

The 1960s are often remembered and studied for the rise of social movements, including civil rights, feminism, and environmentalism. This period of radicalization and youth emancipation also saw the spread of rock and roll and socially liberal lifestyles. In 1968, a wave of political and civic protests spread across the Cold War world, marking the decade as a time of upheaval and change.

However, this image of global revolt and transformation often overlooks the socially conservative and patriarchal values that were still present in societies during that period. Take, for example, the immensely popular serial *The Forsyte Saga* (BBC, 1965). First aired in 1967, the show, which tells the story of an upper-middle-class English family at the turn of the twentieth century, captivated 160 million viewers across 77 countries in just five years. Described by *The Guardian* as “a middle-aged, middle-class Beatlemania,” the serial sparked passionate discussions about the moral dilemmas faced by its characters. Viewers everywhere altered their routines, skipped religious services, and avoided regular social outings as they engaged with the show’s themes.

What drew people from such varied socio-cultural backgrounds into the same shared experience? Why both men and women felt an urge to take a stand in fictional story and they still remember it today? How did the story about domesticity and its endangerment, patriarchy, gender emancipation but also sexual coercion in marriage resonate so much in the late 1960s and early 1970? And are there any commonalities in peoples’ intuitions across the East-West divide?

This project argues that across the Iron Curtain similar societal concerns existed despite the ideological divide. By examining the intersection of personal experiences, public media portrayals of the serial, feminist narratives, and state policies in different cultural contexts, the research challenges the traditional East-West divide in understanding 1960s and 1970s.

The study focuses on how domestic issues—especially women’s roles, marriage, and family—were discussed and understood in both the East and the West during this time. It compares four case studies: Britain and the United States in the West, and Poland and Czechia in the East. Using *The Forsyte Saga* as a lens, the project examines both the similarities and differences in how people across the Cold War world responded to these shared concerns.

What makes the project particularly interesting is that *The Forsyte Saga* serves as a kind of “methodological icebreaker.” This globally popular television serial acted as a shared cultural reference point, allowing people from very different backgrounds to filter their reflections, opinions and today memories through the same pop culture lens. This creates a unique opportunity to compare how people in the East and West dealt with social and gender-related issues, shedding light on deeper, cross-cultural intuitions and values.

Rather than focusing on the often-studied radical youth movements of the 1960s, this project takes a fresh approach by examining a more conventional group of people—those drawn to the serial’s traditional themes of family and social values. By exploring how they engaged with the moral and social dilemmas posed by the show, the research offers new insights into the complexities of the 1960s and 1970s.

To gather this information, the project uses a variety of research methods, including oral history interviews, focus group discussions, media analysis, and digital ethnography. These approaches will help uncover how the serial’s themes influenced personal and public responses and how *The Forsyte Saga* reflected and shaped societal values during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to answer how different societies on both sides of the Iron Curtain understood and negotiated social norms and if a shared interest in a family drama reveals deeper, cross-cultural connections during a time of global tension?