Macmillan, 1989.

**4** <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress\\_for\\_Cultural\\_Freedom#cite\\_ref-12](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_for_Cultural_Freedom#cite_ref-12)> (accessed 17 March 2024).

**5** Cf. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcxEu2IVT0c>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

**6** This is how he put it in an interview with the monthly magazine *Odra*. Interview with Jolanta Piątek, “Za dużo czerwonego,” Radio Wrocław, published in *Odra* in 2001–2002.

**7** <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ck\\_ZQKZMQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ck_ZQKZMQ0)> (accessed 17 March 2024).

Kaczmarski joins an old cultural tradition in Poland, that of the king’s fool, or jester, immortalized by the painter Matejko in a self-portrait entitled *Stanczyk*<sup>8</sup> – a witness to history’s impotence, the sad king’s fool, a motif later taken up again in a text that made history, “The priest and the jester,” by the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski (1989), which contrasts two ways of thinking: the dogmatic way of the priest (in this case, the “new faith” of Stalinism) and the brilliant and insolent way of the jester who dared to contradict it. According to Zagajewski, this text was fervently studied during the cold war in Warsaw, Prague, Sofia, and Moscow, perhaps even in East Berlin.

“Linoskoczek” [The Funambulist], Kaczmarski explains, is an illustration of the struggle of an individual with his destiny, nourished by the need to take risks, to defend, even alone, certain principles in a world where the dreams of romantics can sometimes be realized by pragmatists: “What should the tightrope walker do when there is no tight rope; he is facing a barbed wire, but he will be able to show the world that it is possible to dance on it?”<sup>9</sup>

The artistic and moral embodiment of such an attitude for Kaczmarski is the Russian singer- poet Vladimir Vysotsky. The Polish artist admired him for his moral attitude and for his lyrics, which were very important in the choice of his own artistic path:

After meeting Vysotsky in 1974, I realized that a song is not just about writing a text and composing music. It can also be a way of expressing what is most profound and fundamental. [ . . . ] I think that everything I wrote between 1974 and 1978 was influenced by Wysocki’s art, as much by his poetics as by his way of singing.<sup>10</sup>

## 2 The interpretation/construction of a Polish national character

When the Russian artist died, Kaczmarski, who called himself an “anti-Communist Russophile,” composed the “Epitaph for V. Vysotsky” as a tribute to his model,<sup>11</sup> where hell evokes the Gulag theme on which the Polish poet draws more often. It is

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8 See the analysis of this painting, which inspired Kaczmarski in Grabska and Wasilewska (2012: 134–140).

9 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9J0ev4ySRaE>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

10 Quoted by the Jacek Kaczmarski Foundation, <<https://www.fundacja-kaczmarski.org>> (accessed 17 March 2024), all translations by Joanna Nowicki.

11 For an English translation (not used in this article) see <<https://lyricstranslate.com/pl/epitafium-dla-w%C5%82odzimierza-wysockiego-epitaph-w%C5%82odzimierz-wysocki.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

this work with which he identified himself most closely. It evokes his existential frankness, perhaps a little borrowed, but understood and admired by thousands of admirers, including himself.

“To moja droga z piekła do piekła” [This is my way from hell to hell] – this formula reflects the Soviet Union and the lives of its citizens, especially the life of an artist in that system. The worst prospect for a creative man is to know that the memory of his work will be destroyed. But another lesson can also be drawn from this, namely that a nightmare can be the driving force of a person’s existence. Many people think that “The Epitaph for V. Vysotsky,” this attempt to synthesize Soviet Russia, is Kaczmarek’s most personal work; he said that interpreting it was a psychodrama for him.<sup>12</sup>

Other texts, such as “Andrej Roubłow” [“There are paths that no one takes”] or “Arka Noego” [Noah’s Ark] are also poems evoking existential questions, primary questions: “Build the ark before the flood, even if the crowd laughs at you, you must save what is most precious, and there is so much of that already!”

Generally, we can speak in the case of Kaczmarek’s work of “poems of moral disquiet,” to borrow the term used for Polish cinematography in the sixties and eighties, embodied by filmmakers such as Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Krzysztof Zanussi, Agnieszka Holland. Asked about his inspirations, Kaczmarek confessed to being influenced by Albert Camus and the existentialists, and said he was convinced of the absurdity of existence, in the face of which he had decided to embrace hope. His poetry helped him in this difficult task.

What interested him was the analysis of the attitudes chosen by people in difficult situations, even borderline situations. He devoted the satirical novel *Portret z kanalia* (Kaczmarek 1994) to this issue. In it he stages characters with complex motivations – dissidents, collaborators, cowards, courageous people, and so on (Nowicki 2013):

Some criticized me for being too trivial in describing the state of war; others said I was too pathetic. I concluded that I was writing in a personal way, that I was not following fashions. Seeking heroism is valid, because it gives people a sense of power, even if it is not illusory. Several times I met people who said that my songs helped them during the state of war. But being capable of irony is also good, because it allows you not to remain frozen like a sculpture.<sup>13</sup>

Other texts express the poet’s interest in complex moral attitudes. He pays homage to Jan Palach (“Pochodnia” [The Torch]) and to Don Quixote, who represents

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<sup>12</sup> <[www.kaczmarek.art.pl](http://www.kaczmarek.art.pl)> (accessed 17 March 2024).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the poet quoted by Jarek Sopinski, in *Odra*, groove.pl.

for him a confrontation between idealism and positivism. He tells another tragic story – that of the painter and playwright Stanislaw Witkacy, who took his own life on the day the Red Army entered Poland, September 17th, 1939 (“The Portrait of Witkacy”).

Another symbolic text is the one dedicated to Robinson Crusoe, in which the poet asks himself: “Why did the cannibals choose precisely my universe to make theirs?” [Czemu akurat ten moj swiat za swoj obrali ludozercy?].

But the theme that recurs in all the shows, like an obsession, is of course the fate of the Polish people and of Poland. Kaczmarski describes the Polish character – its strengths and weaknesses – without complacency, by scrutinizing the Polish soul, which allows him to articulate his idea of the Polish national character.

Let us begin with “Modlitwa” [The Prayer], which poses the question of the responsibility of a people for its future:

If the Mother of God does not save us  
What will become of the Poles?  
That's why I pray to her every day.  
So that she protects us from ourselves.

Another prayer – “Modlitwa o wschodzie slonca” [Prayer at dawn], which is a text by Natan Tenenbaum, a Jewish poet expelled in 1968 as part of the anti-Semitic purges – poses the same question of the moral responsibility of a community for its destiny. Kaczmarski sees this text as a kind of credo for the period of struggle led by Solidarity:

Whatever you decide, let it happen  
May your will be accomplished  
But deliver me from hate  
Protect me from contempt

As a general rule, Kaczmarski sees his compatriots as more realistic in their literary expression than in their political choices. This is why he calls upon great authors to interpret certain constants of the construction of a Polish national character,<sup>14</sup> such as the tendency to never raise the white flag, to fight to the end, even in a desperate situation. The poem “Barykada” [“Barricade – Baczynski's death”] provides a pathetic illustration of this. The disappearance of the young resistance fighter-poet during the Warsaw Uprising, a national drama whose wisdom is still debated today, returns in another poem that illustrates a long-taboo theme of this episode

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14 <<https://www.piosenkaztekstem.pl/opracowanie/przemyslaw-gintrowski-modlitwa-o-wschodzie-slonca/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

in the history of the Second World War in Poland. It is about what is considered an unforgivable betrayal by the Soviets on the grounds that, despite being on the spot, they did not help the insurgents on Stalin's orders, so as to enable him to better take power after the "liberation" by the Red Army. "Czolg" [The tank], a poem by the Russian poet Vysotsky echoes an essay by Milosz, published first in French under the title "La prise de pouvoir" [The seizure of power] and then in Polish "Zdobycie władzy," which shows the ambiguity of the Soviet "liberator-invaders" in Eastern Europe, which was not immediately clear to everybody in reality. Milosz will say about this essay in the Polish introduction to it years later:

In fact, the most interesting thing in this book is everything that goes on beneath the surface of the calm, pared-down sentences. These are small observations of the details of the chaotic reality of the time, scenes mentioned in passing, encounters without further sequels. I am inclined to consider this second layer as one of the advantages of my novel, almost forced by fate.<sup>15</sup>

The theme of a battle lost in advance, of lost insurrections, of battles for symbols, is the background of another poem, "The scattered battalions" [Rozbite oddziały], which presents the veterans of all these battles, "at the table around compassions, indulging in guilt and singing to the glory of the one who will not perish: 'Poland is not dead . . .'"<sup>16</sup> Noting that the coming generation, their sons' generation, does not understand them: "they write untranslatable memories in foreign languages."

If their own sons don't understand their history, what indeed can be said of the foreigners, in this case those living in *Europa felix*, the Westerners, who are lucky enough to live on the other side of the Berlin Wall? There is indeed a kind of incommunicability of experiences of this period of European history in East and West: the representations and perceptions of certain events are often very different on both sides due to ignorance of the particular contexts in which they occurred, or sometimes to prejudice, to the *new speech*, or to bad faith (Nowicki 2017).

Yet Kaczmarek never blames fate, others, or geopolitics. He is more demanding with his compatriots in pointing to tradition, that often-painful collective experience which, transmitted from generation to generation, can explain the

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<sup>15</sup> "Właściwie najciekawsze w tej książce jest wszystko, co dzieje się pod powierzchnią spokojnych, ułożonych zdań. Są to drobne obserwacje szczegółów ówczesnej chaotycznej rzeczywistości, sceny napomknięte mimochodem, spotkania bez dalszych ciągów. Tę drugą warstwę skłonny jestem uznać za jedną z zalet mojej powieści, niemal wymuszonej przez los." (Milosz n.d.).

<sup>16</sup> <<https://www.piosenkaztekstem.pl/opracowanie/jacek-kaczmarek-rozbite-oddzialy/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

mentality he describes. An example is the pride in the failures suffered, instilled by the ancestors, so well illustrated in the text “Rejtan or the ambassador’s report” – the elected representative to the sejm who blocks the way with his body so that the partitions of Poland cannot be signed (see the painting of Rejtan by Matejko).

Kaczmarski, who has been said to have delivered a real history lesson in his poems, does indeed draw the attention of his compatriots, for example, in the text “Kassandra,” to a triumph that is not a triumph because it hides a real failure: “think of your own weakness, instead of thinking of how to triumph over other people; there are people who are ready for death given by other people who are immature to live.”

It is the tragedy that he scrutinizes – that of destroyed communities – the solitude, the discord, the absence of links, as, for example, in the text “The Return” [Powrot], featuring a fighter who returns from the carnage of a war and finds that everything he knew has gone. “Where am I going to go when there are no more nations?”

The tragedy that his generation is experiencing is oppression by the Communist system. His moral and artistic opposition to Communism was close to that of another poet – Zbigniew Herbert, to whom Kaczmarski dedicated some of his anti-Communist revolt songs. In a now classic text, Zbigniew Herbert was to say, concerning poetry as a refusal, that it was mainly about the defense of the beautiful, it was a question of taste:

It didn’t require much character  
We just had the courage to do it.  
But in the end, it was a question of taste  
Yes, of taste  
That makes us come out with a grimace, a whisper of sarcasm  
Even if the priceless capital of the body would collapse as a result,  
The head.

(Herbert 2012: 437)

The motives he chose to express his revolt against the Soviet system and of course false friendship (“Przyjaciele” [Friends]), propaganda (“Ballad on a waiting room”: “this is not a train for you, shouted the megaphones, and we believed what they said . . .”). The “Ballad about September” is a ballad about the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, which sealed the fate of Poland, which was invaded from both sides by Hitler in the west and by Stalin in the east. “The Flood” is reminiscent of Stempowski’s essay in Maisons-Laffitte’s *Kultura* magazine entitled “After the Flood,” where it is a question of inventing words to account for the disastrous reality that words used

before are powerless to describe now. For Kaczmarek it is necessary to save that which is most precious.

And in order to do so, the people must act. It is for this attitude that Kaczmarek is most admired in Poland. He has become the voice of a generation. At his funeral in the ceremonial area of the Powazki Cemetery in Warsaw, the Polish Père Lachaise, the crowds sang “Mury” – which has become synonymous with his fight for freedom through sung poetry.

These poetic commentaries on this pivotal period in the history of Central Europe constitute a particularly interesting cycle called “Five Sonnets on the Agony of Communism” by the editor of the volume devoted to Kaczmarek:

Then, when he dies, with impunity, they will resurrect him.  
 Unconscious – they will consider it inexhaustible.  
 And they will blow with tenderness in the palm of their hands  
 While hoping that he will come back, for them, and not against them.  
 And they will proclaim it, no doubt, sacred again!

(Kaczmarek 2017: 388)

Then there are the historical lies, the famous blank pages of history that some texts wanted to fill in. “Swiadkowie” [The Witnesses] is inspired by a TV program from the seventies where witnesses told about the war. But those testimonies were not impartial and did not show the whole truth, especially about the role of the Red Army in Eastern Europe, which was not just an anti-Nazi liberation army. The story takes place in 1945 in a camp where Polish resistance fighters, considered “bandits” by the Soviets, were imprisoned. Kaczmarek put into poetry the story of his uncle Ignatius, who scrupulously avoided revealing the truth on TV. People of his generation chose the truth sung by Kaczmarek.

The Western reader might be surprised by this interest of this anti-regime poet in the collective imagination of his compatriots and his willingness to offer them a “history lesson” through his poetry. The Western part of Europe, and especially those countries where it was necessary to conduct a complex debate on the excesses of national feeling that had led to nationalism, avoided speaking of “national character” in this period and questioned its existence. In the occupied part of Europe, subject to Sovietization, where internationalism was imposed and the attachment to the national tradition discredited, speaking of national identity was an act of political opposition. Culture had become a weapon (the poet says it well: when words are a weapon, one must fight with words).

These warlike notes may also be surprising because in the West the poets became pacifists at this time. But the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the division of Europe was the fruit of all these Cold War fights led by figures who did

not accept the status quo. These differences of tone and of style are part of “European incommunication” – to quote the title of an edition of *Hermès*.<sup>17</sup>

### 3 European future

There are a number of poems that Kaczmarski composed especially for his shows on RFE that he did not sing elsewhere. They can be found together in an album entitled “Supplement” (Kaczmarski, Radio Free Europe),<sup>18</sup> which is invaluable in interpreting his poetic activity; some have called them “works of intervention.” Their titles are revealing regarding the poet’s reflections on the fall of Communism, on post-Communism, on memory, on the responsibility of those who collaborated with the regime. But Jacek Kaczmarski does not stop there. He is not afraid of tackling current events after 1989 and addresses all the complexity of this passage from a totalitarian system to freedom, the imperfections of democracy that sometimes became “democratorship,” the lies, the cynicism, the ambivalence of the transformation during which, he says, “we exchange honor and penance for currency” (Lepeuple 1995).

Among the major title in this series is the poem “The Autumn of the Peoples” (more literally translated as “The Spring of the People in Autumn” – “Jesienna wiosna ludow”), sung in 1989,<sup>19</sup> which shows this historical event in its collective and individual dimension:

Everyone wants to witness a miracle  
There is no way back from this path.  
They look to the West  
Hungry Slavs and Asians  
Waiting for a reward for their suffering  
That the god of liberty has reserved for them  
They are going west, the settlers  
In the carts of their dead ancestors  
They are heading towards Europe, in a vineyard  
Where God of Opulence awaits them

[ . . . ] as this tornado has risen, it will calm down . . .  
It will destroy, it will create, it will bury . . .

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17 Joanna Nowicki, “L’Europe : une incommunicabilité d’expériences,” *Hermès* nr 77 *Les incommunications européennes*, 29–39.

18 Jacek Kaczmarski, “Supplement,” Vol. 1, 2 3 – Radio Wolna Europa.

19 <<https://www.kaczmarski.art.pl/tworczosc/wiersze/jesienna-wiosna-ludow-1989/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

Someone is happy, someone else is afraid  
 Every beginning has its end.

The poet anticipates the settling of scores, the language of hatred due to an acquired habit of always looking for an enemy. The text “Maneuvers II” [Military Exercises II] testifies to this: “how to get out of your hole . . ., nourished by lies and fear, give us an enemy, to hate means to live.”

Kaczmarek's work was treated as a history lesson. Indeed, he often questions in his texts the lessons learned from the past, notably in “Mengele's Skeleton,” where it is a matter of “indispensable remorse,” but since “it is just a trace of the body” it is not certain that it will become “the backbone of History.” Indeed, it is not certain that the Bard of Solidarity believes in “never again,” perhaps because the notion of good and evil is blurred, as shown in his song “Brat dobry, brat zły,” the story of two brothers – one just and the other despicable: the village confused them, no longer knowing in the end which was the good one and which the bad one.

The poet talks a lot about this return to normal and warns against forgetting the universal rules for relating to the Other, which will no longer be political but will have to be based on ethics, as in the text “When” [Kiedy]:

When we go to church to pray  
 Not for a Free Fatherland but for free will  
 When the unworthy are treated as unworthy, the unworthy  
 The virtuous – the virtuous in whatever role they play

When the Middle Ages will become a Renaissance,  
 The Romantics will become positivists  
 When dreams come true  
 In shock with other dreams  
 [ . . . ]

The bracelets will become handcuffs again  
 But in the opulent and more clement times  
 And the old ideals will arise before the Romantics.  
 To be on the side of the weak, who will always be there.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, his “Ballada zebzacza” [Ballad of a Beggar] rebels against the brutalization of human relationships:

Give me something for pity's sake  
 A beggar is a man too

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20 <<https://www.kaczmarek.art.pl/tworczosc/wiersze/kiedy/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

I no longer have the strength to sing  
 No more jokes  
 [. . .]  
 I am told – get up early and work!  
 Or – get out of the way because you make Warsaw look ugly.  
 [. . .]  
 Don't say I'm ruining something  
 I want to stay here with my body and soul  
 In this city I have rebuilt  
 to have for my old age, somewhere to beg.<sup>21</sup>

Kaczmarski's sung poetry broadcast on Radio Free Europe, the national substitute radio station, was impossible to jam with what was dubbed the “KGB jazz” (Lepeuple 1995) and stopped under Gorbachev in November 1988. His was a voice that could not be silenced because its lyrics were taken up by others, shared in parallel circuits.

Radio Free Europe led what has gone down in history as the “crusade for freedom” by also choosing to make use of forbidden music. The program “Fifteen minutes with Jacek Kaczmarski” was part of this. It certainly played its role as a forbidden history lesson: it helped a whole generation of Poles to forge a certain vision of the national character and to imagine a common future after the fall of Communism, without naivety or pathos, without a spirit of revenge and without triumphalism on the part of the victors. This is why it deserves a place in this volume on the circulation of ideas in Europe during the Cold War era.

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Joanna Szylo-Kwas

## “A Window onto the World”?

On European Themes Presented in the Polish *Przekrój* Weekly Magazine

Poland was separated from Western Europe already in Yalta. Yet, despite this obvious fact, however, since the beginning of post-war order development, Poland observed the West with curiosity, fascination, reluctance, pride, or even ideological superiority. The fascination for Western politics was very difficult to exercise; however, at the same time, Western Europe's culture offered some respite, hope and a sense of community. The *Przekrój* [Review] weekly was considered to be such a window onto Western Europe thus it was referred to as “the only such magazine for eight hundred million of Slavs.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Cultural policy in Poland's post-war renaissance

The time of Poland's rebirth after World War II was marked with the cultural revolution idea, the political revolution component. This had an impact on Poland's press-market shape. As a result of the war, Polish intelligentsia was decimated; thus, the debilitated cadres were prone to accept the planned changes resulting from the socio-political situation, i.e. dissemination of culture in the socialist sense. One thing, however, had been evident from the very beginning: the state – in fact, the party as it turned out in later years, that defined the guidelines and managed so-called post-war Poland's cultural policy.

The Ministry of Culture and Art, established by the decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation in September 1944, was the first institution whose prerogative was to indicate the cultural policy directions. However, as early as 1943, the PPR declaration outlined the first objectives the culture was supposed to deliver in the emerging Polish society. Comprehensive support for science, literature and art development, schools and cultural institutions expansion and, above all, “making all cultural achievements available to the masses of the people” (Fi-jałkowska 1985: 11) were the main principles for creating a new social reality. Pol-

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<sup>1</sup> This is how *Przekrój* weekly's founder and first editor-in-chief Marian Eile described the magazine after the People's Republic of China's proclamation and its accession to the Slavic states alliance (Matras-Mastalerz 2020: 93).

ish culture, in its revival period, supposed to detach from the pre-war traditions. Jakub Berman, in his interview with Teresa Torańska, described it as the onset of the struggle for “a revolutionary trend that, as a rule, breaks old habits, old reasons, shapes, structures and myths, sometimes very deeply embedded in mentality. The trend build everything anew” (Torańska 1985: 86). This clash intensified in 1949, with Bolesław Bierut’s cultural offensive proclamation, which demanded to go beyond solely preventive actions. The proclamation urged to discontinue precautions to guide the creators on the right paths of thinking and creating. With time, the implementation of Soviet cultural models was openly referred to.

The Polish intelligentsia, thus the culture creators, were targeted by the party’s activity in two ways. Firstly, acceptance, support and cooperation of a pre-war group of cultural milieus were necessary to obtain. Secondly, a new intelligentsia implementing the party’s ideology was to be raised and educated. Barbara Fijałkowska writes that Bolesław Bierut was aware that art and its products could deeply move the mind, feelings and imagination, and thus stimulate the recipient to engage specific actions (Fijałkowska 1985: 53), hence the need to supervise artists and direct them towards “responsible” influence over society.

Initially, there were no heralds of radical actions included in the cultural policy. The idea of socialist realism seemed a harmless concept that could coexist with others. However, the first symptoms of culture single-track development, in line with the party’s ideology, can already be seen in *PKWN Manifesto*, which made a caveat; civil liberties restoration was restricted in the sense that the freedoms could not serve the enemies of democracy. Jakub Berman mentioned above emphasized that there can be no “abstract freedom” of both speech and press for those who represent an inappropriate attitude towards Poland and towards work (*Historia PRL* 2009: I, 37). The “inappropriate” term was not difficult to specify; it simply meant not in line with the sole, appropriate ideological doctrine of the party. The beginning of 1949 marked the onset of the political activities’ focus on making culture a tool for shaping top-down social attitudes. There was no place for those culture creators who refused to engage in shaping socialist awareness among the mass audience. Even greater emphasis was placed upon educating new, young creative cadres who would implement the concept of socialist realism without compromise and unnecessary pre-war political experiences ballast.

The “old” Polish intelligentsia still existed. Well-designed actions were necessary to win over this group of people and make them support the socialist idea or, conversely, to prevent this group from promoting its own independent and subversive concepts. The press was one of the tools used by the authorities in various forms. Press, both official party and seemingly independent publications, influenced the intelligentsia’s attitudes. Press was supposed to constitute “a transmission belt between the party and society” (Fijałkowska 1995: 124), aimed at

transmitting the new way of thinking in the sense of socialist ideology. The emerging press system had the following features: de facto state ownership, central supervision of the ruling party, dissemination of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and apparent world-view pluralism exercised mainly by allowing the Catholic press to be published (Dziki 2000: 49). Weeklies appeared to be an appropriate tool to deliver the aforementioned cultural policy goals; they conveyed opinions enhancing the intelligentsia integration with the party's agenda.

## 2 The most essential socio-cultural weeklies

A description of the post-war Polish press cannot ignore the name of Jerzy Borejsza and the “Czytelnik” Publishing Cooperative he founded. The *Czytelnik* was a very important institution for people returning from emigration and for the emerging intelligentsia. Borejsza acted for the benefit of the publishing house and used it as an incentive for writers and journalists to return to Poland, offered jobs, housing and professional development opportunities. The party authorities saw Borejsza's activity as the possibility of pursuing their goals, disguised in the independence offered to “Czytelnik” (until 1948) (Fijałkowska 1995: 124–125). This publishing cooperative created the first socio-cultural weekly *Odrodzenie* [Revival] and monthly *Kuźnica* [Ironworks]. Despite different editorial teams and initially different goals and activities, *Odrodzenie* and *Kuźnica* were combined into one new magazine; both brands quickly became inconvenient for the authorities and had to be neutralized. They were too independent and might have become a platform to disseminate for ideas which were not in line with the People's Republic of Poland's ideology. Making the *Odrodzenie* columns available for the rebellious youth was the confirmation of such a threat; this posed a threat to the party. Therefore, both periodicals were transformed into one new title – the *Nowa Kultura* [New Culture] whose first issue was published on April 2, 1950.

The *Przekrój* [Review] issued in Krakow from April 15, 1945 was an interesting journal; its editor-in-chief Marian Eile tried to maintain a non-communist and intellectual style of the magazine, which was relatively easy until 1948. A light and humorous style, clearly in contrast, when juxtaposed with socialist realism's pompous and schematic literature, was the *Przekrój*'s distinctive feature. Outstanding writers associated with the magazine (including Czesław Miłosz, Zofia Nałkowska, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Sławomir Mrożek) and innovative editorial ideas, such as the “Thoughts of great and average people and Fafik the dog” section resulted in the fact that the magazine enjoyed probably the largest circulation among the weeklies of that period.

### 3 The *Przekrój* Weekly

Marian Eile, somewhat by accident, became the *Przekrój* founder and editor-in-chief. Eile shaped the magazine's content and visual character. In the interwar period, Eile was the editorial secretary at one of the most essential socio-cultural weeklies in Poland – *Wiadomości Literackie* [Literary News]. He also worked as a journalist and graphic designer. After the war, he was supposed to work at the Teatr Nowy in Łódź as a stage designer. However, an incidental street-encounter with his pre-war acquaintance Jerzy Borejsza resulted in a job-offer from the *Przekrój*. Initially, Eile was supposed to edit the weekly illustrated insert. However, after Jerzy Putrament, who was supposed to create the weekly, was injured in an accidental shooting, Eile was indicated as the replacement. The initial substitution eventually continued until 1968.

Witty, a mine of ideas, a demanding editor, was able to gather the most eminent writers, columnists and artists to work for his journal. Frequently he used his artistic and literary contacts of the pre-war and occupation times. He created a new type of Polish weekly magazine. (Matras 2005: 161)

From the very beginning, the *Przekrój* was a colorful magazine; although it supported the authorities, it did not deal with politics. This allowed the magazine to develop freely at that time (Potkaj 2019). The weekly was generally believed not to deal with politics at all, which was not necessarily true. Indeed Marian Eile was not involved with party liaisons, but in the *Przekrój*, he also included political topics. The weekly's first pages were reserved for obligatory topics, most often related to politics. This was called a "tribute" to the authorities and the press control office and was supposed to divert attention from the topics discussed on the following magazine pages, i.e. non-political statements looking onto the West, mainly describing European culture and art (Wilk 2020).

The *Przekrój* was the arena for Poland's most important artists of that period who published their articles in the magazine like Gałczyński, Iwaszkiewicz, Broniewski, Nałkowska, Tyrmand, Tuwim, Wiech, Lem, Miłosz. Sławomir Mrożek also made his debut in the *Przekrój*. The weekly also published the works of world masters; in the *Przekrój* one could find Kafka, Borges, Nabokov, Dickens and Hugo's works. "A window onto the world opened every week for Poles living behind the iron curtain." (Wilk 2020)

## 4 The *Przekrój* and European affairs

The *Przekrój*'s fascinations for Europe are usually located in the fields of literature, music, art and fashion. Various sources often indicate that

in the post-war times, the weekly “created” culture other than that formally imposed by the People's Republic of Poland's realities, and it was a link with the West's culture through foreign travels reports, teaching manners, discussing jazz and rock'n'roll, showing famous artists' pictures, recommending to read books popular in the West. (Wrona 2015: 222)

“In his magazine, Eile tried to inform about everything that deserved attention. Even in the most challenging times, he made sure that the bond with European and global culture was not completely severed” (Matras-Mastalerz 2020: 95). Selected quotations indicate that the weekly was closely related to the idea of Europe. However, the then politically difficult times in Poland and Eastern Europe pushed this idea more through cultural themes than how we would see it today – writing about politics. How was what was broadly defined as Europe described in the *Przekrój*?

The *Przekrój* archives include 39 articles published until June 4, 1989; despite various journalistic genres, they are categorized under the “Europe” tag; all are devoted to the same theme. Six of them are satirical drawings, and one is a kind of a photo-reportage. The above collection should also include 13 other articles which correspond to the “European” tag, including three satirical drawings – a very critical commentary on the “European army.” The date of June 4, 1989 is the analysis cut-off date, which seems obvious; the date marks the first round of contractual parliamentary elections, the result of the agreement concluded at the Round Table and the onset of political and social transformation in Poland. In total, forty-six issues of the weekly published in the 1945–1989 period were subjected to content analysis. Each article has been categorized by its subject area (categories: history, politics, economy, society, culture) and the tone (categories: positive, negative, neutral, ambivalent). Then, the content was analyzed regarding references to European issues and the manner of presentation, the metaphors used, and the content they are characterized by.

Marian Eile believed that a journal should be a combination of lightness and perfection. The specific political situation required a specific journal structure so that it

effectively convinces the officials it is all about are fooling around by making a magazine that resembles a child's play. The *Przekrój* was a brilliant trick, thumb your nose at the difficult reality, yet at the same time, it was the greatest form of art: an innovative, daring artistic and literary creation, a manifesto of wit and imagination (Wilk 2020)

This does not mean that the weekly avoided a serious tone. The articles collection, which is the subject of analysis, begins with a journalistic article – *The decisive year 1947* by Edmund Osmańczyk (No. 91, 01/1947). The author puts forward the thesis that “at present, Europe as a concept of a certain political, economic and cultural unity does not exist. Europe is in rubble, really divided into two superpowers’ spheres of influence whose power is derived from other continents.” However, as emphasized by the author, the division is “a necessary evil in the face of the political chaos of post-war Europe.” A vision of Europe’s future is outlined therein; it should be reconstructed in parallel to Germany’s reconstruction, diligently controlled. Europe should again become a potent political entity. According to Osmańczyk, Poland’s participation in these activities is natural. The tone becomes quickly more and more negative in the following issues of the magazine. A dozen or so issues later, the article *The thing with rot* (106, 16/1947) authored by Jerzy Zagórski expresses the delight with Europe’s cultural heritage on the one hand while emphasizing the Western civilization’s decadence on the other hand. The author calls upon the example of France and emphasizes that the so-called old masters’ works are the true beauty of European societies’ achievements. The new developments should be neglected to rebuild the more valuable spirit of old Europe. Also, subsequent articles published in the late 1940s and early 1950s show that Europe, as the reviving idea in the West, is spoiled by the influence of American politics and the unresolved German case. In a political context the *Przekrój* presents the West in a rather negative way, pointing out Western countries’ exclusive attention to their interests (*Flowers* – special No. 52/1951), maintaining authority over their colonies (*We’re fed up with savages* – No.136 46/1947), or the disregard of Germany’s fascist traditions (*Europe is us!* – No. 192 50/1948).

Up to the mid-1970s, political topics are handled in a negative tone. Radio Free Europe or NATO are discussed. These institutions are regarded by the propaganda as acts to the detriment of Poland and aimed at dividing Europe. Subsequent articles discuss political issues and there is a tone transition towards more ambivalent, neutral and even positive. The tone change is related to the coverage of meetings held within the scope of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This transition starts with the preparatory meetings in Helsinki, continues through working meetings in Geneva, the Helsinki meeting when the Final Act was signed, and the subsequent conference meetings, including the one in Madrid (e.g. *Poland’s place in Europe and the world*, No. 1474,27/1973; *The third birth of Europe*, No. 1659, 04/1977; *There is no other way*, No. 1884, 20/1981). The conference objective was to develop Europe’s security and cooperation rules and standards observed by European states. The articles’ authors offered a positive description of the idea of a common, secure Europe. The postulates the signatories subscribe for, including equality and respect for the rights arising from it, refraining from threats or use of

force, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-interference in the states' internal affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and equality were not comprehensively discussed in the articles. Because these were mainly interviews with Polish politicians, the interlocutors primarily focused on security and territorial integrity of Poland. They also confirmed the integrity of Europe. They reverberated the propaganda-driven importance of Eastern Europe in the whole process. The strong position of Poland and the Poles in Europe was also reflected in the article *The Palace of 132 nations* (No. 1470, 23/1973), whose author emphasizes the importance of Polish specialists working at the European Centre, the home of International Organizations in Geneva.

The subject-matter change also means an evolution of the tone; i.e. social and cultural matters are discussed in a more neutral or even positive tone. The *Przekrój* repeatedly published travel reports which showed Europe as a continent which abounds in beautiful places and, first and foremost interesting, open-minded people who enjoy life (e.g. *An Old Man, Miss Europe and Fatty's guests*, No. 751, 35/1959). The weekly published features of the European Cultural Forum, the European Music Festival and other events complemented with photo reportages and graphics showing exciting places in Europe.

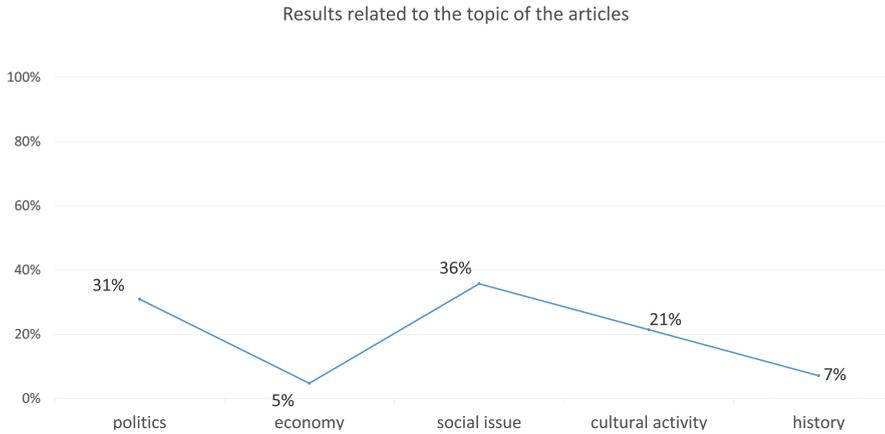
A significant share of the articles was of neutral nature. The reflections offered an attempt to look at Europe in the context of specific requirements of censorship which might have banned an overly positive text and prevent it from print. At the same time, they had a critical look at the exacerbated divisions. The *What Others Write* regular column material may serve as an example (2070, 06/1985); these reflections are genuinely apparent. The author writes,

Europe – what it is, what it can be? For many centuries it was the centre of the world, enjoying the primacy in politics, culture and art; today, it seems that Europe has hardly anything to say. Does Europe, as we see it in our imaginations, really exist? Today, in the face of the old continent being so divided, may the Europeanness criteria be defended?

This text encourages to read another magazine's extensive issue, but it also shows that the *Przekrój* editorial office found the themes vital.

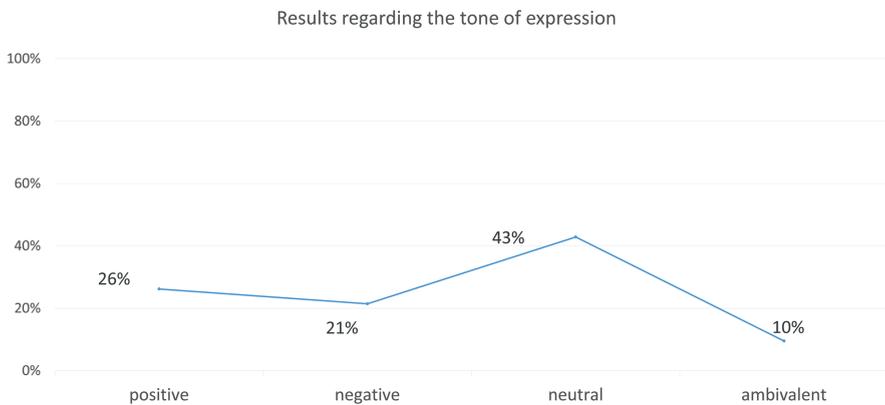
Taking into account all articles on European issues, the most significant number (36%) concerned social problems. Political issues come second (31%), and then broadly understood culture (21%) third (Fig. 1). There is one more aspect which should be emphasized. The scope of this analysis did not include articles on literature, art, film, music or fashion, which promoted European works. The scope was narrowed to the articles on cultural events in the context of a general description of European culture.

The dominant tone – neutral; the number of texts accounted for almost half of all analyzed journalistic materials (43%). Positive texts (26%) come next in the



**Fig. 1:** The articles' topics.

Source: own research



**Fig. 2:** The tone.

Source: own research

tabulation. What comes as a surprise, considering the historical period in Poland, the overly negative texts came in third place. What should be noted, however, is the fact that the third-place's result is similar to that of the runner-up (21%) (Fig. 2).

## 5 Summary

The *Przekrój* was a unique magazine. With varying degrees of success, attempts were made to combine certain political neutrality with the obligations all media had towards the socialist authorities and political institutions supervising media in Poland. Since the very start, the weekly was designed as an illustrated magazine, which “creates” culture rather than deals with politics. Eile, the *Przekrój* creator and first editor-in-chief, had a clear vision. The magazine was supposed to familiarize its readers with European culture, to show the West as a modern, inspiring, open and interesting place; it took proper care to sustain bonds with European culture and to make Poles know and understand up-to-date currents other Europeans were familiar with.

Besides cultural and artistic context, European topics were also discussed in the *Przekrój*'s pages. Importantly, articles were published on the first pages, which were restricted for the so-called tribute to the authorities, i.e. topics which were supposed to be covered by default. As a result, some articles had a negative tone; however, importantly, the negative tone frequency comes third in the ranking, after neutral and positive ones. This comes as a surprise which testifies to the fact that the weekly's editorial team tried to acquire certain political neutrality and to promote European topics shown in the best possible light. What needs emphasis is the fact that political narration was negative most frequently. Other issues, e.g. social or cultural, were neutral or positive.

The *Przekrój* was a real window onto the world of the time, when more topics were forbidden than allowed to discuss; it made it possible for Poles to have a perspective on Europe, which in itself was illegal and systemically controlled. European topics, apart from literature and art, may not have been regularly featured in the magazine. However, the editorial team made sure to keep it as positive as possible, avoiding the situation where the censorship might have banned the print at all.

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## Table of figures

**Fig. 1** The articles’ topics. Research of the author.

**Fig. 2** The tone. Research of the author.

Camelia Beciu and Dana Popescu-Jourdy

# Media and Catastrophic Events during the Cold War: Between Ideological Borders and Solidarity

## 1 Introduction

A less-studied aspect regarding the role of the mass media during the Cold War involves the practices of media coverage of disasters events that happened in Communist countries or in other geopolitical areas. This type of event deserves to be analyzed from the perspective of communication, given the intertwining of various practices of information diffusion, including those transgressing the dominant logic of communication, in the context of the ideological boundaries existing between Eastern and Western Europe. Such events, through their unpredictability and their profoundly disruptive consequences, led in the Communist countries to a certain reconfiguration – a temporary one – of the established communication practices, as well as to a specific symbolic construction of the “Other,” namely, the “West” and the liberal democracies, as an ideological alterity (Jarausch, Ostermann and Etges 2020; Wuillème 2007). Thus, one of the peculiarities of this symbolic construction of the Other relies on the coexistence of the ideological register, based on a communication contract shaped by the geopolitical context, and the humanitarian and the civic ones. In this respect, the devastating earthquake of March 1977 in Romania is a relevant event for the rearticulation of a field of symbolic borders in times of crisis through the emergent practices of information and circulation of ideas and meanings, both for Communist media and for Western media broadcasting for audiences in Communist countries – e.g., Radio Free Europe, the BBC, Radio France Internationale, Deutsche Welle. Similarly, the media coverage of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986, in accordance with the geopolitical logic of the last decade of the Cold War, highlights the existence of a European circulation of information despite the political division.

We start from the hypothesis that these event-generated crises reveal certain reconfigurations of the ways in which the printed media and radio in the Communist regime (in our case, in Romania) positioned themselves towards their sources, (re)producing but also dislocating the ideological filter of public communication. It also became relevant how, in these circumstances, certain logics of solidarity were rearticulated through the media discourse produced at the time – the relationship with international audiences from the Communist and the Western blocs on the one hand, and with Romanian audiences on the other. At the same time, these cri-

ses cannot be dissociated from the positioning of the Communist regime towards the Soviet Union and towards Western countries. The 1977 earthquake happened during a particular set of circumstances in the Romanian Communist regime. Ceaușescu took leadership of the Romanian Workers' Party in 1965, presenting himself as a Communist leader who would continue the process of de-Sovietization of the country that had already been started by his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej (Romania was at that time the only country in the bloc of Communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe that no longer had Soviet troops on its territory, starting in 1958). For more than a decade, Ceaușescu carefully built an image as a leader independent of the Soviet Union, at the same time cultivating dynamic diplomatic relations with some Western leaders. The year that established Ceaușescu as a Communist leader oriented to a certain liberalization and openness towards the West was 1968, when Soviet troops occupied Czechoslovakia. In his speech, Ceaușescu condemned the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops, which gave him a huge political capital that was to last him for a long time, especially among Western leaders. Historians explain the fact that Western leaders constantly cultivated relations with Ceaușescu, including in the years when the violation of human rights in Romania became evident, by invoking his so-called policy of independence towards the Soviet Union. In 1977, Ceaușescu's policy of liberalization had already been replaced by an increasingly intense control of culture by the Communist Party.<sup>1</sup> In a few years, with the eighties,<sup>2</sup> Ceaușescu was to impose a policy of eco-

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1 On July 6, 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu presented, within the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, a series of "proposals" destined to "improve political-ideological activity," a document that foreshadowed the subordination of culture to the ideological control of the Party. The document, recalled by historiography and collective memory under the name of the "1971 Theses," marked a turning point in the politics that Ceaușescu was pursuing, from a facade of liberalization to the reaffirmation of an authoritarian regime, primarily through ideological control and surveillance of the individual. Historians talk about the "double game" (Preutu 2015: 540) that Ceaușescu resorted to in his foreign policy: exhibiting a sort of independence from the USSR and, at the same time, reassuring the Soviet leaders that the Bucharest regime would not move away from Marxist-Leninist principles.

2 The beginning of the eighties marks a new stage in the politics pursued by Nicolae Ceaușescu. His decision to pay off Romania's external debt was to plunge the population into poverty amid the tightening of the repressive apparatus of the Securitate. The political scholar Stelian Tanase describes the contexts in which this decision was made: "The turning point is marked by Constantin Pârvulescu's contestation of Ceaușescu's reelection as head of the Party at the Twelfth Congress of 1979, by the workers' revolts in Poland, the trade union *Solidarność*, and the introduction of martial law, in December 1981, and also by Leonid Brezhnev's death, in November 1982. Ceaușescu decides, in the face of a changed political-economic environment, to proceed to the repayment of Romania's foreign debt, at that time 13 billion dollars" (*Sfera Politicii/Sphere of Politics, The years of late communism. An attempt at synthesis*, Vol. 22, Iss. 6, (Nov/Dec 2014): 72–88, 142).

conomic austerity, with disastrous consequences for the Romanians' standard of living; the cult of the Ceaușescu family, unique to Eastern Europe, would confirm the extent to which propaganda, censorship, and control exercised by the secret police (Securitate) had spread in the country. The Chernobyl nuclear accident took place in 1986, right at a time when Romanian citizens were already facing acute material shortages (absence of basic foodstuffs, etc.), while the totalitarian regime in Bucharest was showing its opposition to the reform policy of Gorbachev, who had recently been elected general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Under these circumstances, the main questions we intend to pursue in our research are the following: what were the information and communication practices, grounded in ideological borders and humanitarian action, that were mobilized by the Romanian public radio station and by Radio Free Europe in the first hours after these two catastrophic events happened? What emergent practices of language and representations of “we/them” across East–West borders can be identified?

The March 1977 earthquake, considered the most devastating earthquake in Romania in the twentieth century, gained a global audience, being heavily covered by the international media.<sup>3</sup> Numerous humanitarian and logistical operations were initiated by other states (regarding some of these, the propaganda apparatus had to take contradictory positions, for example, by denying that humanitarian aid from the United States had been accepted at the beginning of the crisis, but at the same time authorizing the landing of aid aircraft).<sup>4</sup> In the Romanian public space, the tragedy was to be instrumentalized by the PCR's (Romanian Communist Party) propaganda apparatus, but it should be noted that there were several stages when it came to controlling crisis communication in that case. In a communication context fueled by propaganda and rumors, historians record a series of “urban legends”<sup>5</sup> – most of them are actions and decisions attributed to Ceaușescu or interpretations of events that contradicted the official version. Unlike other events, the 1977 catastrophe placed decision-makers, media actors, and Romanians in a real-time communication regime, which in the socio-technological context meant more on-site, witness-based information (the evolution of rescue operations, the situation

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3 The earthquake of March 4, 1977, had a magnitude of 7.4 on the Richter scale, lasted 56 seconds, and damaged 35.000 homes, leaving 1.570 dead and more than 11.000 injured. Bucharest, the country's capital, was the hardest-hit city <[http://stiri.tvr.ro/45-de-ani-de-la-cutremurul-din-1977-soldat-cu-aproape-1600-de-mor-i-i-pestea-11-mii-de-rani-i-imaginidin-arhiva-tvr\\_901073.html#view](http://stiri.tvr.ro/45-de-ani-de-la-cutremurul-din-1977-soldat-cu-aproape-1600-de-mor-i-i-pestea-11-mii-de-rani-i-imaginidin-arhiva-tvr_901073.html#view)>.

4 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/mircea-carp-despre-urm%C4%83rile-cutremurului-din-4-martie-1977/31118095.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

5 <<https://www.mediafax.ro/editorialistii/istoria-fara-perdea-marius-oprea-ceausescu-securita-tea-si-cutremurul-din-77-19943146>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

of the victims, forms of solidarity), quantitative updates on the catastrophe (damage, casualties), and information on the measures taken by the authorities. Due to the nature of the event, the need for constantly updated information, which would ultimately serve to normalize the discourse of power, was to generate (especially in the first moments of the crisis) certain synopses or adjustments in the communication routines of the government.

In the case of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster,<sup>6</sup> after a few days of media silence due to Moscow's desire to conceal the extent of the accident and its own responsibility for it, the media covered the event in both Eastern and Western Europe, but with important differences in treatment. Faced with a significant lack of information and the political instrumentalization of information in a system of total censorship, the citizens of Eastern European countries tried to get information from the Western press in order to understand the real risk involved. In a spirit of informational solidarity, the international radio stations broadcast comprehensive and contextualized information for the public in the East, drawing in particular on Western "expert" sources. Western journalists on international radio stations almost automatically asserted that their main "mission" was to inform the public in the East. Our observations show that, as in the case of the earthquake, these practices went beyond the dissemination of information to Eastern audiences or even beyond respect for journalistic ethics. The specific Cold War communication mechanism was replaced by a specific form of informational solidarity from West to East that did not take the dividing line between the two blocs into account anymore. At least for a few days, the geopolitical dimension was displaced by a humanitarian perspective.

## 2 Theoretical and methodological aspects

We place this research in a framework that is interested in a) the media practices of (dis)locating and linking borders through symbolic operations of information and framing during the Cold War (Mikkonen 2010) and b) media discourse as a site of performative practices of symbolic power (Thompson 1995, Silverstone 2007), practices that take specific forms in crisis contexts.

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<sup>6</sup> The Chernobyl accident (April 26, 1986) is considered the largest nuclear disaster in history. Equivalent to five hundred Hiroshima bombs, it affected more than 2.500 km<sup>2</sup>, injured more than 250.000 people (including 25.000 dead), and displaced 350.000. The nuclear cloud spread to the vast majority of European countries.

An extensive research literature addresses the role of the media as a tool in the geopolitical conflicts of the Cold War. There is a consensus regarding the essential role of radio “in the ideological confrontation between East and West, as well as within each bloc and, as archival documents gathered here reveal, it was among the most pressing concerns of contemporary information agencies” (Risso 2013: 145). Usually, in the current literature, top-down approaches predominate, and they investigate media discourses (such as radio discourse) and how the Cold War as a broad media frame influenced the particular frames mobilized by journalists in depicting events, actors, and social life (Somerville 2017).

One of the peculiarities of media coverage during the Cold War frequently mentioned in the literature refers to the politicization of events (including non-political ones) (Lamizet 2002), which can be explained, among other things, by the dependence of journalists on official sources. Of course, inside the Soviet bloc, politicization and propaganda operated structurally, as a “regulatory framework” (Gumbert 2014: 6), articulating all fields of institutional, professional, and social life. There is also evidence that the Western media (e.g., Radio Free Europe) also covered the reality in the Communist countries depending on the official rhetoric and the specific circumstances of the relations between the countries in question at any given moment (Tofan 2021: 47). At the same time, as Risso (2013: 151) has emphasized, “during the Cold War, radio broadcasting corporations had to learn to be objective while at the same time avoid being neutral on key issues of freedom and democracy”.

Research on the Cold War media takes into account the various types of media (with a special interest in the printed press and radio) in relation to certain contexts and events, ranging from political/historical events happening in one Communist country or another (such as the 1956 Hungarian Revolution or the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops in 1968), to transnational events (such as the Olympics). A significant area of research refers to media discourse and biased, specific reality-building practices, where the bias is the result of systematic censorship (in various forms) operating in the Communist countries. Even so, there is a need to diversify the research area of media discourse as social practice during the Cold War by considering the historically situated interplay between its varied production circumstances (technological, political, and social conditions), including consumption practices, and those atypical or emergent contexts in which media operated on the basis of established practices. Such atypical contexts include the humanitarian situations generated by natural disasters or technological disasters (the Chernobyl case). We argue that some analytical premises of the literature on the media construction of catastrophic events can be used to analyze the contexts of similar events during the Cold War.

We also start from the hypothesis that, in times of crisis, the rationality of solidarity can determine a reparameterization of practices and discourses. Thus, solidarity, which represents a form of action in value rather than in finality (Weber 1922 [2003]), involves the construction and affirmation of a common identity around a specific need. Once the need is identified and the principle of solidarity is collectively recognized, solidarity constitutes the starting point for a series of mediations between actors. In the two moments analyzed here, the principle of solidarity prevailed over the logic of confrontation. At least for a limited time, the journalists acted according to a logic of solidarity, even if within the framework of the Cold War.

Starting with Boltanski's (1993) research on the mediation of distant suffering, an extensive literature addresses the media coverage of catastrophic events from the perspective of mediating "forms of moral political action" (Boltanski 1993: 254) via "moral agency towards vulnerable others" (Chouliaraki 2008: 331). This research questions the media's capacity to empower the public with a moral feeling and an ethics of action towards the situation of the sufferer, one major concern being the tendency of the media and other public actors "to portray the current" theatricality "of humanitarianism," as Wilkinson (2013: 265) puts it, referring to critical reflection on the public representation of people suffering and of humanitarian action. There is a consensus in the current literature that media representations "of distant suffering shape, and are shaped by power relations" (Orgad 2013: 296); what differentiates this type of research is the articulation of this critique through specific analytical tools applied to media, to the humanitarian communication of NGOs and other public/organizational actors. Interest in this topic started developing in the 90s, in the post-Cold War context, focusing on the neoliberal democracies. However, expanding this type of analysis (the media representations of distant suffering) to the Cold War period will bring valuable insights regarding the humanitarian imaginary within the context of geopolitical power relations. How did the radio and the printed media from one side of the Iron Curtain or the other appropriate humanitarian action?

To answer this question, we analyzed two corpora. The first consists of broadcasts from Radio Free Europe (RFE) – we included material on the subject of the earthquake of March 4, 1977, available in the online radio archive at <<https://www.osaarchivum.org/digital-repository/osa:484d852e-1334-4570-a2be-e41230b9e36a>> (accessed 17 March 2024), including programs broadcast in the first days after the earthquake, as well as ten years after the earthquake and after 1990. We also included some articles published in the Romanian postcommunist online media, on commemorative occasions. The analysis focused on the way in which the journalists participating in the RFE communication project at this dramatic time provided their own interpretation of radio as a medium, more

specifically of RFE as a *dispositif* (Charaudeau 2011), and of information and interaction with the audience, in their subsequent interventions. We also considered the interventions of some of the iconic RFE journalists (Ioana Măgură-Bernard, Neculai Constantin Munteanu, Emil Hurezeanu, Sorin Cunea, Liviu Tofan) in the programs that commemorated ten years or more since the 1977 earthquake.

We were interested in highlighting the journalists' self-reflexivity from the perspective of the role they assumed in the context of the event, the relevance of the information *dispositif*, and, last but not least, the practices of mediating an ethical position to the public in Romania and abroad. For this purpose, we applied a research tool relevant to the conditions of production of media discourse, i.e., to the way in which the RFE journalists constructed the representations of actors (primarily, representations regarding their role at that time) and events. Starting from Wodak's typology (2010), we analyzed the media representation of actors and events via nomination (nomination strategies) and evaluation of actors (predicative strategies). We also identified the recurring issues addressed by journalists when they referred – as reflected in their memories of the time – to their work in the first days after the earthquake.

The second corpus comprises documents related to the media coverage of the Chernobyl nuclear accident. We consulted the archives of Radio Romania and RFE, but also the archives of the state institutions of Communist Romania, namely the archives of the Ministry of National Defense and the archives of the Securitate, as well as testimonies from journalists who were active professionals at the time. We also interviewed several Romanian journalists who were working at Bucharest National Radio at the time. We were interested in (1) the informational trajectories in the construction of the event, i.e., the internal circulation of information, in order to understand the censorship mechanisms put in place by the organs of the Romanian Communist Party; (2) the testimonies of Romanian journalists and other citizens concerning the information broadcast in Romanian by international broadcasting services; and (3) the way in which Western journalists analyzed their attitude of solidarity with Romania's population. The method of media analysis proposed by Eliseo Veron (1985) allowed us to highlight (1) informational trajectories and (2) the paths of the sociopolitical construction of information as key elements constructing the meaning of a mediated event.

We present an analysis of two events from the same thematic category (humanitarian catastrophes) that happened in two different geopolitical contexts. As previously mentioned, the 1977 earthquake happened at a time when Romania was about to enter a new stage – ideologically speaking – of enforcing Communist power, from a certain “liberalism” accepted by the Party apparatus (reflected in the standard of living of society) to a totalitarian control exercised at all levels of society and associated with the exacerbation of the cult of personality of Ceau-

șescu (reflected in a dramatic decline in living standards). In this case, we are still in the period when Western leaders supported Ceaușescu, given that he displayed independence from the USSR. The Chernobyl catastrophe, on the other hand, occurred during the final years of the Ceaușescu regime. It was in these years that the regime in Bucharest, increasingly criticized by Western democracies, distanced itself from the policy of glasnost initiated by Gorbachev in the USSR. The reactions of the communist leaders in Bucharest in connection with the two humanitarian catastrophes are also explained by these macrocontexts.

### 3 Findings

#### 3.1 RFE journalists' self-reflexive narratives in the context of a humanitarian crisis: The devastating earthquake of March 4, 1977, in Romania

One aspect which is still vivid in the collective memory is the information void at this time, since the first reactions from the government came only twelve hours after the earthquake.<sup>7</sup> Ceaușescu was engaged in foreign travel, so, according to the account of some journalists, “nobody dared to decide on resuming the [news] broadcasts, as nobody knew what should be said and what was allowed to be said.”<sup>8</sup> It was Radio Free Europe that filled this information gap, broadcasting the first news via the media in Romanian. RFE started broadcasting two hours after the earthquake, Radio Romania not until after midnight, with a transmission which was limited to “summary information.”<sup>9</sup> The news broadcast by Radio Romania only stated that “on the evening of March 4, around 9.30 p.m., there was a strong earthquake that affected a number of areas of the country” (in fact, the earthquake had taken place at 9.22 p.m.).<sup>10</sup> While Radio Free Europe did not broadcast information about the effects of the earthquake (at least not within the first few hours), it pioneered a practice of communication between Romanians

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7 “Actualitatea românească,” Radio Free Europe, March 4, 1987, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/arhiva-podcast-neculai-constantin-munteanu-radio-europa-libera/30790134.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

8 “Actualitatea românească,” Radio Free Europe, March 4, 1987, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu.

9 “Actualitatea românească,” Radio Free Europe, March 4, 1987, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu.

10 “Actualitatea românească,” Radio Free Europe, March 4, 1987, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu.

within the country and those who were living abroad in Western countries, “through a live phone connection between people in Romania and their relatives and acquaintances abroad, in live shows that continued for many days.”<sup>11</sup>

Journalists who were directly involved in the Radio Free Europe broadcasts at the time would later point out that the idea of creating an information connection between Romanians abroad and those in their home country was born in a complicated information context when it came to access to sources, at least in the early days after the catastrophe. The event was announced two hours before Radio Romania; the journalists relied on the still poor information of the international press agencies. One of the main recurring themes in the later discussions by the Radio Free Europe journalists is that the newsroom had to react to the event in real time without being able to resort to the established editorial routine. In other words, RFE set up an emergent *dispositif* for informing the public, one to which the public would also contribute – as the interlocutors of journalists. Basically, the Romanians abroad, but also people in Romania, wanted to find out news about their families; moreover, because the phone lines were malfunctioning, as calls poured in, some callers from Romania even requested information about families that lived in various regions of the country. Therefore, RFE journalists took calls coming from Romania and abroad in the form of short messages for relatives and acquaintances, creating a “loop” of information exchange among Romanians: “there was only one phone number they could call, Ioana [Ioana Măgură-Bernard] made the first contact with the person calling, would then pass the connection to the studio, in the meantime someone else would call . . .”<sup>12</sup> At first, the calls came from Romanians abroad, and then the calls started coming from Romania.<sup>13</sup>

According to Ioana Măgură-Bernard, the idea of creating a “bridge” between the Romanian and the overseas audiences came from Noel Bernard, the director of the Romanian section of RFE, at the end of a show he did with a group of specialists two days after the earthquake, starting from the “indirect suggestion” of one of the interlocutors to continue providing information about the situation in Romania. The way in which this initiative was born, the description of how RFE

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11 The journalists mentioned in their retrospective commentaries that the live phone connection was active in the early days after the earthquake. As the official discourse of the Communist state became “normalized” and the media started to convey information about the earthquake, it became risky for Romanian citizens to contact RFE because of consequences of the regime’s apparatus of control.

12 Liviu Tofan, journalist, “Actualitatea românească,” radio show, Radio Free Europe, March, 4 1987, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

13 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

put it into practice, and, especially, the impact it had on the public are aspects that journalists consider to be part of the collective memory of Romanian society and the diaspora, and also, last but not least, of RFE as an organization that “ran perhaps one of the most amazing and moving humanitarian actions in Romania’s modern history,” as one journalist points out.<sup>14</sup> In fact, in the following years, RFE was to commemorate the tragedy of March 4, 1977, through dedicated shows, bringing to attention the novelty of the information *dispositif* that the radio created at that time. The novelty of it was also highlighted by the journalists through descriptions of the reactions from listeners who, desperate in light of the situation, initially misunderstood what exactly the RFE team could really do as far as information was concerned. According to the accounts of journalists from RFE, at the beginning, people did not even understand the initiative taken by the radio – they thought that the radio had lists with the victims, and so on.<sup>15</sup> In that specific communication regime, journalists were also faced with professional dilemmas, for example, whether to disseminate information that, although based on expert sources, could have caused panic among the population.<sup>16</sup> But the most relevant topic for the identity construction of RFE concerns the way in which journalists established the significance of this information *dispositif* in a crisis situation.

Thus, a constant of the journalists’ words – both in the days following the catastrophe and later, at a distance in time – was references to the solidarity that had been created among Romanians, RFE having contributed to the establishment of a new context: from a permanent division among Romanians, as an ideological outcome of the Communist regime, we moved “for the first time” (as often stressed by journalists) “to communication that transcended ideological barriers.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, for journalists the telephone line provided by the radio team also had, beyond its humanitarian role, the function of (partially) redefining the communication contract (Charaudeau 2011) of RFE and of avoiding ideological discourse:

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14 “Radio Europa Liberă și cutremurul din 1977” <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/30404699.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

15 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

16 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

17 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

“people could talk to each other freely, unhindered by anyone, in a tragic moment, through Free Europe.”<sup>18</sup>

As journalists have pointed out, we can thus talk about a zero moment of communication, during which the ideological dimension had been suspended: “for several days it was as if the Iron Curtain no longer existed,”<sup>19</sup> the RFE transmissions no longer being disrupted by the propaganda apparatus and the RFE journalists at the same time avoiding the use of any political argument. For example, when in the first days after the earthquake, the editorial team received calls containing criticism of the Communist regime, journalists from RFE avoided the politicization of the event.<sup>20</sup> Humanitarian solidarity was, therefore, coarticulated with a strategic “neutrality” towards Party ideology, grounded in the immediate circumstances of the earthquake. These two principles, humanitarian solidarity and nonideological discourse, shaped “the communicative structure of humanitarianism” (Chouliaraki 2016: 362), which was activated by RFE in the first days after the catastrophe struck, under the generic headline of “solidarity live.”<sup>21</sup> At the time, RFE’s communication contract relied on a political solidarity with the Romanian audience that was subject to a totalitarian regime – this type of solidarity structured the communication project of the radio channel during the Cold War.

The way in which RFE journalists internalized the importance of the new way of communicating with Romanians is revealed by some phrases that highlight the cross-border logic of solidarity: “an antenna opened to Romanians around the world,”<sup>22</sup> “direct communication between Free Europe and people hit by misfortune, between the Romanians in the country and the Romanians in the world,”<sup>23</sup> “this unprecedented national dialogue,”<sup>24</sup> “an unprecedented amount of solidarity was fostered,”<sup>25</sup> “live broadcasts, going up to twenty-four hours per day, created an unprecedented communication bridge between those in Romania and their rela-

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18 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

19 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

20 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

21 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

22 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/30404699.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

23 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/30404699.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

24 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/30404699.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

25 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/30404699.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

tives abroad.”<sup>26</sup> The term “bridge” (between Romanians in the country and those abroad) is frequently used by journalists to summarize the specific approach to communication initiated by RFE. On the other hand, for the journalists, the humanitarian solidarity in Romanian society in those dramatic moments also carried a political meaning (“this miracle of Romanian solidarity”), marking, in their opinion, the revival of an authentic civic spirit that the Communist regime had eroded. The journalists interpreted – implicitly – the solidarity among the Romanians in the country as a positive sign with a view to its potential replication in contexts of civic engagement against the totalitarian regime.

The significance of the new communication context is confirmed even in the radio interventions where journalists articulated their uncertainty regarding the period immediately following the catastrophe: “It took an earthquake to create solidarity among Romanians, a visible solidarity both around the ruins of the cities devastated by the earthquake and on the airwaves of our radio station; the question is how long this solidarity can last, will it resist even in the absence of earthquakes and calamities?” (Noel Bernard, March 11, 1977).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, for journalists, the days when they kept the telephone line open to Romanians also meant an emotional experience, associated with the removal of political barriers: “For me it was moving when I heard after so many years of exile a telephone operator from Galați saying, ‘Hello, you have Free Europe on the line.’”<sup>28</sup> Also noteworthy is the emphasis placed in these interventions on the geographical aspect, on RFE’s mediation of messages sent by Romanians, thereby bringing together Romanians from all over the world – “phone calls from the farthest corners of the globe.”<sup>29</sup>

The second phase in the information and communication process is relevant for the politicization of the tragedy from one day to the next, once the ideological

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26 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/r%C4%83zboiul-regimului-ceau%C8%99ist-%C3%AEmpotriva-%C3%AEntregului-popor-1977-arhiva-podcast-victor-eskenasy-radio-europa-libera/30839835.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

27 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

28 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

29 March 4, 1987, Emil Hurezeanu in dialogue with Ioana Măgură-Bernard and Sorin Cunea, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/euroipa-libera-in-1977-arhiva-podcast-emil-hurezeanu/31133479.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

structures were reactivated.<sup>30</sup> The tragedy was appropriated by the regime's propaganda in order to enhance Ceaușescu's cult of personality (Ceaușescu – savior of the nation, the one to whom the nation should be grateful for the salvation of the victims, etc.); the Securitate forbade the media from offering factual information about human and material losses: "Only official accounts about the casualties of the earthquake (deaths and injured people) are allowed for publication."<sup>31</sup> We can identify several ways of instrumentalizing the tragedy – politicization of humanitarian assistance: the official media claimed that Romania had all the necessary resources for managing the crisis, while information about supplies and aid coming from abroad was only secondary;<sup>32</sup> politicization of scientific information about the earthquake and its potential forthcoming aftershocks: experts from Romania versus international experts; politicization of material damage: according to the official news, "the older buildings built before the start of the Communist regime collapsed" (in fact, the major damage also included Communist blocks);<sup>33</sup> politicization of consolidation work (houses belonging to members of the Party apparatus were given priority). At the same time, it is relevant to notice that the foreign correspondents sent on-site were allowed to travel to affected areas, receiving support from Agerpres, the official press agency.<sup>34</sup>

In the postcrisis phase, the tragedy was used not least to justify the demolition of one of the most important historical areas in Bucharest and the construction of the so-called "Civic Center."<sup>35</sup> The normalization of the propaganda discourse not long after the humanitarian tragedy of March 1977 would bring even more public attention to the significance of those first days, in which the information practices established during the Cold War were rearticulated by RFE, placing the public in a regime of solidarity and transnational engagement.

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30 "Actualitatea românească," Radio Free Europe, March 4, 1987, Neculai Constantin Munteanu and Emil Hurezeanu, <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/mircea-carp-despre-cutremurul-din-4-martie-1977/31118093.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

31 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/r%C4%83zboiul-regimului-ceau%C8%99ist-%C3%AEmpotriva-%C3%AEntregului-popor-1977-arhiva-podcast-victor-eskenasy-radio-europa-libera/30839835.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

32 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/mircea-carp-despre-cutremurul-din-4-martie-1977/31118093.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

33 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/povestea-vorbei-4-martie-1979-gheorghe-babu-ursu-%C8%99i-cutremurul-ne%C8%99tiut/30781758.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

34 <<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/mircea-carp-despre-cutremurul-din-4-martie-1977/31118093.html>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

35 In the area where the huge building designated by the propaganda as the "House of the People" was placed; nowadays it functions as the Palace of the Parliament.

## 3.2 Western informational solidarity during the Chernobyl nuclear accident

Another nuclear accident, that of Three Mile Island, which occurred in 1981 in the United States, was the field of research for Eliseo Veron, who analyzed the “construction of the event” in the French press. Social events, Veron writes, “exist only insofar as the media shape them” (Veron 1981: 7). The analysis of the media construction of the Chernobyl nuclear accident event confirms, of course, Veron’s thesis. However, it also highlights three other important aspects:

1. The media coverage of the accident was directly dependent on the reality of the final phase of the Cold War.
2. Considering the geographical extent of the radioactive cloud and the effects of the accident in several countries in East and West, the construction of the event took place through the circulation of information at the European level, despite the political division of Europe.
3. The media silence observed in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries led to an informational solidarity of Western journalists with Eastern audiences in the early days following the accident.

### 3.2.1 The geopolitics of a media construction

During the two days following the accident of 26 April 1986, no information appeared in the media. The Chernobyl media event took place because nuclear instruments in several European countries measured very high levels of radioactivity. This was the case on April 28, 1986, for specialists at a Swedish nuclear power station located 1,000 km from Chernobyl. Contacted by the Swedes, the Soviet authorities initially denied the existence of a nuclear accident on their territory. A day later, Moscow admitted what had happened, but downplayed the seriousness of the accident.

To situate this in its proper context, we were at the end of the Cold War. Shortly before the Chernobyl accident, the Soviet president, Mikhail Gorbachev, had announced the new policy of transparency [glasnost] and reorganization [perestroika]. Many commentators nowadays consider Chernobyl to be an illustration of a serious problem regarding the image of the political and economic stability of the Soviet Union, and an indication that the Communist system was experiencing major organizational problems. Gorbachev himself later claimed that the Chernobyl moment triggered the process that finally led to the fall of Communism.

In Bucharest, President Nicolae Ceaușescu wanted to continue hard-line Communism, taking China or North Korea as a model. He did not adhere to the new direction announced by Gorbachev and detached himself from this Soviet line, without understanding that it had already been accepted by the Western capitals. In the same way, the issue caused divisions within the high-level Romanian Communist leadership, and those who opposed the hard line were marginalized by Ceaușescu.

However, despite this attitude and the tense relations between Bucharest and Moscow, the Romanian president preferred not to cut off relations with the USSR completely, especially since on 16 May 1986, Ceaușescu went to Moscow, where he signed an economic, commercial, and scientific pact with Mikhail Gorbachev that was supposed to last until 2000. Moreover, according to the reports of the Securitate preparing for the visit, Ceaușescu also had on his agenda a request for compensation following the Chernobyl disaster (Source: Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, National Archives of Romania).

### 3.2.2 A European flow of information

As it did in the West, the first information arrived in Romania from “experts” in nuclear energy. However, as the news circuit in Romania was subject to strict censorship, information about high levels of radioactivity was transmitted only to representatives of the Communist government. No information appeared in the official media. “We sent all the data to the center, it was normal that everyone was stressed, because the situation could change from one moment to another,” says Dan Galeriu, a researcher at the Institute of Nuclear Physics, one of the specialists who took part in the measurements.<sup>36</sup>

From 28 April, the situation and its effects in several European countries were known in the elite circle of Communist leaders because they were also the subject of dispatches by the main international press agencies. The Romanian news agency, Agerpres, distributed on 29 April “for internal use” a summary of international dispatches on the situation at Chernobyl. PAP, the Polish news agency, for example, mentions on 29 April “damage” to one of the nuclear reactors in Chernobyl (Ukraine), a “high-altitude radioactive cloud” having passed into Polish airspace, without any impact on the health of the population.

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<sup>36</sup> <<https://www.digi24.ro/special/dosare/30-de-ani-de-la-cernobil/exclusiv-documente-studiate-in-premiera-de-digi24-ce-consemmnau-rapoartele-secrete-ale-securitatii-despre-nivelul-radiatiiloror-dupa-catastrofa-de-la-cernobil-510706>> (accessed 1 April 2022).

Through the Agerpres synthesis, the Communist leaders were aware of the information disseminated by the main Western news agencies: France Presse, Reuters, EFE, Associated Press. According to several journalists working at Radio Romania at the time,<sup>37</sup> information on the true extent of the disaster was also known to the leaders and even to some journalists in the newsroom, but it was impossible to broadcast it before being instructed to do so by the Communist Party organs.

Finally, on 30 April, the Romanian press reproduced a dispatch from the Soviet news agency TASS. This short report is repeated in all Romanian media, in the same form, in short sections, without comment and without being presented as information of particular importance (on the last page of newspapers, in the middle of the international sections on television or radio).

coninuate.



Fig. 1: SCANTEIA, 30 April 1986.

“From the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Moscow, 29th (Agerpres) – The TASS agency reports: A failure has occurred at the Chernobyl power plant, located 130 km from Kiev. A government commission headed by the vice-president of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Boris Shcherbina, has been deployed to the site.” The report (Fig. 1) also states that the damage to reactor 4 caused “the destruction of part of the reactor building, its deterioration, and some leakage of radioactive substances.” Two people are said to have died as a result of this “damage.” The

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with six Romanian journalists, conducted by the authors of this article in the period 2018–2020.

population of three localities was evacuated, but “the radiation situation in the power plant has stabilized.” The final reassuring sentence states that “the radiation situation is being continuously monitored at the plant and in the surrounding areas.” It is interesting to note that the same information, provided by TASS, was reproduced on the same day by the majority of the Western media.

On the same day, April 30, the Romanian Ministry of National Defense informs President Ceaușescu of the details of the actual worrying situation following the “Chernobyl nuclear accident.” We should note that the report (Fig. 2) signed by the minister already uses the term “accident,” and not, like the Soviet sources, “damage.” At the same time, the Western media are beginning to use the word “disaster” with reference to the Chernobyl situation.

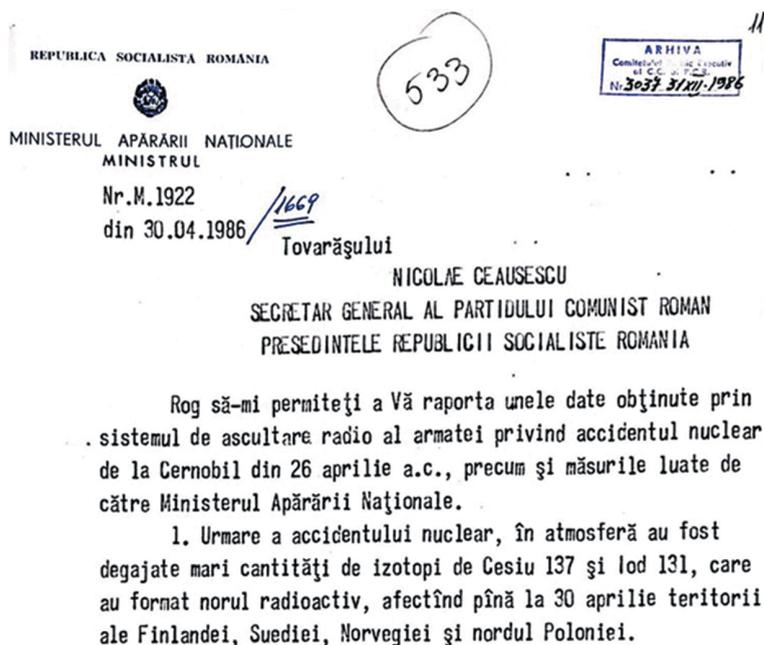


Fig. 2: Note from the Romanian Defense Ministry.

The sources used for this note are Romanian military intelligence, European diplomatic sources, and, of course, the Western media. The main information known on 30 April by President Ceaușescu and his entourage was as follows:

- The number of evacuated people was 30,000, decontamination was underway within a 30 km radius around the plant.

- The radioactive cloud affected the territories of Finland, Sweden, Norway, and northern Poland. Due to the wind direction, the cloud would pass over the territories of the German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania, “without endangering the health of the population.”
- The United States had decided to set up an interdepartmental group for public information and proposed the formation of an international commission to study the consequences of the nuclear accident.

In response to the information received, on the one hand from the intelligence of the Ministry of Defense and the Securitate and on the other from the international press agencies, four days after the accident, on 1 May 1986, President Ceaușescu convened a meeting of the Executive Political Committee of the Communist Party. At this meeting, the Romanian Communist government seemed worried, dissatisfied with the Soviet silence, and decided to inform the population about the measures to be taken:

I believe that we must immediately provide information for public opinion. Without giving dates, but something more extensive than what we have already given. Let us say this: given the situation created by the accident that has occurred, certain increases in radioactivity have been recorded in our country, especially in the northeast. Taking into account the direction of the wind, necessary measures will have to be taken if information on the measured levels is available. And that, also, a permanent command has been created, taking into account this special situation, a group of comrades from the Party leadership is following all these issues. And so let us say: the Central Committee has analyzed this problem, it has informed itself, and it has implemented these measures.<sup>38</sup>

The minutes of the 1 May meeting, since published by the Ministry of Defense Press Office, show that Ceaușescu had total control (Gabanyi, 2000), not only over the content of the information to be released to the press, but also over the types of device to be used: “We must not wait until the evening radio news to give this statement, or until the evening to give this information on television.”

Thus, on May 2, the Romanian press was given the green light to broadcast a dispatch from the national news agency, Agerpres, quoting the “State Party Commission for Monitoring and Control of the Quality of the Environment” (Fig. 3).

It is mentioned in the same announcement that an increase in radioactivity has been recorded in several departments and in the national capital. The population is advised to use drinking water only from the urban network, deep wells, or

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<sup>38</sup> <<http://presamil.ro/catastrofa-de-la-cernobal-cum-reactionat-conducerea-comunista-de-la-bucuresti/>> (accessed 1 April 2022).



Fig. 3: SCANTEIA, 2 May 1986.

mineral water; to wash vegetables and fruits rigorously; to avoid taking children into open spaces; to use deep wells for animals, and to cover wells and fodder, in agricultural units and individual farms.

### 3.2.3 “Informational solidarity”

From the point of view of information on the Chernobyl accident, while Moscow kept silent, Bucharest remained reserved, especially about the causes of and responsibilities for the disaster. The only exception: the protection of the population. “The Romanian Communist authorities understood the political subtext of the event. The political subtext and internal norms of interpretation of events required the state to maintain public discretion regarding the event, as long as there was no official Soviet position on it, but also to protect its citizens,” writes the historian Cosmin Popa.<sup>39</sup>

Between 2 and 14 May, the Romanian press continued to inform the population by means of short reports. The content of the articles exclusively included elements concerning the level of radioactivity, emphasizing that the Party organs and the State Party Commission created for this purpose were closely monitoring the situation. After 15 May, information about Chernobyl and the consequences of

<sup>39</sup> <<https://www.digi24.ro/special/dosare/30-de-ani-de-la-chernobil/exclusiv-documente-studiate-in-premiera-de-digi24-ce-consemnau-rapoartele-secrete-ale-securitatii-despre-nivelul-radiatiilor-dupa-catastrofa-de-la-chernobil-510706>> (accessed 1 April 2022).

the radioactive cloud ceased in the Romanian press, most likely in connection with the visit of President Ceaușescu to Moscow.

The information thus censored by the Romanian Communist government left the population in a state of perplexity and considerable doubt: without knowing the real extent of the disaster, the measures taken seemed to lack logic. This gulf, this rupture between the official discourse and reality, is one of the characteristics of public expression during the period of the Communist dictatorship. More often than not, the information, being decontextualized and without proposing a cause-effect link, does not fulfill its main role and simply becomes one of the propaganda tools used by the regime. It is obvious that elements of information were “leaking out” and that those who knew (those close to power, scientists, a few journalists belonging to the higher echelons) were talking about them. Radu Sicinschi, now the manager of the Tulcea Ambulance Service, was a resident doctor in Iasi at the time of the Chernobyl nuclear accident: “In 1986, there was too little information and everyone was panicking because they didn’t know what to believe. Everyone was talking in corners,” says the doctor. He and his family learned about the nuclear disaster from a neighbor who worked in the Securitate. “At the time we lived in an officers’ block and a neighbor said, ‘we’ve had it,’” he recalls.<sup>40</sup>

But rumors and informal systems of information transmission could not replace the silence in the official media. To overcome this cognitive dissonance, there was only one solution: listening to Western international radio stations. Numerous testimonies from Romanian citizens speak of the importance of information received from abroad. Listening to Western radios was, of course, forbidden and punished under Communist law. As can be seen from the archives of the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate, the agents and informers of this repressive structure had the specific task of identifying clandestine listening to international radio stations.<sup>41</sup> The information notes highlight not only the extent of the phenomenon of listening to Radio Free Europe, for example, but also the fact that Romanian citizens were expressing all over the country, on the basis of the information disseminated by the Western media, criticism of the Communist Party leadership and its way of managing and informing the population.

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<sup>40</sup> *Adevarul* newspaper: <[https://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/cum-trait-romanii-accidentul-nu-clear-ernobil-o-cumnata-vomitat-trei-zile-1\\_62667c8c5163ec4271b8aa58/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/locale/constanta/cum-trait-romanii-accidentul-nu-clear-ernobil-o-cumnata-vomitat-trei-zile-1_62667c8c5163ec4271b8aa58/index.html)> (accessed 12 March 2022).

<sup>41</sup> The briefing notes can be found in the archives of the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate. Two information notes of 5 May can serve as an example: <<http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/judete/Timis/8.pdf>> (accessed 1 April 2022) and <<http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/judete/Bihor/6.2.pdf>> (accessed 1 April 2022).

A series of citizens' testimonies are now starting to appear in the post-Communist Romanian press. Florentina Constantin, a chemist and specialist in radiation hygiene, remembered in April 2020: "My father told me what he had heard on Free Europe, that the Russians were silent in the first days of the disaster and the first to report the radioactive cloud were the Swedes."<sup>42</sup> The historian Alina Pavelescu remembered in 2016: "Our parents didn't understand it any more than we did; there was a vague rumor circulating through Free Europe that there had been a nuclear explosion somewhere in a city called Chernobyl, one of the many cities of the huge Soviet Union."<sup>43</sup>

For the journalists from international radio stations such as Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, the BBC, and RFI, the system of information control was very familiar, some of them being former journalists for the Romanian media. Thus, informing Romanians was considered one of the basic missions of their work. With regard to the Chernobyl nuclear accident, unlike the information transmitted by the Romanian Communist system, the international radio stations tried, as soon as possible, to build up contextualized information, highlighting the logical articulation between the causes and effects of the accident, as well as the question of responsibility.

Liviu Tofan, a journalist from Radio Free Europe, recalls:

I was on duty . . . I remember . . . The disaster took place between Friday and Saturday, at 1 a.m. On Sunday, thirty hours after the accident, we already had enough confirmed and corroborated information to be able to talk about what had happened in Chernobyl [ . . . ]. These were the basic facts. First, about the existence of this nuclear power plant, which nobody knew existed, in a remote corner of northern Ukraine. That a serious accident and a very big fire had taken place, that there was a real danger of contamination, and on Sunday we learned that the evacuation of people there was underway [ . . . ]. Here was the first information [ . . . ] I think we needed a good few days, maybe several weeks, before our listeners in Romania realized what was going on. We were, in this first phase, the only source of information [ . . . ]. In practice, the disaster was kept silent and minimized both in the Soviet Union and in the other Communist countries of the time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Romanian TV: <[http://stiri.tvr.ro/cum-s-au-descurcat-autorita-ile-romane-dupa-explozia-nucleara-de-la-chernobil-date-care-nu-au-mai-fost-publicate-pana-acum-ob-inute-de-la-florentina-constantin-chimista-specialista-in-igiena-radia-iilor\\_860467.html#view](http://stiri.tvr.ro/cum-s-au-descurcat-autorita-ile-romane-dupa-explozia-nucleara-de-la-chernobil-date-care-nu-au-mai-fost-publicate-pana-acum-ob-inute-de-la-florentina-constantin-chimista-specialista-in-igiena-radia-iilor_860467.html#view)> (accessed 15 May 2021).

<sup>43</sup> Mediafax press agency: <<https://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/istoricul-alina-pavelescu-re-member-chernobil-30-de-ani-dupa-15274992>> (accessed 5 September 2021).

<sup>44</sup> <<https://www.digi24.ro/special/dosare/30-de-ani-de-la-chernobil/exclusiv-documente-studiate-in-premiera-de-digi24-ce-consemau-rapoartele-secrete-ale-securitatii-despre-nivelul-radiatiilor-dupa-catastrofa-de-la-chernobil-510706>> (accessed 1 April 2022).

This concern for complete information, which goes beyond the ideological fractures between Western and Eastern Europe that were characteristic of the Cold War, represents a form of informational solidarity with the Romanian population, which was deprived of official information from within about the possible consequences of the nuclear accident and had to resort to listening to forbidden, foreign radio stations in order to have access to wider, more comprehensive information about what was going on in their own country.

## 4 Discussion

In this study we started with the question of how Radio Free Europe and the media in Communist Romania, respectively, approached the process of informing citizens in the context of humanitarian catastrophes and at the same time in the specific geopolitical context of Romania's relations with the USSR and Western democracies. Thus, in connection with the media coverage of the March 4, 1977, earthquake by RFE, we were interested in the retrospective narratives of RFE journalists about the information practices generated in the situation. The analysis has highlighted that the main significance that journalists attributed to the information *dispositif* created immediately after the catastrophe involves the "suspension" (even for a short time) of the ideological borders that otherwise prevented both direct communication with Romanians in the country and communication between Romanians abroad and those residing in the country. For the journalists themselves, the mediation of a solidarity among Romanians everywhere, in a regime of moral commitment, was an emblematic result not only for the relationship between media as a tool and an agent and public action, but also for the relationship among individuals as moral agents within an ideologically divided society and world.

In the case of media coverage of the Chernobyl catastrophe, in the absence of official Soviet information on the extent and effects of the accident, informational solidarity can be thought of in two ways. On the one hand, we have observed a circulation and corroboration of information produced by Western and Eastern European sources, which complemented one another in this situation. On the other hand, taking into account the differences in the treatment of information between East and West, with effective censorship mechanisms in the East, the RFE journalists set up logics of solidarity in order to fill what they considered a dysfunction, namely, the information vacuum to which the Eastern populations were subjected. In this way, the radio was able to offer contextualized and thus comprehensible information on the facts, but also on the importance and effects of, and the responsibilities for, the nuclear accident.

In both cases discussed here, the international radio stations from the Western countries made up for the absence of official information from the Romanian authorities in the first moments after the outbreak of the crisis. Of course, this role that they took on was part of their mission as media outlets. But in these two catastrophes, the radio provided information in a context in which there was a vacuum of both official information and governmental action, one that could be explained not only by the regime-specific censorship but also by the real paralysis of the authorities in the face of such a crisis situation, with humanitarian implications. The Romanian people's suffering transformed the strategy of Western journalists and, thus, the paradigm of the Other-Enemy, the recipient of ideology-laden discourses, into a paradigm of the Other-Similar, the beneficiary of information that can bring support and help.

Further analysis of such narratives by journalists from RFE (and similar radio stations), as well as those of other journalists from former Communist countries, who participated in informing the public during the Cold War and, in particular, in emergency contexts (such as humanitarian catastrophes) is relevant in order to bring light to what humanitarian catastrophes can do to bridge the gap between two ideological worlds during ideological wars. Such analyses, which emphasize the journalists' self-reflexive discourse on past mediation practices, can contribute to a better understanding of the performative role of radio/journalists in mediating various forms of engagement to audiences within regimes of power control.

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## Table of figures

- Fig. 1** SCANTEIA, 30 April 1986.  
<[https://tvrinfo.ro/ziua-interna-ionala-de-reamintire-a-dezastrului-de-la-ernobil-37-de-ani-de-la-accidentul-de-la-centrala-atomoelectrica\\_929498/](https://tvrinfo.ro/ziua-interna-ionala-de-reamintire-a-dezastrului-de-la-ernobil-37-de-ani-de-la-accidentul-de-la-centrala-atomoelectrica_929498/)> (accessed 17 March 2024).
- Fig. 2** Note from the Romanian Defense Ministry.  
<<https://www.gherlainfo.ro/pe-1-mai-1986-romanii-au-aflat-ca-sunt-radiati-dupa-explozia-de-la-ernobil-norul-radioactiv-a-ajuns-si-la-cluj/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).
- Fig. 3** SCANTEIA, 2 May 1986.  
<<https://www.gherlainfo.ro/pe-1-mai-1986-romanii-au-aflat-ca-sunt-radiati-dupa-explozia-de-la-ernobil-norul-radioactiv-a-ajuns-si-la-cluj/>> (accessed 17 March 2024).

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