REVIEW ESSAY

Cold War Radio: The Russian Broadcasts of the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. By Mark G. Pomar. Lincoln: Potomac Books, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press, 2022. xvi, 307 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photogrpahs. $34.95, hard cover.

Remapping Cold War Media: Institutions, Infrastructures, Translations. Ed. Alice Lovejoy and Mari Pajala. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022. ix, 312 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Filmography. Illustrations. Photographs. $36.00, paper.

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In the last decade, scholarship on Cold War media has become more ambitious and expansive. Scholars have not only produced pathbreaking studies outlining the contours of national media systems, but have also taken advantage of transnational, global, and comparative methodologies to cast the Cold War's cross-border exchanges and rivalries in a new light.[1] The growing sophistication of these studies can be glimpsed not only in the range of subjects covered, but also in the more complex geopolitical dynamics they reveal.[2] Scholars examining the US-Soviet rivalry eschew triumphalism, revealing how media actors on both sides of the Cold War divide were not dupes, but inevitably shaped by their own political and cultural context.[3] Other scholars, meanwhile, have gone beyond the US-Soviet rivalry to explore media exchanges between the so-called "second" and "third" worlds after decolonization, as well as transnationalism within the socialist world.[4]

1. The most far-reaching national history is Kristin Roth-Ey's *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca, 2011). For transnational and comparative histories see Thomas Beutelschmidt, *Ost—West—Global: Das sozialistische Fernsehen im Kalten Krieg* (Leipzig, 2017); Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism* (Durham, 2016); Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable, *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television* (Cambridge, Eng., 2018). Worthwhile edited volumes include Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, and Christian Henrich-Franke, eds., *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War* (Baden-Baden, 2013); Kirsten Bönker, Julia Obertreis, and Sven Grampp, eds. *Television Beyond and Across the Iron Curtain* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016); Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal, *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam, 2012); Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (New York, 2012), 1–20.

2. For a sample of the diverse range of subjects covered see Timothy Havens, Anikó Imre, and Katalin Lustyik, eds., *Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism* (New York, 2013); Gabrielle Hecht, ed., *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011); Diana Lemberg, *Barriers Down: How American Power and Free-Flow Policies Shaped Global Media* (New York, 2019); James Schwoch, *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946–1969* (Urbana, 2009).

3. Dina Fainberg, *Cold War Correspondents: Soviet and American Reporters on the Ideological Frontlines* (Baltimore, 2021).

4. Kerry Bystrom, Monica Popescu, Katherine Zien, eds., *The Cultural Cold War and the Global South: Sites of Contest and Communitas* (New York, 2021); Rossen Djagalov,

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The two books in this review embody two modes of practicing Cold War media history. Mark G. Pomar's account of Voice of America and Radio Liberty's Russian broadcasts paints the Cold War in the time-honored way: as a US-Soviet contest won by the United States through the force of ideas. Alice Lovejoy and Mari Pajala's volume, by contrast, situates the Cold War in a wider geographical frame and seeks to understand how media were disseminated, translated, and received across borders. Both books deliver insights into the role of media in the Cold War and offer, through their divergent readings of Cold War media history, a vision of the field's past and future.

Pomar's *Cold War Radio* narrates the media Cold War from the inside. Director of the Soviet Division of the Voice of America (VOA), Assistant Director of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Russian Service, and executive director of the Board for International Broadcasting, Pomar was a broadcasting executive with close ties to the US political establishment in the 1980s and early 1990s. His book presents a historical account of the evolution of VOA and REF/RL, an analysis of their programming, and an eyewitness account of the discussions and conflicts that shaped VOA and RFE/RL's broadcasts.

At *Cold War Radio*'s heart, taking up around half of the book, is a thematic analysis of VOA and RL's programming, which analyzes its programs defending human rights, its arts and culture output, and its religious coverage. These chapters seek to dispel criticisms that VOA and RL's Russian service was merely propagandistic. Pomar's tone is one of advocacy, and on this measure he successfully paints a picture of the breadth and intelligence of VOA and RL's discussions of the contemporary Soviet Union, ranging from round-table discussions of *samizdat* to songs by Soviet bards. The book gives the impression that VOA and RL broadcasts created an alternative public sphere that brought to listeners competing ideas from both the conservative and liberal ends of the political spectrum. But he also points to the phenomenological aspects of radio listening that text cannot quite capture. Radio, in his view, offers "a critical nexus of facts and emotions" (98) in the process of transporting disembodied voices across the airwaves. It is one of the virtues of this book that it might encourage readers to sample the OSA's collections and listen to those broadcasts for themselves.

Alongside Pomar's discussion of VOA and RFE/RL's programming is a historical narrative taking readers from the end of World War II to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Here, the book's narrative is more contentious. Much of what is presented in these chapters—particularly its account of the stations' early years—draws on secondary sources and will be familiar to well-read media scholars. What is most striking, perhaps, is Pomar's implicit endorsement of the Reaganite media strategy, which put an end to the more balanced approach that the radios—and especially VOA—had pursued during détente to foster better relations with the USSR. Ronald Reagan's shift in approach offered increasing opportunities for attacks on the Soviet regime (which had become more muted in the 1970s), more airtime for the regime's critics, including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and the appointment of executives committed to

From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third World (Montreal, 2020); Mihelj & Huxtable, *From Media Systems,* 177–204.

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undermining the Soviet regime. This full-blooded approach exposed divisions among VOA and RFE/RL staff between "purists," Pomar's term for journalists who believed in objectivity above all, and "strategists"—including many Russian émigrés—who considered the weakening, and eventual overthrow, of Soviet communism to be the ultimate goal. Ultimately, Pomar sides with this latter group: he sees the Reagan era as "open[ing] the door to a stream of creative programs . . . that resonated with the Russian audience and had a positive impact on political developments in the Soviet Union . . ." (85).

Pomar chooses to end his narrative at a point of triumph. In a chapter titled "Victory Lap," the book shifts focus from the US-Russian rivalry that sustains the rest of the book to Eastern Europe, where the radios' executives are feted as "heroes" (256) by the architects of the 1989 revolutions. The book ends in Moscow in March 1993 at a gala reception in honor of RFE/RL. Song poet Bulat Okudzhava sings in praise of the broadcaster, while Mikhail Gorbachev chats to executives about the station's role in the Soviet Union's downfall (Pomar serves as his interpreter). This ending is perhaps justified from the perspective of Pomar's career—he left RFE/RL in 1993 to become a senior executive at IREX—but it is too convenient as a narrative arc. By ending the story in the early 1990s, there is no need for Pomar to reflect on the difficulties of Russia's transition to a market economy—nor to the rise of Russian nationalism that followed.

A book-jacket blurb for *Cold War Radio* is provided by former Board of Broadcasting executive Steve Forbes, best known today for his failed runs in the 1996 and 2000 Republican primaries. He avers that the reader will "understand that while Putin's rise was not inevitable, it did combine very real elements of Russia's past." Perhaps not Putin's *rise*, but the book certainly shows that the Putinist ideology had its roots in Russian conservative currents prominent in the 1970s and 80s. We know this because Radio Liberty broadcast those ideas to its listeners. The broadcaster gave ample airtime to conservative voices during the final Soviet decades, and many of the station's staff, Pomar reveals, were nationalists who equated the Soviet Union with Greater Russia. Some Russian liberals and Board of Broadcast staffers criticized VOA and RL for its illiberal broadcasts, yet Pomar claims that such attacks were "unfair" (176) and "did a disservice to RFE/RL" (149). Responding to human rights activist Liudmila Alekseeva's criticisms of Gleb Rahr for idealizing autocracy and propagating nationalist ideas, Pomar argues that Rahr's programs tried "to give his audience hope that Russia could emerge from under the rubble of communism and resurrect its culture and religion, asserting its rightful place among the great nations of the world" (163). Broadcasting nationalist voices, claims Pomar, was justified by the greater goal of overthrowing communism: "If you were going to empower Russian broadcasters to fight communism and reach a critical audience in the Soviet Union," he writes, "you could not expect them to act and sound like proper East Coast liberals" (85). To blame US broadcasting for the tragedy of Putin's Russia would be excessive, but given that the book is so keen to take its share of the credit for VOA and RL's role in communism's downfall, a degree of reflection might seem appropriate. In fact, the opposite happens: Pomar seems to defend positive broadcasts about conservatives and nationalist figures by citing Putin's

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admiration for such figures, who include Ivan Il′in and Konstantin Leont′ev (161–64). And while it is probably true, as Pomar claims, that presenters like Rahr were responding to an anti-communist, nationalist strand of their listenership, Russia's brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine—and the media war that has accompanied it—places the station's decision to "[appeal] to traditional values" (147) in a new light.

Cold War Radio is not an academic treatise and experts may be frustrated at the book's lack of rigor. Pomar, despite citing a few primary sources, does not consult archival repositories, while the bibliography runs to only two pages. This makes Pomar's book a readable memoir, an unreliable historical account, and a frustrating scholarly analysis. Being an insider is not a barrier to writing an analytical history of Cold War radio—in fact, some of the most successful histories have come from RFL/RL staffers. But those authors were able to put their own views aside to produce astute readings of Cold War broadcasting. For scholars of Cold War radio, work by Arch Puddington, Michael Nelson, Richard Cummings, A. Ross Johnson, and Eugene Parta represent a better starting point for academics and students.[5] Particularly disappointing is the book's failure to explore the relationship between RL's Russian-language services and its services for other Soviet republics. To be sure, one expects a book written by the Assistant Director of Russian programming to focus mainly on Russian-language broadcasting. Nevertheless, Pomar says as much about non-Russian services as an interviewee in Arch Puddington's *Broadcasting Freedom* as he does in *Cold War Radio*.[6] Pomar's contributions to that volume made it clear that he thought RL had made serious errors; such criticisms are rather more muted in this volume.

Though these are significant criticisms, Pomar's volume still represents a valuable primary source that will help scholars to better understand the inner workings of Cold War radio, and offers a useful supplement to existing research on the US political and security establishment's role in Cold War broadcasting. In addition, the book gives a strong impression of the diversity of opinion among Russian émigré intellectuals, showing how their differences played out on the airwaves and behind the scenes. *Cold War Radio* may therefore be as useful for scholars of Russian émigré culture as it is for academics researching Cold War media.

While Pomar's book neglects recent scholarship, *Remapping Cold War Media*, edited by Alice Lovejoy and Mari Pajala, gives readers a better sense of where the field currently stands. The product of a conference on European Cold War media cultures at the University of Minnesota in 2017, the book draws on recent attempts to globalize media studies and expand the study of

5. Richard H. Cummings, *Radio Free Europe's "Crusade for Freedom": Rallying Americans Behind Cold War Broadcasting, 1950–1960* (Jefferson, NC, 2010); A. Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond* (Washington, DC, 2010); A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, eds., *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, A Collection of Studies and Documents* (Budapest, 2010); Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens: The Battles of Western Broadcasting in the Cold War* (Syracuse, 1997); Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom*.

6. Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY, 2003), 288–95.

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the Cultural Cold War beyond a US-Soviet framework. In their introduction, Lovejoy and Pajala concede that the Cold War's dynamics tended towards distinct media infrastructures with clear ideological dividing lines, but they prefer to focus on connections and affinities across those divides. While those links were never simple or frictionless, the editors are interested in challenging simplistic ideas about a media Iron Curtain. As the book's subtitle suggests, the book emphasizes the ways that ideas, people, money, and objects travelled across borders, as well as the role of different media in facilitating those movements and the role of "improvisation and experimentation" (5) in Cold War media production.

The book is divided into four sections, each exploring a different facet of Cold War media transnationalism (though there is ample crossover between the four sections). Part one discusses what the editors call "mobile forms": media that crossed Cold War borders, including panoramic photography (Katie Trumpener) and Soviet dramas (Anu Koivunen). The most interesting chapter, by Rosamund Johnson, points to a considerable degree of artistic experimentation even in the darkest days of Stalinism. She shows that Czechoslovak radio served both as an anti-cosmopolitan *and* cosmopolitan medium: it was a conduit for communist regimes' insular messages but also a vehicle for international culture, especially through the broadcasts of stations like RFE. *The Peace Train*, a radio cantata broadcast in 1950, was indicative of this paradox: it disseminated the regime's internationalist messages while inaugurating a socialist realist form of jazz, which smoothed out its rough edges (drum solos, the "bourgeois" saxophone, vocal harmonies), despite nodding to the form's black origins.

The book's second section examines the "processes of interpretation, misinterpretation, and . . . disagreement" (6) that characterized the movement of Cold War texts across borders. Here, the emphasis is on transnational transfers within the socialist bloc, as glimpsed in Masha Salazkina's interesting discussion of Soviet cinematic models in newly-communist Cuba; from west to east, which Jaroslav Švelch explores in a fascinating chapter on Czechoslovak adaptations of the ZX Spectrum game *Manic Miner* (1983); or from east to west, which is the focus of Marie Cronqvist's contribution on the reception of Radio Berlin International in Sweden and Sonja Simonyi's chapter on the reception of Hungarian directors at the Mannheim Film Festival. Both Cronqvist and Simonyi suggest that the movement of Cold War media was a bi-directional process that merged international and domestic concerns: Hungarian film directors were able to draw on the positive critical reception of their films in West Germany to argue for their films to enjoy a domestic release, while the letters of Swedish listeners forced GDR broadcasters to confront their culpability for the actions of the East German regime.

It is not clear how this section should be distinguished from part three, entitled "translations," where, once again, the emphasis is on interpretation and misinterpretation. The process seems to run smoothest in Laura Saarenmaa's discussion of how Finnish broadcasters' coverage of Soviet state visits constituted a form of "TV diplomacy." Brangwen Stone shows how GDR writer Christa Wolf's work was decontextualized by US readers and scholars, who emphasized her feminism and de-emphasized the author's commitment

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to socialism. Marla Zubel shows how western critics' praise for Ryszard Kapuściński's *The Emperor*, about Haile Selassie I's rule, which they read as an allegory for the failures of state socialism, came at the expense of flattening and falsifying Ethiopian reality. The section's most interesting chapter, by Elena Razlogova, shows why scholars should pay more attention to the conditions in which texts are displayed and received. Focusing on Soviet "spoken cinema," in which viewers heard a translator's interpretation through a loudspeaker over the initial dialogue, Razlogova introduces readers to an alternative distribution network for foreign cinema and shows how (mis)translations recast the meaning of cinematic texts, "transgressing Soviet officials' original vision for live translation as an ideological weapon" (160).

The book's final section, which focuses on infrastructures and productions, contains the book's most far-reaching chapters. The Cold War is both center stage and peripheral in chapters by Petr Szczepanik and Stefano Pisu, both of which detail the tense negotiations governing east-west cinematic collaborations. Pisu focuses on Soviet-Italian collaboration on *Life is Beautiful* (1979), a film about revolutionaries in southern Europe, while Szczepanik's chapter on the filming of the US World War II epic *The Bridge at Remagen* (1969) in Czechoslovakia suggests that Cold War tensions were apt to appear at any time, endangering collaboration with the west. In August 1968, invading Soviet forces surrounded the Prague hotel where cast and crew were staying and brought a halt to the production. Nevertheless, the fact that the film was still completed (with Czech soldiers playing American GIs under the supervision of occupying Soviet troops) suggests the durability of east-west economic cooperation despite Cold War tensions. Discussions between east and west—about locations, labor, and distribution—suggest that east Europe governments' desperation for hard currency earnings became part of a wider process of globalization in which communist Europe constituted a fruitful location for US "runaway productions."

These chapters suggest that the Cold War framework, with its assumptions of ideological enmity, can be misleading for our understanding of postwar exchange. That impression is confirmed by Christine Evans and Lars Lundgren's sophisticated reading of the rivalry between the socialist Intelsat network and the US's INTELSAT. Rather than see the development of two rival networks as the inevitable product of Cold War antagonism, the authors instead emphasize the potential for collaboration—both between the US and Soviet Union and between the Soviet Union and western countries dissatisfied by INTELSAT's US-biased voting structure. The Soviet Union, they conclude, was not locked out of international communications networks but one of its main architects.

Remapping Cold War Media shows how far research on Cold War media has come. The book shows not only that the Iron Curtain was porous (that has long been evident), but also show how geopolitical considerations rubbed up against domestic politics, how traffic flowed from east to west and from west to east, and how cold hard cash could trump Cold War divides. In this regard, the book represents a valuable addition to media scholarship. At their best, the chapters in this book offer new directions for academic work. Evans and Lundgren, for instance, combine histories of Cold War communications,

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science, and technology in a way that is genuinely pathbreaking and challenges US-centric accounts of the development of post-war communications. Other chapters seem content to fill gaps in the historical record. That, too, can be a valuable undertaking, but, at times, one is left wishing that authors had considered what their case studies could contribute to bigger questions. This reticence may be due to the decision to prioritize breadth over depth, with many contributions limited to around 6000 words, giving authors little space to explore their main case studies. While the book's geographical and thematic variety is one of its virtues, this sometimes comes at the cost of detail.

As a volume with its origins in a conference on European media cultures, it is understandable that the majority of chapters focus on that continent. One of the book's virtues is to reveal a different set of European locales and networks to those covered in other volumes. Scandinavia, for instance, is relatively neglected in the scholarship, so this volume's chapters on Sweden and Finland offer a valuable in-between location from which to view Cold War tensions.[7] Given Europe's dominance in the book, it may have been productive for the editors to reflect on specificity of "Europe" as a geographical frame, especially in a period where European empires were decolonized and where ideas of a "return to Europe" helped fuel the revolutions of 1989.[8] It is also noticeable that Cold War ideas play relatively little part in the book. One gets a sense of actors circumventing or repurposing the "big-ticket" ideologies of the Cold War, rather than being their adherents or opponents. It is a conscious choice on the editors' part to eschew traditional Cold War ideological cleavages, and it is a valid one—the decline of communist ideologies from 1968 onwards is well documented. However, behind this choice lurks a question: which ideas, if any, replaced communist beliefs, and sustained Cold War exchange?

In their introduction, the editors discuss the idea of "worldmaking," which Łukasz Stanek has recently brought into the conversation on socialist transnationalism.[9] To think about worldmaking is to consider how the Cold War's worlds were the project of conscious imagining and acting. In *Remapping Cold War Media*, we catch glimpses of various worldmaking projects, from Finnish TV producers advertising their country's friendship with the USSR as an antidote to Cold War tensions, to eastern bloc communications experts who sought global integration to counter US dominance. Anti-communism, too, as seen in Pomar's book, can be seen as a worldmaking project with direct implications for post-1991 globalization. Yet globalization was not the only project enacted through Cold War media and one wonders whether the book's neglect of ideology—and of worldmaking—is a product of actors' historical moment or our own.

The final chapter of *Remapping Cold War Media*, by Anikó Imre, which compares Cold War spy dramas before and after 1991, may seem an outlier,

7. However, see Henrik K. Bastiansen and Rolf Werenskjold, eds., *The Nordic Media and the Cold War* (Göteborg, 2015).

8. James Mark, Bogdan Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht, and Ljubica Spaskovska, *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 2019), 125–72.

9. Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, 2020), 29–30.

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but it offers a typically thought-provoking answer. During the Cold War, Imre argues, spy dramas were dominated by "witty or smart male agents who represented powerful nation-states in a good-versus-evil battle" (285), nodding to a world in which secrecy was on display, but where friends and enemies could be clearly identified. But when TV dramas depict the Cold War agent today, they are shorn of their certainty and dropped into worlds of agencies and structures that are "almost supernaturally inscrutable" (286). The rise of algorithmic capitalism, dominated by data flows that atomize publics and serve as forms of digital surveillance creates a crisis of cognitive mapping. Perhaps, then, our blindness to the transformation of worldmaking—especially in the 1970s and 80s—might not simply reflect the limitations of Cold War actors, but stem from our current inability to imagine new worlds under late capitalism. Staying attentive to alternative "worldings" is not just an act of scholarly rigor, but possesses political implications in the present. By remaining alive to historical actors' capacity to make worlds, we not only preserve alternative visions for the historical record, but open ourselves to the possibility of reworlding in the present.

Simon Huxtable
Birkbeck, University of London

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