

Writing the National and Transnational History of Mass Media and Television Audiences after 1945

Approaches and Methods

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mass media, in their printed or audio-visual forms, increasingly permeated everyday life as well as politics in the industrialized societies of the twentieth century. Therefore, contemporary historians cannot write the history of modern societies without taking these media and their impact into account. This article summarizes the challenges facing historians of the last century who want to take the social and political impact of mass media seriously, and try to gauge audience reception. Along the way, it aims to introduce readers to the state of the field in both media studies and historiography, paying particular attention throughout to the advantages and limitations of transnational, global or 'glocal' versus national approaches.

As historians, we have to deal with the fact that radio and television has dominated societal and political debates since at least the 1930s. Before then, the printed mass press fulfilled a similar function since the late nineteenth century. Such modern mass media can be understood both as sources and factors of history. They did not only mirror historical developments, leaving useful coverage of past events and debates in printed, taped, and digitized form to be exploited by today's scholars. Mass media were also agents in their own right, impacting on decision-making processes and the evolution of societal norms and attitudes. But if scholars seek to assess mass media's impact on historical change, weighing it against other factors, they face particular challenges.

Up to the 1980s at least, most media historians chose to understand media as a closed system and thus avoided engaging with broader questions. They looked at the history of media technology, media institutions or the logic of media genres without linking it to society or politics at large. As a result, media history became a niche field within contemporary history¹. This stood in marked contrast to the history of earlier periods. For instance, historians of the eighteenth century engaged in productive debates about the role of media in the

French Revolution, identifying the reception of new, leading mass media such as pamphlets as major drivers of social and political change². Contemporary historians meanwhile did not engage deeply with media historiography. When writing about the twentieth century, they mainly relied on printed media as sources – besides archival materials –, disregarding radio and television broadcasts, not least because these were much more difficult to access and cite³. Therefore, most of the older historiography on the post-1945 period misrepresents the nature of discourses and debates after 1930, screening out precisely those leading media, which dominated the mass media ensemble since the 1930s⁴.

Recently, this pattern has changed, and a growing number of studies now highlights the important role played by broadcast and visual media in shaping the modern industrial world. But so far, the historical treatment of television's role has been limited to the medialization of the political sphere, and to messages rather than recipients⁵. Tentatively, many contemporary historians have also begun to factor the impact of audiovisual media into large-scale explanations of historical change. But particular challenges remain. They include limited access to broadcasts and broadcasting archives, and a disconnect between the scholarly fields of media/television studies and history.

II. LEARNING FROM MEDIA STUDIES

Media scholars and historians ask different questions and, it seems at times, speak different languages. German *Kommunikationswissenschaftler* and Anglo-American television studies scholars, media scholars, and historians everywhere often take little notice of works considered canonical in other fields. Whereas historians are typically interested in questions of mass media effect and societal reception but are split over the value of ratings and opinion polls, TV studies scholars understand television as an everyday cultural form that frames social reality in specific ways through its genres and narrative strategies. They are less focused on reception and doubt the constructivist concept of «society» much relied on by historians⁶. Profound disagreement exists, in particular, about attempts to measure the responses of mass audiences and the social impact of mass media.

The field of media and television studies has seen decades-long, contentious debates about mass media's impact on audiences. Early research followed a behavioristic «hypodermic needle» model, in which TV injects messages into the viewer with direct effects. This was quickly rejected, but until the mid-1970s, most media scholars

still conceived of audiences as rather passive and at least partially receptive to media messages. They insisted that viewers' reactions were measurable and followed certain conventions. Many researchers were then working with Paul Lazarsfeld's «two-step flow model of communication» (stressing the role of intermediary opinion leaders) or the «uses and gratifications» approach, which asked how viewers used media to satisfy needs and generate pleasure. From the late 1970s onwards, following Stuart Hall's emphasis on the independence and creativity of viewers in «decoding» the «codes» offered to them in programming, most scholarship shifted to assume a principal asymmetry between intended and actual readings. The idea of different types of readings – hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional – of one and the same program now came to dominate the profession, followed by John Fiske's notion of «active audiences» that create a myriad of individual readings to agree with their specific social situation⁷. By now, a large part of the field had tired of the debate about media impact, and the belief in the findings of quantitative social research – surveys with representative samples, generalizing questions and presumed objectivity – had waned. Instead, emphasis was placed on the unpredictability of individual readings, the multiplicity of audiences and viewing as an active, not passive process.

Most scholars interested in past programs were by now wary of wading into the methodological quagmire of «media effects»⁸. They typically decided to retreat into safer academic havens, researching texts, aesthetics, genres, and production rather than reception. Those who insisted on capturing audience reaction began to develop ethnographic and refined sociological methods for the analysis of 1980s and 1990s mass media⁹. The focus was less on predictable majority responses in mass audiences and more on participant observation, with surprising reactions and creative readings by individuals commanding particular attention¹⁰. How individual viewers derived emotional pleasures and negotiated identities while watching took center stage, whereas television's impact on «the masses» and society faded into the background. This shift in scholarship corresponded chronologically to television being dethroned as the leading medium, bringing with it a fragmentation and dispersal of audiences¹¹.

Current audience research in media studies investigates talk shows and particularly reality formats in which viewers participate by commenting or voting on the performances of ordinary people (such as *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *Wife Swap*, or *Supernanny*). Media scholars monitor audience response with interviews, focus groups, and the taping of viewers as they talk back to the screen or show affects with gasps and sighs¹². This work leads back to assuming some direct impact not only on individual viewers but also on society, as it relates

television's messages to the construction of class identities, neoliberal values, and gender roles¹³. Notably, these studies draw on qualitative interviews and observation of small groups of less than forty viewers, leaving quantitative surveys or ratings aside. And of course they neglect past programs, as their methodology cannot be extended to the era of early and limited choice television. Television studies scholar Lynn Spigel cautions: «The reconstruction of viewing experiences at some point in the past is an elusive project»¹⁴. Indeed, studies looking at mass media of the late 1960s and the 1970s largely avoid investigating audience reactions. They treat television, for instance, foremost as a mirror, calling it a «barometer of changing social mores» and «a showcase of ideological breakdown and reconfiguration»¹⁵.

Those historians closest to the field of media and television studies lament that the training of future historians does not engage with the core terminology and methods of those fields. Michael Meyen, historian and communications scholar, demands that historians engage more directly with statistical data on audiences and the body of knowledge in the social sciences. Media historian Jérôme Bourdon likewise points to underemployed strategies of researching reception: oral history and media memories, as well as the pre-formatting of experiences by digital media and the recent methods of sentiment analysis and opinion mining. Frank Bösch asks for more historical research into the ways in which media change daily habits and strategies of communication¹⁶. In short, a true fusion of contemporary history with the history of the mass media holds extraordinary opportunities – once we overcome the disciplinary disconnect and begin to explore approaches beyond the traditional history canon taught at undergraduate level.

In the following pages, while not exhausting the subject fully, I will highlight several key approaches, which allow for the writing of media history with society, and with nations and transnational exchanges, in mind. The approaches I will concentrate on are an actor-centered media history (1), an intermedial focus (2), the study of medialization (3), and the analysis of «reach, standing, framing, and agenda-setting», with a particular focus on television (4). Lastly, I will discuss the challenges facing transnational media historians: the tension between the national and transnational approach, and the pitfalls of analyzing the Europeanisation, Americanization, or globalization of mass media during the twentieth century (5).

1. *Actor-centered media history*

Following the lead of Jürgen Habermas' seminal study on the «structural transformation of the public sphere», historians from the

1960s onwards increasingly identified public debates as activities shaped by their spatial location. The spatial concept of the «public sphere» (or, in the original, *Öffentlichkeit*) sees mass communication taking place in the space between the private sphere and the state. This abstract concept leaves little room for historical actors; it deals mainly with structures, institutions, and processes. Whether scholars define the public sphere as a market place for arguments (Habermas) or as a «medium for society's self-reference» (Kurt Imhof), they tend to focus on discourses detached from identifiable speakers. Debates are being analyzed with particular reference to structures of communication, levels and layers of different publics, or the relationship of media institutions and programs in mind – leading to abstract theories in which historical actors are drained of agency, and their interests, social practices and ideas need not be investigated¹⁷. Similarly, the «dispositif» approach – by which media scholars describe the complex relations between media receiver, media content and media user – leaves little room for institutional and individual actors¹⁸. But we can only trace the impact of media on society and state, and vice versa, if we focus on individual and group actors and their decisions. The communication practices of people constitute the public sphere and define its borders. Media history is always also the social history of those who make the media: journalists, publishers, editors, intellectuals, photographers, public relations firms, and so on. These people are the gatekeepers of public speaking, they shape the language in public debates and they engage in agenda-setting (defining the hierarchy of topics worthy of public debate, and introducing new topics)¹⁹. They also engage in cross-border interaction and networks.

For the writing of transnational and international media history, the concepts of public sphere, discourses, and dispositif will be of little help because they are abstractions based on the nation as underlying structure. Only an actor-centered approach enables us to leave the national setting and focus on the entanglements and the travels of ideas, media content, and media personnel across borders. Reporters cover foreign news; publishers and editors copy foreign media patterns and practices; trainee journalists learn part of their trade abroad; broadcasters shop for series formats and feature films on international programming fairs; censors battle the influx of foreign media content; NGOs and public relation firms address audiences beyond national borders; viewers and listeners in border regions seek out content from multiple sources beyond the national context. The context in which twentieth century mass media operated was inter- and transnational to start with, but became even more so as the century wore on.

A look at the historiography of propaganda in modern dictatorships also underscores the need for an actor-centered approach. If we underestimate the agency of journalists and audience members, even in dictatorial settings, we easily fall into the trap of a top-down, totalitarian narrative in which limitless media manipulation leads to brainwashing of the masses. But the historiography of the National Socialist regime has shown that the limits of state-sponsored propaganda, the agency of media personnel, and the obstinacy of listeners and readers were greater than initially assumed²⁰. Historians also argue that the Soviet Union's communist media policy lacked consistency and often failed, leading to a political culture where propaganda and censorship were not as monolithic and powerful as they pretended to be²¹.

2. *The intermedial approach*

While the agency of those who make and receive media matters, neither the production nor the reception of media messages happens in isolation. Both media scholars and media historians thus stress the «intermedial» setting in which mass media operate. Each medium is produced and received in competition with others, and occupies a place in an internal hierarchy of mass media. Particularly useful in this regard is Axel Schildt's concept of the evolving «mass media ensembles» in which certain media enjoy pole position for defined time periods. Schildt outlines four stages of the modern mass media ensemble since the late nineteenth century. The first era saw the rise of the mass press as a leading medium, followed by the era of radio, then television, and most recently the internet taking over as leading medium²². Certain rules apply when a new medium attains dominance and the ensemble reconfigures itself. While the old media stay on, they lose their leading role and their content will no longer be mirrored and commented on by other media to the same extent. The ensemble as a whole will expand and the total time individuals spend on combined media use will rise. For instance, tabloids, radio channels, and television are still being produced and received in the twenty-first century, even though they have lost their former function as prime media. The internet, personal computers, and smart phones top the media hierarchy instead, and daily mass media usage has increased by several hours each day (on average) since the 1930s. The rise of television, for instance, led to audiences cutting down on sleep during the 1950s and 1960s. Popular television shows of the 1960s and 1970s generated much of their social impact in the process of being mirrored by other mass media within the ensemble²³. The interdependence and hierarchy of mass media are a strong argument against historical studies, which concentrate on one medium at a time. Different mass

media always coexist, impact each other, and only as an ensemble impact society and state²⁴.

3. *Medialization*

Historians often approach interactions between media and society, or media and state, using the paradigm of the «medialization» process. In the same context, mass communication scholars use the term «mediatization»²⁵. Both «medialization» and «mediatization» commonly refer to the steady increase of mass media impact in the modern world. The growing power of media requires different social sectors, as well as individuals, to adapt their strategies to the conditions set by these media: their genres, their time schedules, and their modes of access. Exact definitions of the term medialization vary, but not widely. Media scholar Sonia Livingstone speaks of «the meta process by which everyday practices and social relations are historically shaped by mediating technologies and media organizations»²⁶. Knut Lundby defines medialization as «the impact of media or media communications on social change in contemporary, high modern societies»²⁷. In an edited volume concerned with the function of media in Twentieth century democracies and dictatorships, Frank Bösch and Norbert Frei understand medialization as a «process of interdependent stimulation of media development and society development», pointing out an «increasing saturation of society by media» and an «increase in media-driven self-reflection of society»²⁸. With an eye on the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bernd Weisbrod explains «political medialization» as an active process by which the political sphere is made, including the «politicization of communicative conflicts» («Politisierung von Kommunikationskonflikten») and the «production of communicative awareness» («Herstellung von Kommunikationsbewußtsein»). He sees modern mass media as agents, which activate new configurations of communicative contexts and drive political actors to claim inclusion in public debates²⁹.

As these definitions highlight, most studies of the historical medialization process concentrate on the political realm. They look at the use of media «from above» by exploring subjects such as propaganda and election campaigns, polling by political parties, and the theatrical staging of state visits or parliamentary proceedings. In a long-term process, politicians, parties, advisers, lobbyists, and advertisers learned how to access and use the power of new mass media³⁰. (It needs to be emphasized, however, that the medialization of politics did not in itself cause the rise of symbolic and visualized politics, as political scientists Matthias Kepplinger and Thomas Meyer suggest. Throughout the middle ages and early modern period,

politics were built on the symbolic, ritualized, and visual communication of power³¹). The investigation of media scandals and their role in politics is a closely related pursuit³². Several studies also approach the issue from the perspective of media actors, in particular television journalists³³. Most recently, Ute Daniel reconstructed the relations between actors in politics and journalism in Britain and Germany over the course of the twentieth century. She concludes that both sides were interested in, and dependent on, a cartel of mutual trust (*Vertraulichkeitskartell*): Politicians regularly delivered confidential news to journalists who could ill afford to criticize their informants publicly. This structure rather effectively served to avoid prominent clashes between media and politics, while the asymmetrical power balance in the end always favored politicians³⁴. The imbalance Daniels describes was naturally even more pronounced in the case of the dictatorial systems of Communist-controlled Eastern Europe after 1945. Numerous studies show that the Communist media systems of the Cold War were less monolithic than often assumed, often depending less on direct censorship and more on the channeling of public opinion by selecting and training willing journalists. But generally, the mass media behind the Iron Curtain operated under much more restrictive conditions than their Western counterparts³⁵.

While mass media's effects on the political realm have been studied extensively, there is a curious dearth of studies dealing with the impact of medialization on the private sphere or the sphere of business and administration. The impact of rising mass media on individual lifestyles and attitudes, the relations between media and the grassroots, have mostly been dealt with by media scholars as part of the «uses and gratifications» approach. Beyond these confines, the medialization of private lives in modern history remains underinvestigated³⁶. For instance, how did youth cultures, work cultures, or the relationship between patients and doctors change when the mass media ensemble reconfigured itself? How did schools, administrations, courts, and marketers adapt to new mass media? Individuals typically cut down on other activities to make time for use of new media. They adapt their daily schedules to catch a favorite media message, and change the way they shop or socialize. Reconstructing these choices from the bottom up poses challenges for historians who cannot rely on sending out questionnaires or observing media use in a fieldwork setting. Television historians, for example, will often find even the few surviving ratings reports in broadcasters' archives disappointing in content. Still, certain genres of primary sources allow for the historical investigation of the medialization of private lives. A fruitful approach by Jérôme Bourdon relies on collecting «media memories» or «life stories» of media users. He argues that television viewers organize the flow of images according to their memories. In the interview setting, they remember «major

media figures and celebrities ('media friends', as J. Meyerowitz put it)», but also well-known media events, media crises, and those key points where TV became intertwined with their daily schedules and life cycles. People may remember the shows they watched at breakfast before they went to school, the program choices their parents argued over, or the night they were allowed to stay up beyond their usual bedtime because of a special event being broadcast³⁷. Elsewhere, I have used anthropological sources from a Westphalian folklore archive to explore how villagers responded to the arrival of TV during the 1950s and 1960s. Once the set arrived in their homes, villagers slept less (on average) and were more hesitant to visit their neighbors. Pastimes such as playing cards and knitting became less popular, living rooms were reorganized, and the livestock began to be fed on a different schedule³⁸. Sources on the private responses to mass media are more likely to be found outside the archives of broadcasters and state organizations: for instance, in private homes, on Ebay, or on the basement shelves of contemporary social scientists, anthropologists, or NGOs.

4. *Reach, standing, framing, and agenda-setting*

The analytical concepts of «reach», «standing», «framing», and «agenda-setting» can be of use when investigating the social impact and medialization effects of audio-visual mass media. These concepts can be applied not only to television history but also to other modern mass media, although I am using TV as an example in what follows.

To explore a particular media message's «reach» means to reconstruct the social and geographical makeup of audiences, testing in particular whether reception stretched to include previously underserved groups of viewers, listeners or readers. For instance, 1970s TV situational comedies (or 'sitcoms') reached social groups that had been far from the center of cultural change in the pre-television era: housewives, children and teenagers, rural dwellers, the elderly, and the poor. I have argued elsewhere that such access to previously untapped audiences boosted processes of value change during the long sixties. The monitoring of television ratings and audience response grew increasingly sophisticated over the 1960s and 1970s and provides today's scholars with illuminating, if methodically not always unproblematic, source material³⁹.

The other three concepts, borrowed from the social sciences, serve to examine the ways in which mass media influenced contemporary debates about changing values. «Standing» signifies that a media message only has an impact because all actors in society believe in its impact. To again refer to 1970s popular television comedies: Contemporaries assigned considerable standing to such shows by

making their heroes and props into long-lasting national symbols, museum exhibits, and material for election campaigns and academic research. The American sitcom *All in the Family* and its lead character Archie Bunker became national icons, with Archie's living room chair being enshrined in the National Museum of American History⁴⁰.

The next concept, «framing», points to the way contemporaries used mass media content as a script for their own negotiations of social change. «Framing» is a mechanism by which mass media provide viewers with narratives and frames into which they can insert their own personal experiences and memories of public debates. Media scholars define frames as «organizing ideas», «organizing themes», or «patterns of presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion»⁴¹. They function like templates, which media producers use and repeat while creating media messages. The concept of «framing» has resulted in compelling studies of political discourses in modern newspapers. For example, an interdisciplinary project by Myra Marx Ferree, William Anthony Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht analysed the North American and German press debate on abortion, using statistical coding of thousands of articles in addition to interviews with key players. It differentiates between several forums of debate (the arena, the gallery, and the backstage) and develops useful concepts such as «critical discourse moments», the «discursive opportunity structure», and «validator media»⁴².

«Validator media» for Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, and Rucht are mass media with particularly high standing both within the fields of journalism, politics and elsewhere – what historians might call the leading media of the mass media ensemble. During the 1970s, television played this role, by now reaching all regions and classes, while the technical problems of the beginning had been overcome. Viewers could only choose between very few channels, sending part of the day only, but almost everyone had a TV. This was the «era of limited choice», during which the scarcity of programming on offer amplified the medium's impact. During prime hours, a select few channels aired programs for wide audiences and aimed at «family viewing» (as opposed to later decades when careful targeting of specific demographic groups with different formats became the norm in broadcasting). Therefore, everyday sociability was underpinned by the common experience of large swathes of the population having watched the same broadcast the evening before. It is difficult to underestimate the standing of prime-time television shows during the era of limited choice. In most European countries, this period lasted from the 1960s to the early 1980s, by which time privatization and channel proliferation took hold⁴³.

During the era of limited choice, certain blockbusters – massively popular TV series, cinema films, or pop music hits – delivered almost

universally known, endlessly returning, and structurally easy to understand stories that became «framing scripts» through which viewers could make sense of their world and construct their own multiple and fluid identities. In a process of continual negotiation, individuals struggle to give meaning to their lives, to relate them to larger units (such as nations or social groups). They do so in multiple ways, constructing parallel identities as, for example, citizens, workers, or women. As we negotiate and communicate our identities through language, we make use of the formal structures of stories: temporal and spatial order, a grammar-clarifying agency, a beginning and an ending, a climax and possibly unexpected twists. Often, our storytelling relies on familiar heroes and a limited number of tropes or frames⁴⁴. Media blockbusters offered a vocabulary, an imagery, and characters to weave into personal stories: heroes and villains such as Archie Bunker the bigot, fun patterns such as a TV character's hairdo, accent, or malapropisms. Recurring catchphrases taken from TV, film, or music worked their way into ordinary people's narratives, as did costumes, hairstyles, or theme tunes. Referring to frames from popular mass media served to negotiate values in a way that was fun and removed from personal (possibly painful or embarrassing) experiences. It allowed viewers to communicate personal identities to others who also, very presumably, had received the same media messages. And as mass media engaged in the selection of frames, they also set limits to people's storytelling. Mass media's «framing scripts» can exclude, dominate, and suppress minority identities and alternative stories.

Lastly, to explore «agenda-setting» means asking whether mass media raise awareness of particular issues by introducing new topics or reintroducing old topics to public and political debate. «Agenda-setting» refers to the selection of topics for mass media coverage, and this includes the topics' placement, repetition, and the internal structure with which they are presented⁴⁵. Media scholars posit that agenda-setting does not tell people what to think, but what to think about. The less political knowledge and education recipients can draw on, the more likely they are to «accept the priorities suggested by the media»⁴⁶.

5. *Transnational media history and nation-building mass media*

To a certain extent, modern mass media always serve a transnational function because they transmit news and entertainment within and beyond borders. If we define «transnational» exchanges as goods, people, or ideas travelling from one country to another, radio and television waves – permeating state borders – qualify as transnational in nature, just like many printed media, which are read beyond the

confines of one nation. Radio and television audiences naturally transcend political borders, a fact much exploited during the Cold War when East Germans in the German Democratic Republic were targeted by West German broadcasts and vice versa, or Radio Liberty catered to audiences in Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe. Moreover, as the twentieth century progressed, these media increasingly depended on an international market for formats and finished content. The considerable expense involved in producing programs led to a lively trade of series and formats from the 1950s onwards, even across the iron curtain. International programming fairs developed, and large broadcasters or production centers such as the BBC and Hollywood began to sell their output to clients worldwide. European TV channels also collaborated from the beginning, with the Eurovision song contest being a case in point. The worldwide exchange of broadcasting personnel and techniques developed in a similar vein.

In spite of the undeniably transnational nature of audio-visual mass media, scholars traditionally focused almost exclusively on the national aspects of their history. They concentrated on national frameworks because modern mass media developed together with the nation state, and were employed as its tools from the beginning⁴⁷. Even in the context of international research cooperations, projects were typically investigated within single-nation settings, often resulting in edited volumes with «nation-by-chapter reporting» without a real synthesis or comparison⁴⁸. Since the 1990s, Anglo-American scholars (whose cultural studies approach for a long time dominated the field of television studies) strongly emphasized television's nation-building function. They saw electronic and audio-visual media as powerful instruments of nation-building, building on Benedict Anderson who understood media as key players in the collective construction of «imagined communities»⁴⁹. Radio and then TV emerged as the storyteller of national myths and keeper of the national calendar. Broadcasting served the processes of national integration and mobilization, telling national stories and binding regions together with a new, common language. In this way, radio and TV served both democratic and dictatorial modern states, as exemplified by Roosevelt's fireside chats or Führer speeches broadcast on *Volksempfänger* sets. Media scholars stressed that television embodied «the modernist intent of engineering a national identity» like no other medium (Jean K. Chalaby) and fulfilled from the 1950s onwards a «key role as a stabilizing factor of the national experience»⁵⁰.

Countering this trend, researchers more recently began to explore transnational contexts. One of the first forces fueling the transnational turn in media history was the desire, and existence of funding

opportunities, for a Europeanization of research. Several projects embarked on the search for an «European identity» fostered by mass media. Studies emerged that explored the Europe-wide trade in programming or cross-border negotiations about technical broadcasting standards. Therefore, we now have a history of the Eurovision network, of the European Song contest, of the European Broadcasting Union, and of the controversy about the technical standardization of color broadcasting⁵¹. Since 2004, the European Television History Network held several conferences and put a large amount of source material online⁵². At the end, though, researchers concluded that there was and is no such thing as a European media landscape or media-induced European identity. A recent edited volume summarized: «What has become evident is the dominance of ‘national’ political and cultural context that informs the signifying practices of television in Europe»⁵³.

Similar caution has been expressed by scholars who investigated the supposed «Americanization» or «Globalization» process of national cultures via imported media content during the second half of the twentieth century. Contrary to popular perception, there was no huge, unchecked one-way Americanization process to which European mass media succumbed after 1945. Most television genres, for example, such as news, children’s programming, documentaries, drama and comedy series, remained dominated by nationally produced broadcasts until the late twentieth century. While American models were undeniably influential, European broadcasters did not simply import and copy U.S. productions. Rather, «mutual inspiration and co-operation», globalization processes, and European political decisions resulted in hybrid and popularized forms of broadcasting on the continent. To cite the media historian Ib Bondebjerg:

«American series taught the Europeans many a lesson on how to reach an audience ... In the history of European television it has sometimes been too easy to blame the Americans. Many of the developments in European television have not been caused by American dominance, but by internal struggles between popular culture and high culture within the nation-states of Europe»⁵⁴.

Since 2010, the transnational turn in the humanities reached the discipline of media history with full force. That year, the journal «Media History» presented a special issue on transnational television history with contributions on the transnational careers of individual producers and correspondents, and the import and export of several programming formats⁵⁵. «Glocal» media scholarship now began to embrace the study of globally traded TV formats and the way they are translated and received by local producers and audiences. Such work typically concentrates on post-2000 programming, privileges production over reception contexts, and only rarely engages with historical examples⁵⁶. While the patterns and flows of the more recent

programming trade and the localization of travelling television texts receive much attention, pre-1980 programming and audience responses are all but ignored⁵⁷.

These new studies raise important questions about modern mass media's transnational links and cross-border effects while often reinforcing that the local or national framework largely trumped the transnational. Whenever a format is imported, it will quickly be nationalized or localized, as I have argued elsewhere in regard to the export of the British sitcom format *Till Death Us Do Part*. This series' West German and American versions in the 1970s comprehensively adapted characters, plots, and storylines to national specificities and purged the original format of all foreign references. The producers in the three involved countries even used the series to engage in the stereotyping of the national other, poking fun at foreigners and the international variants of their own programs. Audiences in West Germany and the United States saw the format as a typical expression of their own national identity, ignoring that it had been imported from Britain. Paradoxically, the imported television heroes became national idols, their foreign ancestry quickly forgotten – a reminder that all national identities are complex puzzles, cobbled together from foreign as well as domestic sources⁵⁸. Therefore, the transnational context in which mass media messages are produced can end up fueling the nationalizing function of the medium at large.

One of the most influential voices in the debate on global and local media impact has been Arjun Appadurai. In his book *Modernity at Large*, he describes the world we live in as one globalized by the media. Audiences now split into «deterritorialized» groups, transcending national borders. Koreans in American exile may be watching Korean channels on the internet, or Turkish migrants in Germany may be following their favorite Turkish sitcom via recorded video cassettes or on satellite TV. As these migrant groups form «diasporic public spheres» abroad, the mass media contribute to the decline of nation states in a globalizing world. Audiences as well as media become more transnational in nature⁵⁹. Appadurai's concepts of deterritorialized audiences and diasporic public spheres invigorated global and transnational approaches to media history.

Nevertheless, the staying power of nationalism, and of those Twentieth century leading media that became powerful instruments of nation-building – TV, radio, and penny papers – should not be underestimated. The intriguing vision of a transnational media world with deterritorialized audiences is specific to the twenty-first century or at the most to the period from the late 1990s onwards. Only when the internet became the new leading medium, the mass media ensemble reconfigured itself and television was partially dethroned. But even today, in 2018, the nationalizing power of audio-visual media

has not waned completely. In highly developed countries, huge sums are still being spent on television advertising for election campaigns and product launches. Public health and pacification drives in less developed countries still use radio and television as the instruments of choice. NGO projects have long harnessed audio-visual mass media power to bring about social change around the globe, typically for purposes of conflict resolution and prevention⁶⁰. Light entertainment real-life drama and soap series, locally produced and weaving in current issues in a limited number of subplots, have been shown to be most effective at changing behavior. Several recent surveys document the success of broadcast interventions in spreading awareness of HIV/AIDS, lowering fertility rates and tackling domestic violence in Ethiopia, Tanzania, and South Africa⁶¹. To this day, television stars such as Donald Trump and owners of TV stations such as Silvio Berlusconi have built successful political careers on broadcasting. They use particular television channels to play to their base and bolster their popular support on a daily basis. The Brexit campaign in Britain, with its nationalist agenda, also relied to a large extent on tabloids⁶². The era of the traditional nation-building mass media is not over yet, even if the internet may already play a deterritorializing role for some pockets of society.

Looking at the twentieth century from today, we can see the power of the nation state and the nation-building function of mass media more clearly than ever. Therefore, historical studies of transnational media links and exchanges should not simply be seen as an antithesis to the study of media history in nationalized settings. Rather, transnational approaches can enrich our understanding of mass media's nationalizing role in modern history by keeping questions of national development and nation-building in mind. Historians can fruitfully design research projects, which do not replicate the national map but, in their approach, still take the nation into account. Projects on the mass media in modern history can focus not only on national entities, but also on villages, towns, cities, regions, borderlands, empires, and colonies. They can investigate multi-national or multi-regional comparisons, center-periphery exchanges and cross-border travels, or audiences beyond borders without having to disprove the mass media's key role in constructing national identities. For instance, how did readers, viewers, and listeners receive and use media messages in borderland regions? To what extent were foreign broadcasts able to disrupt or destroy the cocoon of a nationalized mass media ensemble? Which hybrid forms of media programming or reception patterns developed in borderlands or among migrant audiences? To what extent were local or regional mass media discourses able to resist the impact of nationalizing mass media? There are many ways to engage meaningfully with questions of national identity building and national agenda setting in non-national research settings.

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¹ I apply the term «media» to vehicles of mass communication in which texts are being publicized, not (in the wider sense) to technical tools such as the telephone or the video recorder. Cf. A. VOWINCKEL, *Mediengeschichte*, Version: 1.0, in «Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte» (accessed February 11, 2010), <https://docupedia.de/zg/Mediengeschichte?oldid=75527> (accessed February 8, 2018).

² For the French Revolution, see R. CHARTIER, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Durham N.C., Duke University Press, 1991; R. DARNTON, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Prerevolutionary France*, London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1996. For similar debates on radio and Nazi Germany, or scandals in imperial Germany, see C. ROSS, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, and M. KOHLRAUSCH, *Der Monarch im Skandal: Die Logik der Massenmedien und die Transformation der wilhelminischen Monarchie*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2005.

³ C. VON HODENBERG, *Expeditionen in den Methodenschubengel: Herausforderungen der Zeitgeschichtsforschung im Fernsehzeitalter*, in «Journal of Modern European History», 10, 2012, pp. 24-48; F. BÖSCH, *Mass Media and Historical Change: Germany in International Perspective 1400 to the Present*, New York - Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 9-11.

⁴ American historians were first in correcting this problem, for example in works on the history of the Vietnam war or sixties protest, where TV was key to political and cultural developments. Cf. etwa D.C. HALLIN, *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam*, New York, Verlag?, 1986; T. GITLIN, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003.

⁵ See P. BREN, *The Greengrocer and his TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2011; K. ROTH-EY, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War*, Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2011; M. VOGEL, *Unruhe im Fernsehen: Protestbewegung und öffentlich-rechtliche Berichterstattung in den 1960er Jahren*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2010.

⁶ See C. VON HODENBERG (ed.), *Frank Bösch, Jérôme Bourdon, Michael Meyen, Lynn Spiegel. Roundtable. Writing (Media) History in the Age of Audiovisual and Digital Media*, in «Journal of Modern European History», 10, 2012, pp. 98-116.

⁷ S. HALL, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, Birmingham, Centre for Cultural Studies, 1973; J. FISKE, *Television Culture*, London, Routledge, 1987. For the approach of media uses (*Mediennutzung*), see also M. MEYEN, *Mediennutzung: Mediaforschung, Medienfunktionen, Nutzungsmuster*, 2nd ed., Konstanz, UVK, 2004.

⁸ For the highly charged debate on violence on-screen, see M. BARKER - J. PETLEY, *Introduction: From Bad Research to Good – a Guide for the Perplexed*, in M. BARKER - J. PETLEY (eds.), *Ill Effects: The Media/Violence*

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⁹ For example Dorothy Hobson, David Morley, and Ien Ang; see H. WOOD, *Talking with Television: Women, Talk Shows and Modern Self-Reflexivity*, Urbana IL, University of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 101-105; C. BRUNSDON - D. MORLEY, *The Nationwide Television Studies*, New York, Routledge, 2005.

¹⁰ D. HOBSON, *From Crossroads to Wife Swap: Learning from Audiences*, in «Critical Studies in Television», 1, 2006, pp. 121-128, here pp. 124-125; H. WOOD - L. TAYLOR, *Feeling Sentimental about Television and Audiences*, in «Cinema Journal», 47, 2008, pp. 144-151, here p. 147.

¹¹ New technologies and the deregulation of the TV industry have led to the decline of mass audiences and family viewing, with users navigating media content increasingly on their own terms in «multi-set, multi-channel and multi-media» homes. D. JERMYN - S. HOLMES, *The Audience is Dead; Long Live the Audience!*, in «Critical Studies in Television», 1, 2006, pp. 49-57, here pp. 49-50.

¹² See H. WOOD, *Talking with Television*; B. SKEGGS - H. WOOD, *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value*, London, Routledge, 2012, 14??, pp. 124-125.

¹³ *Ibid.* and B. SKEGGS - H. WOOD, *Reality Television and Class*, London, Palgrave, 2011.

¹⁴ L. SPIGEL, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*, Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 187.

¹⁵ See for example, A. BODROGHKOZY, *Groove Tube: Sixties Television and the Youth Rebellion*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2001, 17; L. SPIGEL - M. CURTIN, *Introduction*, in L. SPIGEL - M. CURTIN (eds.), *The Revolution Wasn't Televised: Sixties Television and Social Conflict*, London, Routledge, 1997, pp. 1-18, here p. 5.

¹⁶ All quoted in *Writing (media) History*, in «Journal of Modern European History», 10, 2012, pp. 98-116. For an example of media uses investigated with oral history methods, see M. MEYEN, *Denver Clan und Neues Deutschland: Mediennutzung in der DDR*, Berlin, Christoph Links, 2003.

¹⁷ Cf. J. HABERMAS, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1990; K. IMHOF, *Öffentlichkeit als historische Kategorie und als Kategorie der Historie*, in «Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte», 46, 1996, pp. 3-25, here pp. 4, 12-13; J. REQUATE, *Öffentlichkeit und Medien als Gegenstände historischer Analyse*, in «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 25, 1999, pp. 5-32, here pp. 8-9, 15-16; H. MAH, *Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians*, in «Journal of Modern History», 72, 2000, pp. 153-182.

¹⁸ A. SCHILDT, *Das Jahrhundert der Massenmedien: Ansichten zu einer künftigen Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit*, in «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 27, 2001, pp. 177-206, here pp. 183-184. The dispositif approach is taken by T. STEINMAURER, *Tele-Visionen: Zur Theorie und Geschichte des*

Fernsehempfangs, Innsbruck - Wien, Studienverlag, 1999; C. LENK, *Die Erscheinung des Rundfunks: Einführung und Nutzung eines neuen Mediums 1923-1932*, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997.

¹⁹ For a sociological study which sees journalists as «gatekeepers» and «players», see M.M. FERREE et al., *Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁰ U. DANIEL, *Beziehungsgeschichten: Politik und Medien im 20. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg, Hamburger Edition, 2018, p. 18.

²¹ With references to studies on the USSR and the GDR: F. BÖSCH, *Mass Media and Historical Change*, pp. 138, 141, 144. For the GDR: F. KUSCHEL, *Schwarz Hörer, Schwarzseher und heimliche Leser: Die DDR und die Westmedien*, Göttingen, Wallstein, 2016.

²² A. SCHILDT, *Das Jahrhundert der Massenmedien: Ansichten zu einer künftigen Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit*, in «Geschichte und Gesellschaft», 27, 2001, pp. 177-206.

²³ For the 1950s and sleep: C. VON HODENBERG, *Square-Eyed Farmers and Gloomy Ethnographers: The Advent of Television in the West German Village*, in «Journal of Contemporary History», 51, 2016, pp. 839-865. For the 1960s and mirroring: C. VON HODENBERG, *Television's Moment: Sitcom Audiences and the Sixties Cultural Revolution*, New York - Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2015, p. 292.

²⁴ A. FICKERS, *Nationale Traditionen und internationale Trends in der Fernsehgeschichtsschreibung. Eine historiographische Skizze*, in *montage/av*:

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²⁵ M. MEYEN, *Medialisierung*, in «Medien und
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²⁶ S. LIVINGSTONE, *Foreword: Coming to Terms with Mediatization*, in K.
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²⁷ K. LUNDBY, *Introduction: «Mediatization» as key*, in K. LUNDBY
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²⁸ F. BÖSCH - N. FREI, *Einleitung*, in F. BÖSCH - N. FREI (eds.),
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²⁹ B. WEISBROD, *Öffentlichkeit als politischer Prozeß: Dimensionen der
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³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 15-16, and F. BÖSCH - N. FREI, *Einleitung*, pp. 9-10.

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³⁷ J. BOURDON, *Too Much Text, Not Enough Institution, and an Elusive Public: How (not) to Write Media History*, in «Journal of Modern European History», 2012, pp. 102-107, here p. 106. See also J. BOURDON, *Media Remembering: The Contribution of Life Story Methodology to Media / Memory Research*, in M. NEIGER et al. (eds.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 62-76.

³⁸ See C. VON HODENBERG, *Square-eyed Farmers*.

³⁹ C. VON HODENBERG, *Television's Moment*, chapter 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 5.

⁴¹ Quoted from C. DE VREESE, *Frames in Television News: British, Danish, and Dutch Television News Coverage of the Introduction of the Euro*, in S. HJARVARD (ed.), *News in a Globalized Society*, Göteborg, Nordicom, 2001, pp. 179-193, here p. 180.

⁴² M.M. FERREE et al., *Shaping Abortion Discourse*.

⁴³ For the «era of limited choice» (or «Zeitalter der knappen Kanäle»), see C. VON HODENBERG, *Television's Moment*, p. 75. Cf. John Ellis concept of the «era of scarcity», which begins already with TV's inception (J. ELLIS, *Seeing Things*, 39, 46). Ute Daniel defines an «era of classical mass media» («Periode der klassischen Massenmedien»), which lasted from roughly 1900 to the 1980s: U. DANIEL, *Beziehungsgeschichten*, 14.

⁴⁴ There is no static national, gender or class identity at any one time. The ongoing negotiation of identity is asymmetrical and subject to power hierarchies. J.E. TOEWS, *Historiography as Exorcism: Conjuring up «Foreign» Worlds and Historicizing Subjects in the Context of the Multiculturalism Debate*, in «Theory and Society», 27, 1998, pp. 535-564, here pp. 535, 539, 551.

⁴⁵ M. SCHENK, *Medienwirkungsforschung*, 3rd ed., Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

⁴⁶ C.A. COOPER - M. B. BAILEY, *Entertainment Media and Political Knowledge: Do People Get any Thruth out of Truthiness?*, in J.J. FOY (ed.), *Homer Simpson goes to Washington: American Politics through Popular Culture*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 2008, pp. 133-150, here p. 134.

⁴⁷ Surveys of television history, for example, typically operate on a national level. See E. BARNOUW, *A History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 3 vols, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966-1970; A. BRIGGS, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, 5 vols., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961-1995; K. HICKETHIER - P. HOFF, *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens*, Stuttgart, J.B. Metzler, 1998; R. STEINMETZ et al., *Deutsches Fernsehen Ost: Eine Programmggeschichte des DDR-Fernsehens*, Berlin, Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2008; H. KREUZER - C. W. THOMSEN (eds.), *Geschichte des Fernsehens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 5 vols., München, Fink, 1993-1994.

⁴⁸ The methodological basis of many multinational cooperations was too diverse to result in meaningful comparison, as such leading to «unexciting» findings, as the British scholar Sonia Livingstone posits; S. LIVINGSTONE, *On the Challenges of Cross-National Comparative Media Research*, in «European Journal of Communication», 18, 2003, pp. 477-500, here p. 481.

⁴⁹ B. ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso Books, 1983.

⁵⁰ J.K. CHALABY, *Towards an Understanding of Media Transnationalism*, in J.K. CHALABY (ed.), *Transnational Television Worldwide: Towards a New Media Order*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2005, p. 1; A. FICKERS, *Nationale Traditionen und internationale Trends*, p. 19. Fickers provides an overview of the historical literature on TV in almost all Western European countries.

⁵¹ See I. RAYKOFF - R. TOBIN, *A Song for Europe: Popular Music and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, Aldershot, Routledge, 2007; W. DEGENHARDT - E. STRAUTZ, *Auf der Suche nach dem europäischen Programm: Die Eurovision 1954-1970*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 1999; R. ZELLER, *Die EBU - Union Européenne de Radio-Télévision (UER) – European Broadcasting Union (EBU): Internationale Rundfunkkooperation im Wandel*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 1999; A. FICKERS, «Politique de la grandeur» versus «Made in Germany»: *Politische Kulturgeschichte der Technik am Beispiel der PAL-SECAM-Kontroverse*, München, Oldenbourg, 2007.

⁵² See the synthesis of this project by media scholars from over 20 countries in J. BIGNELL - A. FICKERS (eds.), *A European Television History*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

⁵³ (Emphasis added by the author). S. DE LEEUW et al., *TV Nations or Global Medium? European Television between National Institution and Window on the World*, in J. BIGNELL - A. FICKERS (eds.), *A European Television History*, pp. 127-153, here p. 151.

⁵⁴ I. BONDEBJERG et al., *American Television: Point of Reference or European Nightmare?*, in J. BIGNELL - A. FICKERS (eds.), *A European Television History*, pp. 154-181, here pp. 180-181.

⁵⁵ «Media History», 16, 2010, 1, with an introduction by A. Fickers and C. Johnson and contributions by S. de Leeuw, M. Hilmes, and E. Müller.

⁵⁶ See the 2013 special issue of the journal «Critical Studies in Television» 8, 2; J. MCCABE - K. AKASS (eds.), *TV's Betty Goes Global: From Telenovela to International Brand*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2013; A. MORAN (ed.), *TV Formats Worldwide: Localizing Global Programs*, Bristol, Intellect, 2009; T.G. OREN - S. SHAHAF (eds.), *Global Television Formats: Understanding Television across Borders*, New York, Routledge, 2012.

⁵⁷ A rare historical approach is applied by C. FERRARI, «National Mike»: *Global Host and Global Formats in Early Italian Television*, in T.G. OREN - S. SHAHAF (eds.), *Global Television Formats*, pp. 128-147. See also E. WEISSMANN, *Transnational Television Drama: Special Relations and Mutual Influence between the US and UK*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

⁵⁸ C. VON HODENBERG, *Television's Moment*, chapter 8.

⁵⁹ A. APPADURAI, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 1-11.

⁶⁰ See the «Search for Common Ground» project, operating in twenty countries (www.sfcg.org/sfcg/sfcg_evaluations.html) and the California-based organization «Equal Access», working in Afghanistan, Nepal, Laos, Cambodia and elsewhere. www.equalaccess.org/ (accessed February 8, 2018).

⁶¹ See the 2002-2004 radio series *Yeken Kignit* (www.populationmedia.org/where/ethiopia/yeken-kignit/ethiopia-results/) and the South African *Soul City* series (www.soulcity.org.za/, accessed February 20, 2013). Cf. S. USDIN et al., *Achieving Social Change on Gender-Based Violence: A Report on the Impact Evaluation of Soul City's Fourth Series*, in «Social Science and Medicine», 61, 2005, pp. 2434-2445; P.W. VAUGHAN - E.M. ROGERS, *A Staged Model of Communication Effects: Evidence from an Entertainment-Education Radio Soap Opera in Tanzania*, in «Journal of Health Communication», 5, 2000, pp. 203-227.

⁶² See M. MOORE - G. RAMSEY, *UK Media Coverage of the 2016 EU Referendum Campaign*, London, King's College London's Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power, 2017.