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One of the most overlooked but seemingly indelible legacies of the Cold War is the scholarly convention of examining phenomena associated with Eastern Bloc nations through the conceptual paradigm of totalitarianism. Emerging out of a combination of Western animus toward the Soviet Union and its allies, the often inaccessible nature of archival and other sources in these closed states, and the demonstrable authoritarianism of their governments, the totalitarian paradigm casts dictatorial political figures and communist ideology as the determining factors in the creation, character, and development of Eastern Bloc societies. While undoubtedly capturing definite aspects of the Eastern Bloc, the totalitarian paradigm also obscures many others. Illustrating this fact are revisionist works produced over the last several decades by researchers such as Sheila Fitzpatrick (*The Russian Revolution: 1917-1932*, 1982), Boris Groys (*The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, 1992), and Lars Lih (*Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context*, 2006). In their respective political, art, and intellectual histories, these scholars moved beyond the myopic foci of the totalitarian paradigm and produced rewarding studies stressing popular agency, identifying continuity with pre-communist society and recognizing commonalities with Western cultures. Shelia Fitzpatrick,; Boris Groys,; and Lars Lih,.

With *TV Socialism*, Anikó Imre provides a valuable contribution to this revisionist corpus by composing a study of television within the Eastern Bloc that consciously undermines the totalitarian image of Eastern Bloc societies as monolithic entities subject to centralized control in accordance with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Examining both the production and content of numerous television programs across the Eastern Bloc, Imre argues that it was not government direction or official ideology that exerted the greatest effect upon them, but a host of decidedly nontotalitarian factors including audience preferences, the nationalisms of individual Bloc states, and even pan-Europe cultural trends. Alongside this path-breaking use of television as a means of illuminating the plurality of dynamics at work within Eastern Bloc societies, Imre also considers how television programs registered changes within these societies, particularly in regard to shifting conceptions of what the “good life” under socialism should entail and the ensuing tensions regarding gender roles. Although Imre’s expansive scope rests on a relatively small number of case studies, this ultimately does not detract from what is a strikingly original and valuable cultural history of the Eastern Bloc.

Writing that "instead of confirming the blanket oppression of the people by authoritarian or dictatorial leaders," a study of Eastern Bloc television will serve to "question … our received wisdom" about the socialist societies of Eastern Europe, Imre announces her participation in the ongoing revision of the totalitarian paradigm at the outset of her monograph (pp. 3, 1). This participation is most immediately visible in her striking assertion that aside from controls over news coverage and some educational programming, Eastern Bloc television "generally operate[d] in a liberalized fashion, with little or no censorship" (p. 18). Drawing upon interviews with numerous contemporary television producers, Imre explains this surprising fact by arguing that Eastern Bloc governments considered entertainment programs on television as lowbrow novelties and "not even deserving [censorship] policies" (p. 33). While the totalitarian model essentially posits that no detail of Eastern Bloc life was too insignificant to escape government control, Imre not only foregrounds the evidence to the contrary but also emphasizes the familiar values animating this contradiction. As she relates, it was a certain elitist disdain toward television, an attitude also held by many in the West, and a reluctance to afford it the same status as media, such as film and theater, that were "deserving" of government attention that allowed Eastern Bloc television to operate in ways defying the stereotypes of totalitarianism.

Although Imre's conclusion regarding the relative lack of political oversight of Eastern Bloc television is perhaps her most striking contribution to the revisionist project, it ultimately serves as the basis for even more arresting findings. Recognizing the reduced role of politics in Eastern Bloc television launches Imre toward exploring the numerous other factors and dynamics that molded and were contained within it instead. In doing so, Imre is also highlighting phenomena within Eastern Bloc societies that further subvert the assumptions of the totalitarian paradigm. This is especially clear in her argument that the absence of "top-down" control over television in the Eastern Bloc allowed for "bottom-up momentum throughout the socialist period, giving viewers some leverage in defining the medium's development" (p. 10).

The lack of strict government guidance, Imre thus asserts, allowed audience preferences to play a significant role in determining the content of Eastern Bloc television, a claim she illustrates with examples of viewer feedback resulting in programming changes. Discussing, for example, the Hungarian program ***Family Circle*** (1974-94), which initially centered on roundtable debates on parenting issues interspersed with dramatized vignettes, Imre relates that "viewers responded most positively to the dramatized segments, which made the creators gradually shift emphasis to these" (p. 64). Similarly, Imre correlates the predominance of what one contemporary critic called "warmed over bourgeois values" on East German television by the 1960s with the earlier attempts at "revolutionary television" being met with "viewers' rejection … and demands for light entertainment" (p. 236). In contrast to the totalitarian paradigm's assumption that Eastern Bloc states either ignored or manipulated popular opinion, Imre's investigation reveals strikingly contrary examples of ordinary Bloc citizens unreservedly expressing their preferences and even effecting change by doing so.

While Imre thus contributes to the mounting evidence suggesting that the totalitarian paradigm's conception of the Eastern Bloc neglects a great deal in regards to internal dynamics, her study also points to the need to question its effective isolation and alienation of the Eastern Bloc from Western Europe. Often overlooking both the shared history and contemporary intercourse between the East and West, the totalitarian paradigm tends to sharply oppose the two camps and emphasize their differences and divergent development. Imre explicitly rejects this "national containment" and argues that "transnational affilia-

tions" are visible within Eastern Bloc television, destabilizing the binary image of Cold War Europe (pp. 4, 12). This effort to recuperate the commonalities between East and West bears compelling fruit in her integration of certain Eastern Bloc television programs into the wider, pan-European attitudes regarding the didactic role of television. As noted above, educational programs were one of the few aspects of television programming in which Bloc governments consistently intervened, sponsoring their development, regulating their content, and generally attempting to employ television as a "massive school for the masses" (p. 41).

Viewed in light of the totalitarian paradigm, such a tele-educational drive would be seen as little more than attempts as state propaganda. Imre, however, complicates and undermines such a view by, first, noting the politically neutral content of many of these programs, which ranged from promoting literacy to broadcasting lectures on art and science. More striking, however, is her argument that such programs are but examples of a Europe-wide commitment to "public service broadcasting (PSB)." Describing PSB as "the government-led mission to inform and educate" via television, Imre argues that this was "a common denominator across all of [Europe's] television cultures … [and] reaches back to the pre-Cold War era" (p. 17). She thus folds the paternalist pedagogy within Eastern Bloc television into the wider European tradition of government patronage for didactic programming and comes to cite a host of state-funded programs across Western Europe with avowedly educational intentions to emphasize the values and activities shared across the iron curtain. In doing so, Imre subverts the totalitarian paradigm's aggressive othering of the Eastern Bloc in regard to the West and its tendency to portray Eastern Bloc culture as ***sui generis*** products of communist authoritarianism.

Imre continues to challenge received notions of the Eastern Bloc as she turns to the homogenizing implications of the "Eastern Bloc" concept itself. Not only with its stress on the entirety of the Eastern Bloc as an alien "other" in regard to the West, but also in its emphasis on the Soviet hegemony over, and its oppressive imposition of communism upon, other Bloc states, the totalitarian paradigm invites a view of the Eastern Bloc stressing uniformity and subservience. Imre is particularly keen to counter these connotations, arguing that Eastern Bloc states vigorously asserted themselves by employing television to foster vibrant and exclusivist nationalisms that drew upon their respective traditional cultures. Once again stressing continuity between communist and precommunist culture, Imre argues that "established nationalistic literary cultures" within Bloc nations were "seamlessly transferred to the new medium [of television]," establishing it "as a key terrain for sustaining nationalisms" within the Eastern Bloc (pp. 134-137). Citing the Hungarian historical dramas ***A Tenkes kapitánya*** (The captain of the Tenkes, 1964) and the Polish ***Janosik*** (1974) as prime examples of this phenomenon, she relates how these programs chose as their subject matter historical events and figures long romanticized into mythic narratives of patriotic nationalism.

Even more striking than her illumination of persistent nationalism within Eastern Bloc states ostensibly devoted to communist universalism is Imre's disclosure that these nationalisms routinely employed a specific adversary as a means of uniting patriotic sentiment. Beginning with an analysis of the traditional nationalist narratives utilized in Eastern Bloc television, she concludes that they invariably centered on lionized figures "who defended the nation and resisted the evil intruder or oppressor" (p. 137). This consistent positing of conflict with an outside force, she argues, was a direct expression of Eastern Bloc states' attitudes towards the Soviet Union, which was implicitly the antagonist of these nationalistic programs wherein the "the dominant allegorical

framework remained national resistance against Soviet domination" (p. 135).

As illustrations of this thesis, Imre continues to cite *A Tenkes kapitánya* and *Janosik,* relating the former's recounting of nineteenth-century Hungarians fighting Habsburg rule and the latter's focus on a Robin Hood-like figure who robbed from the foreign or foreign-affiliated nobility for the benefit of the poor. These conflicts between native patriots and external enemies, she asserts, spoke directly to the current feelings of resentment among Bloc citizens over their forced subordination to the Soviet Union, strengthening their nationalistic appeal by encouraging affective identification. Imre thus highlights both the persistent cultivation of individualized identities among Bloc states and their expressions of resentment in regard to Soviet hegemony. In both instances, she provides a valuable corrective to the tendency inherent in the Cold War-era views of the totalitarian paradigm towards dismissing these "satellite" states as a single, conflated mass lacking unique identities and the will to assert them.

As in other revisionist scholarship, Imre's disruption of received ideas ultimately functions as more than a simple critique. By undermining the totalitarian paradigm, by removing an image of the Eastern Bloc that has obscured many of its constituent dynamics, she also is opening up a space for research that would have previously been unthinkable. Imre herself realizes one aspect of this potential in her extended investigation into how television reflected a significant shift in aspirations within Eastern Bloc states and how this interacted with established gender roles. She relates that by the 1960s, most Eastern Bloc governments, in their continued efforts to court popular support, had moved from promising egalitarianism and industrial might toward emphasizing the availability of abundant "daily comforts" and the pursuit of "consumer lifestyles."

This new conception of what the "good life" under socialism should entail, Imre continues, privileged the domestic sphere, the site in which comfort and consumption took place, effectively positing it as "the microcosm of the socialist nation" in that domestic success was essentially equated with national success. She goes on to explain that this created an acute tension in Bloc societies between women's traditional role as caregiver in the domestic sphere, which this new valuation reinforced, and the fact that Bloc women's high participation in the workforce often occluded their fulfillment of this role. Imre argues that television registered this tension and rendered it visible in a number of what she terms "socialist soap operas," serialized dramas centering on female characters. In an extended analysis of one such program, the Hungarian *78-as körzet* (District 78, 1982), concerning Ilus, a housewife who decides to begin working outside the home, she notes how ambivalently the resulting conflict is addressed in the form of Ilus's husband, Deszo, who repeatedly voices complaints about how Ilus's new work causes her to neglect her domestic duties. Deszo and his complaints, Imre argues, are alternatively treated sympathetically and mocked within the show, reflecting the tension between the privileging of the domestic sphere and the reality that high female employment often rendered the role of a traditional housewife a retrograde fantasy. Thus realizing the potential contained within abandoning the totalitarian paradigm's ossified image of the Eastern Bloc as solely characterized by sclerotic ideology and stifling oppression, Imre is able to perceive the shifting values within Bloc societies and the reactions they provoked, resulting in rich and nuanced analyses.

While thus illustrating the superlative aspects of her study, Imre's examination of the fraught nature of gender roles in the Eastern Bloc and its representation on television also demonstrates some of its greatest weaknesses. Besides *78-as körzet*, she only subjects a handful of other programs to close readings to support her argument,

raising questions as to how applicable her otherwise cogent conclusion is. A similar issue mars Imre's previously discussed analysis of nationalist dramas, wherein the two programs already mentioned, *A Tenkes kapitánya* and *Janosik*, are the only ones analyzed to support her, again, incisive and compelling argument. Both of these examples highlight the recurring problem of her study in which only slim evidence supports broad conclusions. It is, however, easy to forgive Imre for this when one considers the fact that she has composed an engaging and path-breaking study offering further insight into the multiplicity of phenomena long obscured behind the notion of totalitarianism.