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## Networking socialist television

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## **Networking Socialist Television**

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The ideological vision and political reality of communism were profoundly transnational, premised on the belief in the transnational camaraderie of the working class. This vision served as the basis for close political, economic and cultural ties among communist-led countries, as well as for their engagement both with the liberal democracies of the West and with the Global South. Socialist television shared this commitment to transnationalism: like elsewhere in the world, television schedules included substantial proportions of imported material, and audiences often thought of the small screen as a means of connecting with distant corners of the globe. Socialist TV broadcasters eagerly participated in cross-border exchanges of technology, personnel and programming from early on, and established transnational networks to facilitate such exchanges both within the state socialist world and beyond. These included the Intervision programme exchange organised through the Soviet-dominated International Radio and Television Organisation (OIRT), occasional collaboration with the Eurovision programme exchange through the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), as well as various bilateral agreements and regional networks, such as the network of broadcasters associated with the Non-Aligned Movement. In this sense, socialist television formed an integral part of global networks of television broadcasting. Yet the question remains: Were socialist countries all equally open to television imports; how did their dependence on foreign programming change over time; and how can we explain these cross-country differences and changes? Did the transnational networks established by socialist broadcasters succeed in countering the pull of programming produced in the capitalist world, giving rise to a distinctly socialist form of TV transnationalism? To answer these questions, this paper draws on a range of data from five communist countries: East Germany, Romania, Poland, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia. It analyses the balance of domestically produced and imported TV materials and the origin of foreign programming across the five countries between 1960 and 1990, drawing on original quantitative data sets produced for this purpose, as well as a range of archival and other sources. The concluding part of the paper considers developments after the end of the Cold War, noting the extent to which the legacies of socialist broadcast networks survive in transnational programme flows, co-productions and viewer memories in the region to this day.<sup>1</sup>

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