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## *Oranges on the Telly: Films and Series in the Christmas Programming of Polish Socialist Television\**

**ABSTRACT.** Klejsa Konrad, Piepiórka Michał, *Oranges on the Telly: Films and Series in the Christmas Programming of Polish Socialist Television*. "Images" vol. XXXVII, no. 46. Poznań 2024. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 71–92. ISSN 1731-450X. <https://doi.org/10.14746/i.2024.37.46.5>

Whilst much has been written about both the organizational structure and particular shows produced and screened by *Telewizja Polska* (TVP) during the People's Republic of Poland era, there have been few attempts to investigate this broadcaster's film programming policy. The article discusses the programming strategies of Polish state television broadcaster TVP in the period 1960–1989. The main focus of the paper is on comparing Christmas schedules with samples of "ordinary weeks" (both: working days and weekends). This proves that the predominance of Western content over productions from Poland and other countries of the Soviet Bloc was typical of Christmas schedules and partially in accordance with the weekend scheme. Furthermore, the article investigates the interference in the television schedule and religious practices. The final section focuses on content analysis of several films most frequently broadcast during Christmas, with a closer look at Polish productions in the final section. The programming policy of *Telewizja Polska* was to avoid not only Christian content but also movies and tv series which depicted Christmas celebrations in affluent societies. By combining quantitative and qualitative explorations of carefully gathered data on television schedules, the study seeks to propose a new perspective on the history of TVP, thus facilitating future research into other patterns of television programming.

**KEYWORDS:** television programming, state socialism, ordinary television, Christmas schedule, foreign film in Poland

A characteristic feature of Polish culture under communist rule was the scarcity of products from Western countries, which were coveted by Poland's citizens and regarded as symbolic of a 'better world'. This scarcity affected different aspects of the market – household appliances (e.g. dishwashers), food (e.g. oranges and other citrus fruits), and cultural goods (e.g. foreign films and television series). The centrally planned economy allowed only the party elite to satisfy these needs; for the rest of the population, these needs were met only sporadically. The party-state governance typically announced its intention to meet such needs in the state-run press and electronic media several weeks in advance; for example, early December often witnessed reports of 'hundreds of tons of bananas contracted' or news of 'a ship with oranges

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that will arrive at the harbour very soon.' Imports of citrus fruit during the holiday season were intended as a 'gift' for the public, hungry for a taste of exoticism that was unavailable on a daily basis.[1]

Similarly, before Christmas, the press often published articles announcing an attractive television programming schedule prepared by the State Committee for Radio and Television, which, until the fall of the People's Republic of Poland (PRP), had a monopoly on radio and television broadcasting and was wholly dependent on political power and eagerly used for propaganda purposes. For instance, in 1963, in an article with the revealing title *Pracowite dni* ('Busy days'), the committee's deputy chairman, Andrzej Walatek, described the tireless efforts of television employees as they tried harder than usual to meet the expectations of viewers hungry for good programming during the holiday season, because, as an anonymous viewer quoted in the article wrote, "when it is snowing and freezing outside, and there is a Christmas tree in the house and everyone is relaxing, there is nothing more pleasant than watching a good programme on television." [2]

This quote may be true for many national television cultures – at least for those which developed in countries with a Christian cultural background.[3] There are several testimonies quoted in the seminal volume by Sabina Mihelj and Simon Huxtable suggesting that Eastern Europe was no exception in this regard, as festive occasions – including Christmas – without television were simply unthinkable: "The familiarity and repetitiveness associated with television formed an integral part of the wider ritual of New Year's and Christmas celebrations, associated with family gathering, socialising with friends, or certain types of food." [4] This observation echoes a comment made in 1980 by the Polish film critic Krzysztof Mętrak, who wrote:

The festive harmony makes us express our good wishes to other people, stare fondly at the TV set with our family, sing carols out of tune together – the world is filled with uncommon meanings (...) The sense of being at home we all feel during the holidays concerns the reality that is the closest, within reach. In our nest, among our family, among our own community, among our compatriots, staring at the same TV set – we feel folksy, even ennobled.[5]

Listing the festive practices of this exceptional season, the columnist included watching television with the family among the traditional forms of holiday celebration. Mętrak's word choices – 'being at

[1] Święta bez świętości. Z Piotrem Oseką rozmawia Barbara Polak, <http://www.polska1918-89.pl/pdf/swieta-bez-swietosci,5470.pdf> (accessed: 27.05.2020), p. 36.

[2] A. Walatek, *Pracowite dni*, "Radio i Telewizja" 1963, no. 52, p. 2.

[3] See, for example: G. Agger, *Danish TV Christmas Calendars: Folklore, Myth and Cultural History*, "Journal of Scandinavian Cinema" 2013, no. 3(3), pp. 267–280; P. Tucker, H. Wolfenden, H. Sercombe,

*Scheduling for Christmas: How an 'Ordinary' Piece of Television Became Extraordinary*, "Journal of Popular Television" 2017, no. 5(1), pp. 31–48.

[4] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018, p. 276.

[5] K. Mętrak, *Poczucie zadowolenia*, "Ekran" 1980, no. 37, p. 6.

home,' 'collectivity,' 'folksiness,' 'nobilitation' – emphasises the integrative value of this way of passing time at this time of year.

The offerings available on Polish Television (*Telewizja Polska* – hereafter TVP) at Christmas time were therefore not without significance, as there was no competition from other broadcasters. What content did socialist television provide during this special time? How did the programme schedule during Christmas differ from that available on a daily basis throughout the year? What significance did films and series from the United States and Western Europe, particularly desired by Polish audiences, hold in the programming schedule? In addressing these questions, we lack any significant body of existing studies on which we might draw because, until recently, the topic of television in countries under communist rule was of only marginal interest to film, media and cultural studies. As Anikó Imre observed, the current scholarship is still in the process of “uncovering pieces of a globalized TV history that complement and challenge mainstream Anglo-American TV histories on the one hand and question some of our received wisdom about the Cold War on the other.”[6]

The simplified notion of a socialist television, understood as a vehicle of propaganda and contrasted in the Manichean manner with their capitalist counterparts, has been challenged in recent studies.[7] These works go beyond the tradition of focusing almost exclusively on institutional regulations and perceiving television in state-socialist countries solely as an instrument of propaganda. Moreover, while English-language television studies are dominated by the conventions of cultural studies, with its focus on textual readings or audience studies, data-driven research into television programming originated primarily in German academic circles.[8] In this context, an exceptional achievement is the above-mentioned 2018 book *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television*. [9] Following in Mihelj's and Huxtable's footsteps, this study relies on sampled schedules derived from published television guides to juxtapose the everyday programming schedule with the holiday listings. Although Mihelj and Huxtable chose to focus on 1 May and 31 December, they also comment on other holidays, including Christmas, which forms the focus of the present study.

### Researching Socialist Television: The Schedule and the Database

[6] A. Imre, *TV Socialism*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016, p. 1.

[7] Apart from the already quoted works by Imre and Mihelj, the study on Soviet state television should be mentioned: Ch. Evans, *Between Truth and Time: A History of Soviet Central Television*, Yale University Press, Yale 2017.

[8] M. Schubert, H.-J. Stiehler, *Program Structure Analysis of East German Television, 1968–1974*, “Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television” 2004,

no. 24(3) and Ch. Classen, *Bilder der Vergangenheit. Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1955–1965*, Böhlau, Köln, Weimar and Wien 1999.

[9] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, op. cit. The importance of that volume, which aimed at challenging the far-famed concept of Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini's typology of media systems, reaches far beyond the scope of this article.

In this article, we do not seek to investigate actual viewing practices, which constitute a separate research problem that would be best served by an oral history approach.[10] In addition, this study does not intend to reconstruct the institutional context, including the decision-making process that informs the creation of television listings. Rather, we are primarily interested in the programming schedule, although we do not intend to examine all of its parameters (e.g. news, variety shows, concerts).[11] We limit ourselves to investigating the movies and series that were shown on TVP during Christmas, or rather, those that were planned for broadcast, because during the communist period, some viewers complained about the discrepancies between printed television guides and what was actually broadcast (we have found no data reporting such changes during the holidays).

To this end, we combine both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The former will allow us to examine the structure of the television listings (in relation to the countries in which the films and series shown were produced, for example), while the latter focuses on the themes presented in the films. In this way, it is possible to identify the dominant trends in the film programme schedule during those years with respect to the films' countries of origin, the most frequently broadcast genres, the preferred narrative types, and even the most frequently shown film settings. This panorama of film programming broadcast at Christmas in the People's Republic of Poland will allow us to determine the kind of content that Polish television was offering to its national audience at that particular time.

To achieve this goal, we have created a database of all feature films and series shown on Polish television at Christmas from 1960 to 1989, that is, up to the fall of the People's Republic of Poland. We have chosen to omit the pre-1960 period: although regular nationwide broadcasts began in 1953 (in this year, weekly half-hour broadcasts were scheduled to air every Friday at 5pm) and lasted up to the close of the decade, these were limited with respect to time (programmes were broadcast for only several hours during the evening, six days a week) and space (in 1957, only 6000 television subscribers were documented, which had grown to 238,000 four years later).[12] Furthermore, in 1959 and 1958, the Christmas schedule did not include any feature films or television series. Interestingly, in the early 1960s, much of the programming was determined by the regional centres (Warsaw, Katowice, Łódź, Gdańsk, Poznań, Kraków, and Szczecin), from which the signal was broadcast regionally. Consequently, different films were broadcast on the same TVP Channel 1 at the same time in different cities.

[10] For example: S. Szostak, S. Mihelj, *Coming to Terms with Communist Propaganda: Post-communism, Memory and Generation*, "European Journal of Cultural Studies" 2017, no. 20(3).

[11] The relative proportions of information and educational, cultural and entertainment content were

examined by Mihelj and Huxtable (especially Chapters 5 and 8).

[12] S. Miszczak, *Historia radiofonii i telewizji w Polsce*, Wydawnictwa Komunikacji i Łączności, Warszawa 1972, p. 324.

The database contains titles from all divisions and includes data from TVP Channel 2, which began broadcasting nationwide in October 1970, initially five days a week in the late afternoon (which was dedicated to local news) and in the evenings. Only in 1974 did Channel 2 extend its broadcasts to 7 days a week. By 1980, Channel 1 was broadcasting up to 17 hours of programming per day, with Channel 2 up to 11 hours per day. No other channels were added to the television's offer until the demise of the Republic.

In compiling the Christmas database, we included not only Christmas Day (25 December) and St. Stephen's Day/Boxing Day (26 December) but also Christmas Eve. Although it was not a public holiday during the communist era, it was granted a festive evening schedule, because most Poles regard Christmas Eve as the most important holiday of the year. We undertook a detailed analysis of the programming for 90 days in total (30 days for each decade). These data form the basis for analysis of the programme schedule, which we take as illustrative of the kind of television content that broadcasters considered appropriate – for various reasons – for broadcast during Christmas (i.e. what items it considered to align with the vision of Christmas in a state-socialist country and why).

However, the uniqueness of the Christmas tv listings can be fully appreciated from a comparative perspective only against the backdrop of the daily programming schedule. To this end, we have created the second database (the *ordinary television* database), which contains samples of non-holiday programme schedules. Unlike Mihelj and Huxtable, who used a 1-week sample (but multiplied by five countries under consideration), we availed of the privilege of having a slightly more precise measurement for the Polish case exclusively. Our database includes all films and series that were shown on Polish television for three weeks of different periods of the year (February 18–24, June 2–8, and November 18–24) at 5-year intervals: in 1961, 1966, 1971, 1976, 1981, and 1986 (21 days from each year, 42 days in each decade, 126 days in total, including 90 weekdays). The selection of specific weeks was arbitrary: in making the decision, we were guided by the weeks' 'ordinariness' (i.e. it was important that the weeks selected did not fall during any state or Christian holidays nor during winter holidays, Spring break or summer vacations, at which points, the schedules were also slightly modified).

Both databases were generated based on television guides featured in magazines entirely devoted to radio and television issues: "Radio i Telewizja" (1960–1981) and "Antena" (1981–1989). The year 1981 is an exception – Christmas fell in the first days of martial law,<sup>[13]</sup> when the publication of "Antena" was suspended; in this case, we took the data from "Trybuna Ludu" (one of the few daily newspapers allowed to be published).

[13] Zob. M. Piepiórka, *Nie tylko "Teleranek". (Nie)obecność filmów zagranicznych w Telewizji Pol-*

*skiej w stanie wojennym*, "Kwartalnik Filmowy" 2019, no. 108, pp. 71–88.

When preparing the database, we considered all feature films – both fiction films and documentaries – as well as television series. Differentiating between these forms was occasionally problematic. For instance, is Ariane Mnouchkine's *Molière* a series or a 4-hour film, as described on [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)? In our database, we list it as a series because we deemed it significant that the television broadcasting practice had divided this work into episodes. Thus, we were guided primarily by the decisions made by the station itself. By contrast, it was relatively common throughout the People's Republic of Poland to broadcast single episodes of series as separate, hour-long films (e.g. *The Elusive Ellshaw*, directed by John Moxey, was in fact one of the episodes of *The Saint*). In such cases, we classified the item as a film, consistently following the identification provided by the television station itself. We did not consider *Teatr Telewizji* (Television Theatre), which offered performances made especially for television.

When collecting the titles, we identified each one and attempted to determine its year of production and the original title. It was not an easy task, despite the fact that the television guides printed in "Radio i Telewizja" and later in "Antena" contained richer descriptions of the broadcast films and series than the daily press, typically including the country of production, the name of the director, and even the genre. Unfortunately, the television guides used only Polish titles, which were sometimes created ad hoc for the purpose of television broadcasting and did not appear elsewhere, which hindered identification. Despite these difficulties, only 22 titles in the 'Christmas database' (out of 454 items) and 32 titles (out of 345) in the set of data for 'ordinary television' proved impossible to identify. Co-productions, meanwhile, caused the most trouble during the analysis stage. Ultimately, we assigned the work to both the co-producing countries; for this reason, the total number of films and series is sometimes lower than the sum of titles ascribed to a particular country.

### Ordinary and Holiday Television: Feature Films versus Television Series

An important premise of this article is the notion that television during Christmas differed in several fundamental ways from television offered during non-holiday periods (to some extent, Christmas programming may be perceived as self-referential to the early days of the medium itself, when television was a festive medium, as its broadcast was an event in itself and was expected to disrupt routines<sup>[14]</sup>). In this regard, we draw on the intuition of Frances Bonner, who distinguished *ordinary television* from *special television*.<sup>[15]</sup> We also follow Roger Silverstone's thesis that "television is part of the grain of everyday life"<sup>[16]</sup> – it accompanies viewers in their everyday affairs. However,

[14] Ch. Evans, op. cit., pp. 48–52.

[15] F. Bonner, *Ordinary Television: Analyzing Popular TV*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi 2003.

[16] R. Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London and New York 1994, p. 22.

a change occurs when a special programme disrupts the routine of the daily programming schedule, for example, a broadcast from an important occasion (such as the Olympics) or a block of programmes created in response to a sudden, unexpected event (such as the death of an important person). The holidays also bring about a disruption to established programming, scheduling and viewing habits.[17] Special programmes disrupt the daily programme schedule, and their content is more lavish and expensive (as is the case for the Christmas Eve dinner in the Polish tradition).

Mihelj and Huxtable added an additional layer to this strand of reasoning. In their analysis, a vital difference between communist-related and non-communist media holidays is underlined: “While festive programming associated with communist celebrations did include a notable share of entertainment, such programmes were often used strategically to attract audiences to more ideologically saturated programmes or possessed their own ideological agenda (as, for instance, in fictional programmed dedicated to the communist revolution). In contrast, non-communist TV festivities were unambiguously and unashamedly centred for entertainment for its own sake.”[18] This observation is correct: during national holidays, Polish television typically offered films with explicit political overtones (primarily historical films). This was particularly the case for 9 May, or Victory Day, which is celebrated throughout the socialist bloc, and 22 July, the National Day of the Rebirth of Poland, when the socialist government celebrated the proclamation of the 1944 Manifesto of the communist-run Polish Committee of National Liberation. Although Mihelj and Huxtable do not analyse schedules of religious holidays, they conclude that an important feature of Christmas television in countries like Poland or East Germany was the lack of ideologically saturated programming.[19]

It seems plausible to point out yet another layer that is important for the analysis of media schedules at different times of the year: the differences between weekday and weekend programming. The latter, Bonner argues, is a routinised version of the regular television schedule.[20] To verify this claim within the context of Polish television during the communist dictatorship, in our ‘ordinary days database’, we distinguish between television shown on weekdays and that broadcast on weekends (see Table 1). We consider weekdays to be the period from Monday to Friday, and weekends to be Saturday and Sunday – in the People’s Republic of Poland, Fridays were not considered to constitute the ‘weekend’ and some Saturdays were working days (free Saturdays were not introduced until the mid-1970s), but the television programme schedules of working and free Saturdays did not differ in any respect.

[17] F. Bonner, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[18] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

[19] *Ibidem*, p. 271.

[20] F. Bonner, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Periodic audience surveys invariably found that the most interesting, most watched, and most desired programming items for viewers were feature films and television series.<sup>[21]</sup> The presence of such content (in the database, the number of series refers to the number of titles, not the number of episodes broadcast) was not a standard part of the weekday programming. On many occasions, not a single item of this kind was broadcast on a given day, although it should also be remembered that *prime time* (i.e. in the evening following *Dziennik Telewizyjny* – the news magazine) was reserved on certain days for *Teatr Telewizji* (usually on Mondays) or *Teatr Sensacji* (Sensation Theatre; usually on Thursdays). Weekends, on the other hand, were characterised by an increased number of films and series, making them closer in character to holidays. At Christmas, however, films and series made up a greater share in the programme schedule. Between 1960 and 1989, between four and five films on average were aired on a single day during Christmas, considerably more than the entire week's 'demand' for non-holiday programming. For example, the programme schedules of the surveyed November weeks included a total of just 39 movies and 60 series titles. In 1961, three films and episodes of four series were broadcast between November 18 and 24, while 25 years later, it was eight films and 23 series.

The second difference between the Christmas and non-Christmas scheduling concerned the ratio of films to series. During the holiday season – taking into account all three Christmas days – this ratio was almost 4:1. On weekdays, the situation was different: over the entire study period, in each decade in our sample, these ratios were usually 1:2 in favour of television series. However, at weekends, Polish television broadcast almost the same number of feature films as series (see Table 1).

The latter began to dominate the programme schedule from 1966 onwards,<sup>[22]</sup> with this change largely attributable to the launch of domestic series production.<sup>[23]</sup> In the early 1960s, only Western countries supplied television series, as they were not yet produced in the socialist bloc. The greatest hits of the early 1960s were *Bonanza* and *The Saint*, soon to be joined by *Dr. Kildare*. It was only over time that domestic series usurped some of their popularity: in 1970, more than 95 percent of television viewers watched a Polish spy series set during World War II, entitled *More Than Life at Stake* (*Stawka większa niż życie*), and a series about the adventures of four Polish soldiers and their faithful pet, entitled *Four Tankmen and a Dog* (*Czterej pancerni i pies*).<sup>[24]</sup> From 1959 to 1970, 164 series (and nearly 2000 episodes) were broadcast. Meanwhile, between 1971 and 1974, 116 titles with a total of

[21] A. Kania, *Film fabularny w telewizji w opinii odbiorców*, "Biuletyn Radiowo-Telewizyjny" 1970, no. 8, p. 7.

[22] K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *Telewizja w systemie politycznym i medialnym PRL. Między polityką a widzem*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2003, p. 62.

[23] The first Polish serial production was created in 1964 and it was *Barbara i Jan* (Jerzy Ziarnik and Hieronim Przybył).

[24] J. Kończak, *Ewolucja programowa Polskiej Telewizji Państwowej. Od Tele-Echa do Polskiego Zoo*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, p. 62.



Table 1. Feature films and television series broadcast on TVP in the Christmas sample, 1960–1989.

DECADE	1960s	1970s	1980s	TOTAL
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF TITLES (INCL. TV SERIES)</b>	<b>122 (20)</b>	<b>179 (37)</b>	<b>153 (34) [46]</b>	<b>454 (91)</b>
USA	31 (4)	43 (6)	30 (3)	104 (13)
Great Britain	20 (4)	17 (2)	25 (7)	62 (13)
France	11 (2)	17 (7)	14 (2)	42 (11)
Italy	4	1 (1)	4 (2)	9 (3)
West Germany	1	6	2	3
Other capitalist countries	3	4	8 (5)	15 (5)
Titles from capitalist countries	70 (10)	82 (16)	83 (19)	235 (45)
Percentage of titles from capitalist countries in all films (and tv series)	57,4 (50)	45,8 (43,2)	54,2 (55,9)	51,8 (49,5)
Poland	17 (4)	46 (14)	46 (11)	109 (29)
Percentage of domestic titles in all films (and tv series)	13,9 (20)	25,7 (37,8)	30,1 (32,4)	24 (31,9)
Soviet Union	15	26 (1)	12	53 (1)
Czechoslovakia	2	16 (6)	5 (3)	23 (9)
Yugoslavia	2	1	0	3
East Germany	2	4	0	6
Hungary	1	3	0	4
Other socialist countries	0	1	1	2
Titles from foreign socialist countries	22	51 (7)	18 (3)	91 (10)
Percentage of titles from other socialist countries	18	28,5 (18,9)	11,8 (8,8)	20 (11)
Unidentified	13 (6)	3 (2)	6 (1)	22 (9)

Source: Based on weekly schedules published in "Radio i Telewizja" (1960–1981), "Antena" (1981–1989), and "Trybuna Ludu" (1981), compiled by the authors.

Note: The figures for tv series is given in brackets. The number before indicates feature films and television series.

Table 2. Ordinary (non-festive) scheduling on TVP.

18-24 February, 2-8 June, 18-24 November	1960s - weekdays		1960s - weekends		1970s - weekdays		1970s - weekends		1980s - weekdays		1980s - weekends		TOTAL		
YEAR	1961	1966	1961	1966	1971	1976	1971	1976	1981	1986	1981	1986	all weekdays	all weekends	
All titles (Tv series)	17 (8) [3]	11 (8)	20 (3)	15 (8)	36 (28)	43 (23)	18 (7)	31 (12)	28 (15)	55 (36)	33 (25)	38 (33)	190 (121)	155 (88)	
USA	3 (3)	3 (2)	6 (3)	6 (3)	5 (5)	1	2 (1)	4	1 (1)	4 (1)	4 (3)	4 (3)	17 (12)	26 (13)	
France	0	2 (1)	5	2 (1)	4 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	2 (1)	1	5 (4)	4 (4)	2 (1)	13 (8)	16 (7)	
Great Britain	2 (2)	1 (1)	2	1	3 (3)	6 (4)	3	3 (2)	1	2 (1)	3 (2)	11 (7)	14 (11)	23 (14)	
West Germany	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	4 (3)	4	1	7 (3)	9	
Canada	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	3	1 (1)	1	6	2 (1)	
Italy	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	5	3	
Japan	0	0	0	0	0	(1)	0	0	0	(2)	(3)	(1)	(3)	(4)	
Spain	0	0	0	0	0	2 (1)	0	(2)	1 (1)	0	1 (1)	0	4 (3)	1 (3)	
(<1)	0	0	0	0	0	2	1 (1)	2 (2)	2 (1)	2 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	7 (3)	4 (4)	
Titles from capitalist	6 (6)	6 (4)	14 (3)	9 (4)	12 (10)	17 (10)	7 (1)	13 (5)	9 (5)	21 (15)	18 (15)	26 (21)	71 (50)	87 (49)	
Percentage of titles from capitalist countries (in decades)	42,9 (62,5)		65,7 (63,6)		36,7 (39,2)		40,8 (31,6)		36,1 (37)		62 (62,1)		37,4 (41,3)		56,1 (55,7)
Poland	1	1 (1)	1	1 (1)	9 (9)	8 (5)	2 (2)	4 (2)	5 (5)	10 (7)	8 (6)	9 (9)	34 (27)	25 (20)	
Percentage of domestic titles (in decades)	7,1 (6,3)		5,7 (6,1)		21,5 (27,5)		12,2 (21,1)		18,1 (22,2)		23,9 (25,9)		17,9 (22,3)		16,1 (22,7)
Soviet Union	7 (1)	1	1	1	4 (2)	6 (3)	3	3 (2)	4	11 (6)	3 (1)	0	33 (12)	11 (3)	
Czechoslovakia	1	0	1	0	2	3 (1)	0	4 (1)	4 (4)	4 (3)	1 (1)	0	14 (8)	6 (2)	
East Germany	0	0	1	0	1 (1)	2 (1)	1 (1)	2 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1	0	5 (4)	5 (2)	
Hungary	0	0	0	0	3 (1)	3	1	2	0	5 (2)	0	0	11 (3)	3	
Bulgaria	0	0	0	1	0	3 (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 (2)	1	
Other socialist countries (<1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	
Titles from socialist countries	8 (1)	1	3	2	10 (4)	17 (7)	6 (1)	11 (4)	10 (5)	21 (12)	5 (2)	[1]	67 (29)	27 (7)	
Percentage of titles from foreign socialist countries (in decades)	32,1 (6,3)		14,3		34,2 (21,6)		34,7 (26,3)		37,3 (31,5)		7 (3,4) [4,5]		35,3 (24)		17,4 (8)
Unidentified	2 (1)	3 (3)	2	3 (3)	5 (5)	1 (1)	3 (3)	3 (1)	4 (3)	3 (2)	2 (2)	1 (1)	18 (15)	14 (10)	

Source: Based on weekly schedules published in "Radio i Telewizja" (1960–1981) and "Antena" (1981–1989), compiled by the authors.

Note: The figures for tv series is given in brackets. The number before indicates feature films and television series.

1600 episodes were shown on Channel I and another 72 series with a total of 500 episodes were aired on Channel II.[25]

By contrast, in the 1980s, a decade of permanent deficit as a result of the collapse of the socialist economy, television sought both to attract viewers and to cut costs. During this time, there was an even greater emphasis placed on productions that met these two requirements, namely,

[25] A. Kozieł, *Za chwilę dalszy ciąg programu...*

*Telewizja polska czterech dekad 1952–1989*, Aspra-Jr, Warszawa 2003, p. 170.

series. The Television Fiction Film Editorial Board sought to have them occupy 70 percent of the airtime allocated collectively to fiction productions.[26]

One might reasonably ask, therefore, why films dominated popular series to such a great extent over the holidays. The answer lies in the status of the series, which belongs to the realm of *ordinary television* rather than *special television*. By virtue of their form, the series had to transcend the holiday season and thus become ‘commonplace’. Only occasionally was an episode of a television series shown during Christmas, when new titles were launched, creating a special setting around the first episodes. This was the case with such titles as the crime series *Captain Owl on Track* (*Kapitan Sowa na tropie*; the second series produced by Polish Television) in 1965, *In Desert and in Wilderness* (*W pustyni i w puszczy*) in 1974 – an adaptation of a classic work in Polish literature – and two historical series: *Queen Bona* (*Królowa Bona* in 1980[27]) and *Royal Dreams* (*Królewskie Sny* in 1988).

### Programme Origins: Soviet Bloc versus Capitalist Countries

As elsewhere in the world, television schedules in the People’s Republic of Poland included substantial proportions of imported material. According to Mihelj and Huxtable, “In the state socialist worlds, decisions over where to import materials from were certainly guided by foreign policy orientations and dependent on the transnational orientation of television systems, but were also informed by domestic policy concerns and, in the case of entertainment programming considerations of audience demand.”[28]

In the PRP, the geographical origins of programmes aired were included in the official statistics pertaining to both cinema and television. Audiences’ preferences were also regularly surveyed in this regard, and Western productions invariably proved the most popular. A 1972 study revealed that films from capitalist countries shown on Channel 1 could count on an audience of 54 percent, while 48 percent of viewers watched Polish productions.[29] In turn, in the 1980s, when viewers were asked what programmes were missing, as many as 74 percent felt that television showed far too few films made in the West, while only 12 percent of those surveyed demanded more socialist films.[30] Of course, this went against the grain for the authorities, who, for political reasons, repeatedly criticised productions from capitalist countries, particularly American productions. For instance, in 1964, at the Fourth Congress of the Polish United Workers’ Party, the programme director of Polish Television, Stanisław Stefański, lamented that audiences were most likely to watch series such as *Zorro* or *Robin Hood*, which

[26] J. Kończak, op. cit., p. 242.

[27] This is a particularly interesting case. In fact, *Królowa Bona* was not broadcast until January 10, 1982. Only the pilot episode was shown at Christmas in 1980; viewers had to wait until over a year for the second instalment of the series.

[28] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, op. cit., p. 191.

[29] J. Kończak, op. cit., p. 150.

[30] Ibidem, p. 239.

were believed to promote the ideal of the American hero.<sup>[31]</sup> Despite this criticism, the Committee for Radio and Television agreed to import Western productions anyway. Major purchases were made in the West in the late 1950s,<sup>[32]</sup> resulting in an abundance of American, English and French films over the next decade. However, there was a political agenda to develop the programme schedule in such a way that socialist and Western productions occupied equal space in the listings.<sup>[33]</sup>

To some extent, the quota of imported programmes reflected the changing foreign policy position. It is a common belief in Polish society that during the 1970s, when Edward Gierek as First Secretary of the ruling Workers' Party adopted a dual politics of moderate openness towards the West coupled with greater dependence from the Soviet Union, Poland became increasingly open to the outside world. This may be true for many aspects of social life, such as tourism, but it cannot be confirmed in relation to television programming. Drawing on our 'ordinary television' dataset, we analysed the balance of domestically produced and imported foreign films and television series broadcast by Polish television. This data clearly confirms Mihelj's and Huxtable observation that there was a greater range of imported dramas from the West in the previous decade.<sup>[34]</sup> The authors explain this in the following way: "by the end of the 1970s, the lack of hard currency meant that Polish television was unable to purchase foreign content and, because of a lack of colour film, it was able neither to produce new shows suitable for programme exchange nor to make export copies of old shows."<sup>[35]</sup>

The most interesting conclusions to emerge from the analysis of the daily programme schedule become clear when the weekday and weekend listings are juxtaposed. It transpires that these two 'states of matter' of everyday television differ considerably with respect to the selection of films and series by country of origin (see Table 1). Among the foreign titles shown on weekdays, Soviet titles are by far the most numerous (21 films and 12 series). However, Polish productions are predominant (7 films and 27 series), although they outnumber the Soviet productions by just one item. Moreover, if we divide the countries into two camps based on geopolitical criterion, that is, capitalist and socialist (with the exception of Poland), it becomes clear that they are almost symmetrical, which corresponds to the projected programme schedule development policy, as mentioned above. On the weekdays surveyed, 71 films and series from capitalist countries were broadcast (representing a 37.4 percent share of all films and series), while socialist countries provided 67 items (a 35.3 percent share). These calculations apply to the aggregate results of three decades. With respect to individual decades, the results do not differ – on weekdays, Polish and Soviet productions

[31] P. Pleskot, *Wielki mały ekran. Telewizja a codzienność Polaków w latach sześćdziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo Trio, Warszawa 2007, p. 104.

[32] K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, op. cit., p. 60.

[33] M. Wojtyński, *Telewizja w Polsce do 1972 roku*, [s.n.], Warszawa 2011, pp. 188–189.

[34] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, op. cit., p. 189.

[35] Ibidem, p. 184.

were broadcast the most often, although the proportions between the productions of socialist and capitalist countries were roughly equal.

However, the situation changes significantly in the weekend schedule. There is no longer any question of balance in this regard, with American items indisputably dominating (a total of 13 movies and 13 series). Only domestic productions could compete with these on weekends, with 5 films and 20 series. Given these numbers, the presence of films from the USSR (8 films and 3 series) and other socialist countries is marginal. The predominance of works from capitalist countries in the weekend schedule becomes even more apparent when contrasted with those titles from socialist countries. The share of Western titles increases by 20 percentage points in relation to their occurrence on weekdays, and the share of films and series from the socialist countries decreases by almost the same amount (interestingly, the share of Polish titles remains practically unchanged). Again, these findings apply both to the 30-year period as a whole and to each decade individually. In particular, our findings indicate that the weekend schedules of the 1980s included hardly any feature films or series from the Soviet Bloc (see Table 1). Similarly, in the Christmas listings, the percentage of films and television series from socialist countries was lowest in comparison with the preceding decades (see Table 2).

This dominance of productions from the West on weekends reveals their status as 'special line-up items'. In many ways, the Christmas listings resembled those of the weekend schedule – particularly in terms of the ratio of Western to socialist films (see Table 2). In the weekend sample, as many as 91 films from the United States were broadcast (of all 90 holidays analysed, in only 25 cases no American film was aired), and Polish cinematography came in second in terms of numbers. The Christmas schedule was similar, but more 'domesticated', with slightly more Polish feature films. Furthermore, a total of 29 Polish and 13 American series were broadcast during Christmas. The lack of Soviet-made series in the holiday line-up is also striking; from 1960 to 1989, only one episode of a Soviet-made series was aired at Christmas.

### Mornings and Evenings: The Television Schedule versus Religious Practices

The special status occupied by Western films is further confirmed by an analysis of what was shown during the weekday *prime time*. This programming window (the term '*prime time*' was not used in the People's Republic of Poland) fell immediately after the main edition of *Dziennik Telewizyjny*, after 8 p.m. (see Chart 1). In 1976, an employee of TVP estimated that that programmes broadcast at this hour attracted an audience of approximately 15–16 million, which at that time constituted almost 75 percent of Poland's adult population.<sup>[36]</sup> The sample for 'ordinary weeks' shows that this time slot was devoted almost equally to

[36] *Film i telewizja i film w telewizji*. Lesław Bajer in a conversation with Jacek Fuksiewicz, Maciej Łukowski, Krzysztof T. Toeplitz, Kazimierz Żygulski in

a conversation with Lesław Bajer, "Kino" 1976, no. 4, p. 30.

productions from capitalist and socialist countries. During the weekends, however, the percentage share of capitalist countries in the programme schedule went higher – productions from socialist countries (with the exception of domestically produced) are almost absent at this time. Thus, Western productions belonged primarily to the weekend and prime-time programme schedules, whereas films from the Eastern Bloc dominated the less popular weekday broadcasting windows.

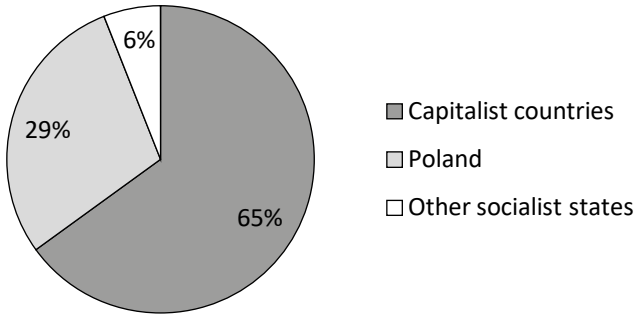


Chart 1. Production origin of feature films and television series broadcast on TVP during Christmas (24–26 December) *prime time*, 1960–1989 (n=151).

Source: Based on weekly schedules published in “Radio i Telewizja” (1960–1981) and “Antena” (1981–1989), compiled by the authors.

An even greater disparity between socialist and capitalist productions occurred in the Christmas Eve *prime time* slot, when only a single item from the Eastern Bloc was shown on television during the entire period under study (this was an episode of a series that was an undisputed hit in the People’s Republic of Poland: the Czechoslovakian *Hospital at the End of the City*). The highest numbers of films and series were from Poland (16), the USA (8), Great Britain (7) and France (7); apart from this, one episode of a Spanish series, one Italian film and 3 Italian–French co-productions were aired.

Polish productions dominated the 8 p.m. window on Christmas Eve, whereas on the two subsequent days, TVP broadcast more American productions (see Chart 2). Out of 44 Polish titles aired during *prime time*, as many as 11 were series. With regard to productions from the United States, only one out of 36 titles was a series, namely *Dr. Kildare*, which was aired on the Boxing Day in 1963. The results show unequivocally that while planning the film and series repertoire for the Christmas *prime time*, Polish Television’s programmers marginalised Soviet cinematography and that of the other Eastern Bloc countries.

On Christmas Day, the programme schedule that began at 8 p.m. was noticeably different from that of earlier programming windows. In the morning, films for children and teenagers predominated, while the afternoon included more programmes for family viewing, but these were nonetheless titles to watch with loved ones – comedies, adventure films or adaptations of literary classics (e.g. *The Great Gatsby* [dir. Jack

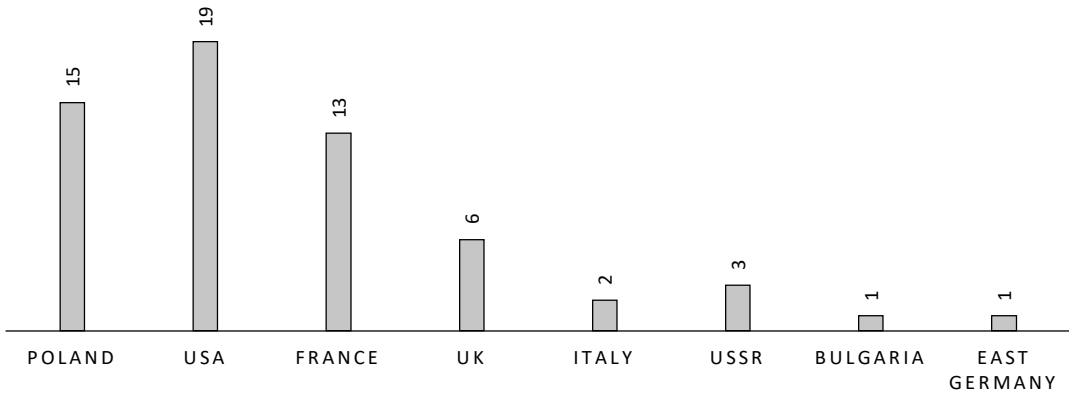


Chart 2. Countries of origin for feature films and television series broadcast on TVP during Christmas Day and Boxing Day *prime time* (programmes starting between 8 and 9 pm) 1960–1989 (n=59).

Source: Based on weekly schedules published in “Radio i Telewizja” (1960–1981) and “Antena” (1981–1989), compiled by the authors.

Note: Two French-Italian co-productions have been accounted for both countries.

Clayton] or *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* [dir. Wojciech Jerzy Has]). It did happen, albeit rarely, that episodes of series were broadcast at these hours, but they had to be particularly popular items, such as the Polish *4 Alternative Street* (*Alternatywy 4*) and *More Than Life at Stake* (*Stawka większa niż życie*), the Czechoslovak *Hospital at the End of the City* (*Nemocnice na kraji města*) or the American *Dr. Kildare*. During holidays, the final evening slot started at around 10 p.m. Understandably, at this time, younger audiences would find little to interest them, while adults could focus on melodramas, action movies, thrillers, crime stories or raunchy comedies, such as *Some Like It Hot* (dir. Billy Wilder).

The late programming window on Christmas Eve sometimes conflicted with Midnight Mass, the traditional mass that forms the centrepiece of the religious Christmas ritual that in most parishes was celebrated at midnight on 24–25 December. Given the socialist government’s policy towards the Church, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesise that the television authorities intentionally aired the most interesting films at this time to attract the faithful away from church. There is some evidence that in the second half of the 1960s, the authorities would demand that the Sunday midday schedule be made more attractive precisely to deter viewers from attending church.[37] This is hardly surprising: as a rule, television in Eastern Europe under the communist regime had a secular character and included very few references to religious services. This reflected the core of communist policy, which was hostile towards the Church and regarded religion as an atavistic remnant of the past and a form of ‘false consciousness.’[38] In Poland, where the Catholic congregation remained of great significance throughout the communist rule and played a substantial role

[37] P. Pleskot, op. cit., p. 49.

[38] S. Mihelj, S. Huxtable, op. cit., p. 89.

in the regime's downfall, state-controlled television certainly saw no interest in live broadcasts of religious ceremonies. On the contrary,

Sunday schedules typically featured extended blocks of attractive programming aimed at two groups through to be especially susceptible to religion's charms: peasants and children (...) television would attempt to broadcast more attractive fare during religious holidays, with a high proportion of fiction, cartoons, and other entertaining content. It is feasible to argue that such popular broadcasts for countryside dwellers and children served as an attractive alternative to the Sunday mass, turning television into a vehicle of secularization.[39]

A similar argument applies to Christmas Day programming aimed at children during the morning slot (9 a.m. till midday), when Catholics would usually attend religious services. The schedule included Western animations (usually, it was the only time of the year that Polish children could watch Disney cartoons) and entertaining adventure films (which we shall elaborate on in the next section). Therefore it is plausible to suggest that "broadcasters sought to ensure that the attention of viewers, especially children and countryside dwellers, was diverted away from religious services (...) This created a situation when the religious temporal order, typically enforced through parental authority, and the secular temporality, embodied in the television schedule, would clash with one another." [40]

It is not certain that our presumptions about programming are correct in relation to the Christmas Eve evening programme schedule. Even assuming that those wishing to attend religious service had to leave home early enough (we assume 20 minutes before the service commenced), it was not always the case that the evening movie on Christmas Eve went beyond that hour, and only on nine occasions did it end after midnight. It is also important to note that films that were aired so late on Christmas Eve can hardly be counted as particularly anticipated and intentionally distracting from attendance at Midnight Mass. Such a category might include films that had not been previously released in cinemas, relatively new films or films with star-studded casts, for example. Of the films which were broadcast in the late hours of Christmas Eve, 14 were not actually known from cinemas, as many as half of these due to their pre-war (or wartime, in the case of two American titles) production contexts.[41] Among these, relatively new films were few and far between: *Der Bettelstudent* (dir. Frank De Quella, 1981; broadcast in 1982), *Edith and Marcel* (dir. Claude Lelouch, 1983; broadcast in 1986), and *On Golden Pond* (dir. Mark Rydell, 1981; broadcast in 1987).[42] The latter film was the only one in this set that

[39] Ibidem, p. 221.

[40] Ibidem, pp. 226–227.

[41] *Millie* (dir. John Francis Dillon), *The Woman of the Town* (dir. George Archimbaud), *The Great Waltz* (dir. Julien Duvivier), *Rhapsody in Blue* (dir. Irving Rapper), *Sklamalam* (dir. Mieczysław Krawicz),

*Zapomniana melodia* (dir. Konrad Tom, Jan Fethke), *Rapsodia Bałtyku* (dir. Leonard Buczkowski).

[42] Additionally, one can name films broadcast by regional branches of Polish Television: *Serge* (dir. Georgiy Daneliya, Igor Talankin, 1960), broadcast by the Katowice branch in 1960, or *The Country I Come*

had a star-studded cast, including Katharine Hepburn, Henry Fonda and Jane Fonda. Thus, there were few films with special potential to attract viewers.

The remaining titles interfering with *Midnight Mass* were mostly archival works that had previously been shown on television several times; their presence in the Christmas Eve schedule was rather like patching up a programming hole and cannot be interpreted as an attempt to draw the faithful away from mass. It seems, therefore, that the authorities preferred not to compete with religious rituals (at least, during Christmas Eve) – they probably realised that in competition with the tradition of attending *Midnight Mass*, which was of such importance to many Poles, they were on the losing side.

### Genres and Settings: The Amazing versus the Sacred

Television providers of the People's Republic of Poland conducted both quantitative and qualitative research on viewers' preferences. Unfortunately, the majority of this research is known only partially from third-party accounts or internal newsletters. Unsurprisingly, audiences expected primarily entertainment films, and even demanded films of specific genres. As Lukasz Szymanski, director of the Centre for Public Opinion Research and Programme Studies at the Committee for Radio and Television, said in 1975, "the viewer constantly demands more comedy."<sup>[43]</sup> Moreover, in addition to comedies, people expected westerns, detective stories and historical films.<sup>[44]</sup> These preferences were reflected in the holiday television listings, in which television responded to the audience's needs – the attractive repertoire was a kind of gift offered by the authorities to the citizens.

The films selected for the Christmas programming schedule appear to have conformed to a distinctive profile. It is no coincidence that they included so many adventure films. Interestingly, on Christmas Day, it was far more common to see the sands of the Sahara on the television screen (in films such as *Ali and the Camel* [dir. Henry Gaddes], *The Thief of Bagdad* [dir. Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell, Tim Whelan], *Sahara* [dir. Zoltan Korda], *Mameluke* [dir. David Rondeli], *Cleopatra* [dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz], or *March or Die* [dir. Dick Richards]) than a winter landscape, let alone a Christmas setting with a Christmas tree. There was a clear tendency to reach for proposals exploring the exotic landscapes – African (*Born Free* [dir. James Hill], *Toto and the Poachers* [dir. Brian Salt], *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* [dir. Henry King], *The Lion of Africa* [dir. Kevin Connor]), Australian (*Bush Christmas* [dir. Ralph Smart], *The Last Frontier* [dir. Simon Wincer], *Silver City* [dir. Sophia Turkiewicz]), Indian (*Heat and Dust* [dir. James Ivory]) or Latin-American (*Masquerade in Mexico* [dir. Mitchell Leisen], *The*

*From* (dir. Marcel Carné, 1956), broadcast by the Warsaw branch in 1960.

[43] Łukasz Szymański was interviewed by Lesław Bajer, *Telewizja i pożytki socjologii*, "Kino" 1975, no. 4, p. 24.

[44] J. Kończak, op. cit., p. 60.



*River's Edge* [dir. Allan Dwan], *The Pioneers* [dir. Marcel Camus], *Black Orpheus* [dir. Marcel Camus]). There were quite a few fiction films with historical reenactments (such as *The King's Thief* [dir. Robert Z. Leonard], *Tom Jones* [dir. Tony Richardson]) broadcast. Finally, included in the price were all amazing things: legends (*Tarzan and the Amazons* [dir. Kurt Neumann]), fairy tales (*Scheherazade* [dir. Pierre Gaspard-Huit]), ghost stories (*The Haunted Castle* [dir. Kurt Hoffmann]), golems (*The Emperor and the Golem* [dir. Martin Frič]), time travel (*The Time Machine* [dir. George Pal]), aliens (*Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.* [dir. Gordon Flemyng]), voyages into outer space (*First Men in the Moon* [dir. Nathan Juran]), vampires (*Vampires in Havana* [dir. Juan Padrón]), or man-eating creatures (*Jaws* [dir. Steven Spielberg]).

Unusuality (understood as a synonym for “pop culture metaphysics”) can also be considered a feature of Christmas cinema. [45] Beings from another world play a prominent role in American Christmas films, intervening in the lives of earthly characters. Typically, these are angels, as in Frank Capra's Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life* (this film, however, did not appear in the Polish programme schedule – presumably the angel's Christian origin was not acceptable). There could be no question of showing any of the ‘biblical’ (or ‘sword-and-sandal’ as they were sometimes called) films during the holidays – neither those that dealt with the birth of Jesus nor those that recounted stories from the Old Testament. Items loosely related to the Christmas theme appeared in the programme schedule, albeit rarely. Only ten such titles can be identified: three domestically produced (which we shall elaborate on in the following paragraph) and seven foreign. These were: *The Nutcracker* (we failed to establish which version was broadcast), *The Country I Come From* (*Le pays d'où je viens*, dir. Marcel Carné), *Bush Christmas* (dir. Ralph Smart), *Scrooge* (dir. Ronald Neame), *Christmas Carol* (dir. Pierre Boutron), *Journey to the Christmas Star* (*Reisen til julestjernen*, dir. Ola Solum), and *Holiday Inn* (dir. Mark Sandrich).

The small number of holiday-themed films may come as a surprise, all the more so because, after all, films from the United States were eagerly broadcast, as it was here that the genre of Christmas cinema originated. A closer examination of American films reveals why this was the case. First, the television authorities were very meticulous in selecting films from across the pond for broadcast. They could not promote American values or criticise socialist policies. American Christmas cinema arguably lay at the very core of that culture. As Mark Connelly writes, through the popularity of such films, the values associated with Christmas became typically American values – and vice versa: American values were an important element of these productions. [46]

[45] D. Johnston, *Haunted Seasons: Television Ghost Stories for Christmas and Horror for Halloween*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2015.

[46] M. Connelly, *Introduction*, [in:] *Christmas at the Movies: Images of Christmas in American, British and European Cinema*, ed. M. Connelly, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London 2000, p. 3.

Another aspect was the commercialisation of the holidays depicted in American films, symbolised by Santa Claus.<sup>[47]</sup> In this way, American values centering around freedom, including economic freedom, and therefore also the consumerism characteristic of an *affluent society* found their ideological medium in the form of Christmas films. These films inscribed consumerism into the everyday reality of the American world, which differed so dramatically from that offered by the reality of the People's Republic of Poland,<sup>[48]</sup> where one of the main problems was the scarcity of goods.

One particular fiction film broke free from the propaganda of American values and the commercialisation of Christmas – this was *Holiday Inn*,<sup>[49]</sup> which was broadcast twice in Poland. While it would be difficult to prove that this production does not support American values (the eponymous inn welcomes guests only on holidays, and these include national holidays, such as Abraham Lincoln's and George Washington's birthdays), it certainly does not promote a commercial approach to Christmas. It includes no portrayals of Santa Claus or gift-giving, and the main characters choose love, family and a quiet country life over money and career.

The plots of two other films from the West that aired during the holidays and went against the grain of commercialising the holidays and social life in general also followed suit: these films were two versions of the Christmas classic, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (*Scrooge* and *A Christmas Carol*), which is, after all, an anti-capitalist story, intent on denouncing economic oppression of the poor and the tyranny of money. Apparently, the authorities could even stomach the references to Christianity and the afterlife that were present in these films.

What about holiday films from the USSR? Although such films were produced, they found no place in the Polish programme schedule. It should be remembered that in the Soviet Union, Christmas (falling on January 7th in the Julian calendar) was not a holiday; rather, the New Year was celebrated lavishly. It was then that some of the rituals associated with Christmas were carried out, such as the distribution of gifts that Grandfather Frost brought to 'good' children. It was the setting of New Year's Eve parties that most often provided the backdrop for the films made there.<sup>[50]</sup> It appears that the Soviet model of 'winter holidays' was even more distant from Polish traditions than the Americanised Christmas.

[47] J. Mundy, *Christmas and the Movies: Frames of Mind*, [in:] *Christmas, Ideology and Popular Culture*, ed. S. Whitely, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2008, p. 169.

[48] Ch. Deacy, *Christmas as Religion: Rethinking Santa, the Secular, and the Sacred*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 149.

[49] J. Mundy, op. cit., p. 170.

[50] B. Beumers, *Father Frost on 31 December: Christmas and the New Year in Soviet and Russian Cinema*, [in:] *Christmas at the Movies...*, p. 187.

**Polish Christmas  
Production: The  
Countryside versus  
the City**

In the absence of sufficient suitable items either in Western or socialist cinematography, Polish television decided to produce holiday films on its own. This led to *Incredibly Peaceful Man* (*Niespotykanie spokojny człowiek*, dir. Stanisław Bareja), *Merry Christmas* (*Wesołych świąt*, dir. Jerzy Sztwiertnia) and *Born Premature* (*Wczesnie urodzony*, dir. Krzysztof Gruber). The first of these films was broadcast several times – in 1975, 1978, 1980 and 1982.

The earliest of these, *Niespotykanie spokojny człowiek*, was the work of a popular comedy filmmaker, who moved the action of his film from the city to the countryside for the first time. The plot centres on an elderly couple awaiting the arrival of their son for Christmas. A letter comes instead and, moreover, it is not the letter that was supposed to reach the parents. They have received a love letter in which the son professes his love for a girl, and to make matters worse, a city girl. The titular peaceful man – the father – is so furious that he decides to do everything in his power to prevent the marriage – after all, he did not raise his son to live in the city and allow the farm to go to rack and ruin. Christmas props such as the Christmas tree, the carp, the Christmas table and even the village carollers feature prominently in the film, but their presence on screen is relegated to a background role. The plot focuses on the conflict between rural and urban culture. Ultimately, anything that involves attachment to land and family is positively valorised.

Christmas asserts an even smaller presence in *Wesołych świąt*, although the plot is structured around Christmas trees that two visitors from the Bieszczady Mountains are attempting to sell in Warsaw. While doing business, they decide to visit acquaintances they have not seen for a long time: the younger, a former summer paramour and the older, a friend from during the war. The film again pits values that become tied to specific geographical spaces against one another. The Bieszczady area and its inhabitants prove to be the repositories of such values as sincerity, love and fidelity. The city, by contrast, emerges as a locus of hypocrisy, rudeness, greed, and sexual perversions unacceptable even for a provincial pick-up artist.

There might as well be no Christmas in *Wczesnie urodzony*. The only link between the plot and Christmas is the time when the action takes place. The character, played by Franciszek Pieczka, ends up in the hospital on the day before Christmas Eve, which he spends on the ward. Yet again, the film presents the conflict of values represented by rural and urban culture. The former is represented by the head of the household, while his sons who visit him from the city symbolise the latter. Each has cut himself off from his rural roots at some point to pursue a career. The three have achieved success, but in their father's eyes they are ingrates. This time, the values represented by the main character were not fully affirmed. The old man undergoes a transformation and becomes capable of appreciating previously overlooked pleasures. However, this does not change the fact that it is the rural

culture, with its attachment to the countryside and contempt for material success at the cost of severance of ties with the family, that is valued more highly here.

An analysis of these films allows us to create a model of the perfect holiday film for the government of the People's Republic of Poland, a job made all the easier by their close similarity to one another. All three are comedies, with a plot involving family conflict, whose backdrop is the opposition between the village and the town, ultimately resolved in favour of traditional folk culture. In each case, the action takes place during the holiday season, but the holidays as such are not integral to the plots. This is just like the references to Christianity, which are marginal to the plot, if they appear at all. This, in turn, makes them similar to Christmas movies from the West.<sup>[51]</sup> Religious practices are shown as part of a tradition that is particularly important for the province. The authorities were keen to present Christmas as an element of folk culture – with its customs, rituals and scenery.<sup>[52]</sup> Thus, a combination of values attributed to the holiday season (such as closeness and reconciliation) and values characteristic of rural culture (such as attachment to the land) was formed. This is reminiscent of the practice in Hollywood cinematography that combines Christmas and American values.

## Conclusions

In 1970, "Radio i Telewizja" published a satirical article citing the opinion of a (fictional) 'prominent foreign television theorist' known as 'doc. dr. hab. A. (last name known to editors),' who even went as far as creating a recipe for the perfect holiday programme schedule, which reads: *primum non nocere*<sup>[53]</sup> – do not force hard thinking; avoid contentious issues; offer entertaining programmes. Although the theorist in question existed only for the purposes of a humorous article, the principle he formulated actually seemed to apply and did not change over the three decades of communist Poland. Therefore, it is possible to identify several features of the Christmas time television programme schedule that consistently formed the Christmas listings.

The first is that films and series were broadcast considerably more frequently in both weekday and weekend schedules. In addition, the Christmas television listings were dominated by feature-length films over series, which were considered more festive because they departed from the expected non-holiday scheduling routine. Television executives apparently wanted to give viewers what they most wanted during this time: to compensate for the inadequacy of the entertainment film offerings during the year. Furthermore, we may assume that the decision-makers did not want the 'winter holidays' to be excessively associated with

[51] See S.J. Lind, *Christmas in the 60s: A Charlie Brown Christmas, Religion, and the Conventions of the Television Genre*, "Journal of Religion and Popular Culture" 2014, no. 26(1), p. 7.

[52] *Święta bez świętości...*, p. 36.

[53] A. in conversation with O. SET, *O programie świątecznym*, "Radio i Telewizja" 1970, no. 52.

Christianity, and therefore they incorporated them into folk traditions, to which the Christmas films made by Polish television contributed.

At the same time, the authorities were more eager to satisfy the audiences' needs at that time and to provide them with items imported from the West, particularly from the United States. Nonetheless, care was taken to avoid disseminating American values or highlighting the wealth of the United States, which was unattainable to the common citizen. For this reason, Christmas movies produced in the United States were largely avoided, and the screens were instead dominated by all manner of exotic and unusual things – geographically distant countries, ancient sceneries, fairy-tale lands, fantastic creatures, and amazing heroes. This uniqueness was perhaps intended as a substitute for the portrayal of miraculous biblical events, which were absent from the screen. One could say that the films in the Christmas schedule intended to tempt viewers with its exceptionality in precisely the same manner as imported oranges, which for Polish customers of that time were available exclusively during the festive occasions.

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