

RESEARCH ARTICLE

“Solidarity Is a Matter of the Heart”: Anti-Imperialist Solidarity Donations in GDR Children’s Magazines

Jessica Dalljo 

Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle, Germany

E-mail: jessica.dalljo@paedagogik.uni-halle.de

Abstract

The article examines the role of children’s magazines in promoting internationalism and solidarity in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Analysing the magazines *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi*, it sheds light on their contribution to the GDR’s system for collecting and distributing charitable donations and to cultivating children’s commitment to countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The article uncovers multifaceted layers of meaning associated with internationalism and emphasizes the significance of the connection between the state-ideological and the everyday levels. Its analysis of primary sources, including articles from the children’s magazines, files from the Federal Archives, and historical publications, reveals that the magazines played a crucial role in fostering international solidarity and shaping the political consciousness of young readers. The use of techniques such as suggestion, competition, and renunciation in the magazines not only evoked a sense of collective responsibility, but also positioned children as active contributors to shaping an international socialist future. The children’s magazine *Bummi* is particularly significant in the GDR’s charitable donations system as it shows the involvement of other parts of society and thus raises issues of transgenerational education through the medium of children’s magazines. By shifting away from the narrative of indoctrination, this article highlights the broader understanding of internationalism in the GDR and its integration into everyday life. It therefore underscores the vital role of children’s magazines not only in fostering a stance of anti-imperialist solidarity among young readers, but also in shaping the GDR’s vision of an international socialist future.

The concepts of internationalism, solidarity, and anti-imperialism were deeply ingrained in the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR) self-image. The significance of these values is not only reflected in the ten commandments of socialist morality,¹

¹For example, the first commandment refers to the commitment to the “unbreakable solidarity of all socialist countries” and the tenth commandment speaks of exercising “solidarity with the peoples struggling for national liberation and those defending their national independence”. See Walter Ulbricht,

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but it is also supported by Article six of the GDR constitution, which stipulated aid to states in their fight against colonialism.² Linked to this was a mandate for the educational system that established internationalism and patriotism as “personality traits of socialist man to be striven for through education”.³ The youngest members of society should participate in shaping a socialist future under the assumption that there would be a world revolution. How this educational goal was to be implemented in the classroom has already been shown in research by Christiane Griesse and Helga Marburger.⁴ However, the idea of solidarity was not only manifest in school curricula; other educational means also contributed to its popularization. This article contributes to our understanding of educational resources through the analysis of the GDR children’s magazines *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi*. With an average annual circulation of between 300,000 and 800,000, these popular magazines are particularly useful for analysis as they expand our understanding of internationalism as an educational goal.⁵ It is necessary, therefore, to reread the children’s magazines and analyse them closely as they reveal a much broader understanding of how the concept of internationalism found its way into everyday life and thus became something of “a matter of the heart”.⁶ Analysing children’s magazines provides insights into how the GDR’s media framed the practice of solidarity. Using the example of appeals for donations calling for solidarity with African, Asian, and Latin American countries, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the article asks what significance the children’s magazines had in the GDR’s system for collecting and distributing charitable donations and how they served as a medium to generate children’s commitment to those countries (Figure 1).

Despite recent research interest in Socialist–South relations, as George Bodie points out in the introduction to this Special Issue, perspectives on internationalism as an educational concept are particularly scarce. While publications in recent years have often focused on the GDR’s development aid, human rights, or the living conditions of international students and contract workers,⁷ studies dealing with internationalism from an educational point of view are mostly from the late 1990s.⁸

“Du sollst ...”. Die zehn Gebote der Sozialistischen Moral, 1959, Quelle P12”, in Matthias Judt (ed.), *DDR-Geschichte in Dokumenten* (Bonn, 1998), pp. 54f.

²See *Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 6. April 1968. In der Fassung des Gesetzes zur Ergänzung und Änderung der Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 7. Oktober 1974* (Berlin (GDR), 1974).

³Christiane Griesse and Helga Marburger, *Zwischen Internationalismus und Patriotismus. Konzepte des Umgangs mit Fremden und Fremdheit in den Schulen der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), p. 26.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Rudi Chowanetz, *Die Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR von 1946 bis 1960* (Berlin (GDR), 1982), pp. 131f and 135f.

⁶“Beiheft. Unsere Pionierorganisation ‘Ernst Thälmann’: Solidarität ist Herzenssache”, *ABC-Zeitung*, 9 (1983).

⁷See, for example, Eric Burton, Anne Dietrich, Immanuel R. Harisch, and Marcia C. Schenck, *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* (Berlin [etc.], 2021); Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge, 2020); Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2022).

⁸See, for example, Griesse and Marburger, *Zwischen Internationalismus und Patriotismus*; or Marianne Krüger-Potratz, Annette Kaminsky, and Werner Winter, “Völkerfreundschaft und internationale



Figure 1 Countries worldwide that were the subject of aid campaigns through children's magazines in the GDR.

Thus, the role attributed to children in the concept of education for internationalism remains un(der)determined. Although Gregory Witkowski emphasizes the significant role of the media in the implementation of solidarity campaigns,⁹ children's magazines are a source that tends to be overlooked in research,¹⁰ and the research on internationalism as described in children's magazines is scant and unsystematic.

One finds publications by Thomas Kramer, for instance, on the image of the African continent in children's magazines. Kramer's descriptions range from very critical readings of the magazines' ideological influence on readers on the one hand,¹¹ to localization of the depictions as a contemporary historical expression on the other.¹² What these publications do not mention, however, is fundraising campaigns. The publications that do mention such campaigns are contributions on GDR internationalism. For example, both Frank Bösch and Toni Weis briefly refer to the solidarity campaigns in *Bummi*, describing their effectiveness and their significance as an educational goal.¹³ The contributions discussed certainly form a starting point, but their descriptions do not go far enough, so it can be said that the research is still in a nascent state.

For a more comprehensive account of the role of children and children's magazines in generating donations, this article draws on a range of primary sources. Firstly, articles from the three children's magazines *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi* form the foundation,¹⁴ which is expanded on by other selected documents. Above all, files from the Federal Archives in Berlin play a central role, including not only files

Solidarität", in Ministerium für Bildung, Jugend und Sport des Landes Brandenburg (ed.), *Freundschaft! Die Volksbildung der DDR in ausgewählten Kapiteln* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 171–259. A more current discussion can be found in some respects in Detlef Siegfried, *Bogensee. Weltrevolution in der DDR 1961–1989* (Göttingen, 2021).

⁹Gregory Witkowski, "Between Fighters and Beggars: Socialist Philanthropy and the Imagery of Solidarity in East Germany", in Quinn Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Color* (New York [etc.], 2015), pp. 73–94, 75.

¹⁰Thus, the state of research on children's magazines can generally be described as "disastrously" underrepresented and marginalized. See Bernhard Meier, "Zeitschriften für Kinder und Jugendliche", in Günter Lange, *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart* (Baltmannsweiler, 2011), pp. 465–481. This is also evident for children's magazines in the GDR. Apart from a chapter by Thomas Kramer, only one volume based on a conference can be found in German-language research that deals decidedly with the medium. See Thomas Kramer, "Kinder- und Jugendzeitschriften", in Rüdiger Steinlein, Heidi Strobel, and Thomas Kramer (eds.), *Handbuch zur Kinder- und Jugendliteratur* (Berlin [etc.], 2006), pp. 935–970; and Christoph Lüth and Klaus Pecher, *Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2007). In the English-language research, a systematic analysis of GDR children's magazines is still outstanding. For a larger study dealing primarily with GDR comics, see Sean Eedy, *Four-Color Communism: Comic Books and Contested Power in the German Democratic Republic* (New York [etc.], 2021).

¹¹Thomas Kramer, "Schwarz-weiß-Klischees in bunten Bildgeschichten", in Thomas Kunze and Thomas Vogel (eds.), *Ostalgie international: Erinnerungen an die DDR von Nicaragua bis Vietnam* (Berlin, 2010), pp. 178–188.

¹²Kramer, "Kinder- und Jugendzeitschriften", p. 957.

¹³Frank Bösch, "Internationale Solidarität im geteilten Deutschland. Konzepte und Praktiken", in *idem*, Caroline Moine, and Stefanie Senger (eds.), *Internationale Solidarität. Globales Engagement in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR* (Göttingen, 2018), pp. 7–34, 24; Toni Weis, "The Politics Machine: On the Concept of 'Solidarity' in East German Support for SWAPO", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2 (2011), pp. 351–367.

¹⁴As the children's magazines rarely contain references to authors and page numbers, they are mainly cited in this article with the titles and publication details of the children's magazine.

containing planning documents for the composition of the children's magazines, but also files from the Solidarity Committee. These documents are further complemented by contemporary historical (pedagogical) publications.

The argument of this article is developed in three sections. In the first section, a general introduction to the topic of donations in the GDR is provided. Based on planning documents for children's magazines and letters to the editor, a first insight into the role of anti-imperialist education for children through the medium of children's magazines is offered. In the second section, the special role of the children's magazine *Bummi*, which contains the most direct appeals to children for donations, is elaborated. In addition, the role of parents as well as educational institutions such as kindergartens, schools, and the pioneer organization is analysed through a supplementary booklet. The focus is thus on questions of transgenerational education. Finally, the last section deals with the formation of children's commitment to anti-imperialist solidarity through the medium of children's magazines. The article focuses on the techniques of suggestion, competition, and renunciation as mediation practices. It furthermore analyses the image of childhood that is constructed in the appeals for donations. It argues that a shift away from the narrative of indoctrination not only highlights the value of children's magazines as a source, but it also helps us to further understand internationalism on an educational level.

Anti-Imperialist Solidarity, Donations, and the Role Attributed to Children and Children's Magazines

Fundraising appeals in the three children's magazines studied here can be traced especially in the 1970s and 1980s. This can be attributed to, among other things, the stronger pedagogical focus on internationalism from the 1970s onwards. While the focus of international education in the 1950s and 1960s was largely on promoting a hatred of imperialism among students,¹⁵ this ideal swung more clearly in the direction of education for friendship between peoples and international solidarity in the 1970s.¹⁶ The period before the 1970s as a whole was particularly characterized by the effects of the Hallstein Doctrine, according to which the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) wanted to reconsider development aid for states that recognized the GDR or had relations with it, and the striving for international recognition associated with it. Despite all the limitations of its political-diplomatic relations, the GDR should by no means be seen as an isolated state since, according to Eric Burton, it maintained relations with states that had recently been decolonized.¹⁷ Contemporary literature speaks of the looming end of

¹⁵See the explanations in Krüger-Potratz, Kaminsky, and Winter, "Völkerfreundschaft und internationale Solidarität", pp. 186–188. The discourse can also be traced in contributions to GDR pedagogical academic journals in the 1950s and 1960s. See, for example, Hans Berger, "Auf das 'Wie' der Erziehung zum Haß kommt es an!", *Pädagogik. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der sozialistischen Erziehung*, 3 (1957), pp. 268–274.

¹⁶Krüger-Potratz, Kaminsky, and Winter, "Völkerfreundschaft und internationale Solidarität", p. 190.

¹⁷Eric Burton, *In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus. Tansania und die globale Entwicklungsarbeit der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1961–1990* (Berlin [etc.], 2021), p. 2.

the Hallstein Doctrine as early as 1969.¹⁸ The GDR also established diplomatic relations with various Asian states, including Cambodia and South Vietnam, and it was recognized by Iraq, Sudan, South Yemen, and Egypt after the Six-Day War in 1967. The GDR's increasingly internationalist orientation is thus presumably also a reason for the increasing number of appeals for donations in the children's magazines at the time.

The donation campaigns published in the children's magazines were an expression of anti-imperialist solidarity, an orientation of proletarian internationalism, also known as anti-colonial solidarity, which focused particularly on (post-)colonial states and liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In addition to monetary donations, donations in kind in the form of clothing, household items such as blankets, and toys were also collected through the appeals. On some occasions, however, children were asked to express solidarity in the form of pictures, letters, or postcards.

The magazines themselves were part of the GDR's international aid programme, described by Hans-Joachim Döring as simultaneously tangled and regulated.¹⁹ The GDR itself, however, avoided or distanced itself from use of the term development aid.²⁰ Thus, in the dictionary of the foreign policy of the GDR under the heading "Development aid (imperialistic)", Western aid is described as "state financing of the neo-colonial expansion of imperialism in the interests of monopoly capital".²¹ Such expansion apparently is also evident in the simultaneous attempt by imperialist states to create relations of dependency, which would also contribute to blocking the receiving countries' access to the world of socialist states. In contrast, the aid provided by socialist countries is seen as "economic and scientific-technical support", which, based on ideals such as "equality, anti-discrimination" and the pursuit of the "consolidation of political independence",²² is oriented in clear contrast to Western development aid. Nevertheless, it can be observed that Eurocentric logics of progression and development are also inherent in the socialist understanding of aid, differing from the case of Western aid above all in the way they were justified and legitimized. The socialist transformation and orientation of states that had just gained independence or were still struggling for it meant the ideal, and indeed only, path was modernization, industrialization, and thereby, ultimately, an improvement in the reality of people's lives. Socialism and progress were thus always thought of together. Döring accurately sums up the underlying

¹⁸Werner Hänisch, "Die Außenpolitik und die internationalen Beziehungen der DDR in den Hauptetappen ihrer Entwicklung", in Autorenkollektiv unter der Leitung von Stefan Doernberg (eds), *Außenpolitik der DDR* (Berlin (GDR), 1979), pp. 45–126, 104.

¹⁹Hans-Joachim Döring, "Entwicklungspolitik und Solidarität in der DDR, dargestellt an Beispielen der staatlichen Zusammenarbeit mit Mosambik und Äthiopien und der entwicklungsbezogenen Bildungsarbeit unabhängiger Gruppen, Band I" (Ph.D., Technische Universität Berlin, 2008), p. 26. Available at: <https://depositonce.tu-berlin.de/items/5019a465-be74-4565-a1a2-ca88dd43456b>; last accessed 22 March 2023.

²⁰A detailed account of the discourse surrounding the concept cannot be given here. However, an initial discussion is provided by Lothar Brock and Hans Joachim Spanger, *Die beiden deutschen Staaten in der Dritten Welt. Die Entwicklungspolitik der DDR – eine Herausforderung für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland?* (Wiesbaden, 1987), p. 94.

²¹Werner Hänisch, *Wörterbuch der Aussenpolitik und des Völkerrechts* (Berlin (GDR), 1980), p. 150.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 151.

logic: “The more socialism there is, the more social justice is established. And the stronger the socialist countries are in a world comparison, the better off the developing countries and their people are.”²³ These ideas are also closely interwoven with the utopia of a socialist world revolution, in which the states of the liberation movements play an essential role as one of the three main thrusts. Depictions of the backwardness caused by colonialism and the accompanying context of justification for GDR aid can also be traced in the children’s magazines. Although they must be viewed critically, a detailed analysis would be too far-reaching in the context of this article. Instead, the role attributed to children and children’s magazines in the GDR fundraising complex will be examined.

The aid campaigns for Vietnam were promoted most widely, especially in the 1970s. Other campaigns included those for Namibia in the early to mid-1980s, Nicaragua from 1985 onwards, and others for unspecified African states. Appeals for donations for Korea, Mali, Chile, and South Africa are also found, although they are not as frequent as those mentioned above. Most of the calls refer to transferring sums of money to an anti-imperialist solidarity bank account managed by the Solidarity Committee. Founded in 1960 and initially named the Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, the institution primarily coordinated cooperation between the GDR and the liberation movements of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In 1963, it was renamed the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee of the GDR and, with the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile, it finally became the Solidarity Committee of the GDR in 1973. Donations from the population that were administered by the committee were mainly collected through annual transfers of levies to the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB) and are assessed differently by contemporary witnesses and researchers. While Ilona Schleicher characterizes the founding of the Vietnam Board of the Solidarity Committee as a response to the “spontaneously spreading solidarity actions of the population”, and thus as a justification of solidarity as a bottom-up principle,²⁴ Bodie argues that the mechanisms behind the donations and associated social controls must also be taken into account: for example, the number of donations also increased with the introduction of a solidarity contribution column on the FDGB membership card in 1960.²⁵ Even though it was generally possible to contribute individually, most donations were collected through the workplace and the FDGB.

It is difficult to determine the share and significance of children’s donations. Schleicher notes that 0.6 million marks in donations were collected by

²³Hans-Joachim Döring, *Es geht um unsere Existenz. Die Politik der DDR gegenüber der Dritten Welt am Beispiel von Mosambik und Äthiopien* (Berlin, 1999), p. 34.

²⁴Ilona Schleicher, researcher and contemporary witness, was also involved in the Solidarity Service International e.V. (SODI), the legal successor to the Solidarity Committee of the GDR. See *idem*, “Denk an die Quelle ...”. Vor 35 Jahren wurde der Vietnam-Solidaritätsausschuss gegründet”, *Neues Deutschland*, 17 July 2010. Available at: <https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/175461.denk-an-die-quelle.html?sstr=Denk|die|Quelle>; last accessed 21 March 2023.

²⁵George Bodie, “Global GDR? Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Decolonization in the German Democratic Republic, 1960–1989” (Ph.D., University College London, 2019), p. 161. Available at: <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10095183/>; last accessed 4 March 2023.

kindergartens and schools in 1982,²⁶ while an evaluation of the Solidarity Committee for the year 1979 reveals a share of 2.5 million marks.²⁷ Compared with the 100 million marks collected by the FDGB in 1982 and 175 million marks in 1979, the sums collected by childcare facilities represent only a small proportion (around one per cent) of all donations in the GDR. Nevertheless, it must be noted that these figures only relate to these specific years, which makes it difficult to reconstruct the development of children's donations in the GDR over time. However, it seems clear that education for internationalism was a central goal in the GDR, given the curricula analysed by Griesse and Marburger. The fact that children also contributed to the GDR's fundraising activities in this context, and that these campaigns were advertised exclusively for this target group, is evident in the children's magazines.

The children's magazines, first published in 1946 (*ABC-Zeitung*), 1953 (*Frösi*), and 1957 (*Bummi*),²⁸ were part of an educational mandate. Thus, Rudi Chohanetz states in a GDR publication on children's magazines: "The children's press is an essential means of exerting a determining influence on children's lives politically and organizationally."²⁹ All products of the children's press in the GDR were published by the Junge Welt publishing house and were thus under the direction of the Central Council of the Free German Youth. Their task was to shape children's personalities according to the ideals of socialist society and – because of their close connection to the pioneer organization – to influence the organization and modelling of children's lives. Children's magazines thus linked up with an extensive newspaper and magazine market in the GDR, which covered all age cohorts and areas of life. The magazines analysed here were aimed at different age groups, representing a seamless transition: while *Bummi* was primarily addressed to preschool children between the ages of three and six, *ABC-Zeitung* took over from the age of six to nine, and *Frösi* appealed to children between nine and thirteen. Press products generally enjoyed great popularity in the GDR. In 1979, ninety-two per cent of GDR households stated that they regularly bought one or more newspapers and magazines or subscribed to at least one.³⁰ In line with regular consumption, the GDR press market had high circulation figures: in 1988, licences existed for 1,812 publications with an average total circulation of around 46 million copies.³¹ The GDR children's press was especially popular, with approximately 3.5

²⁶Ilona Schleicher, "Das Solidaritätskomitee der DDR und Mosambik, Unterstützung des Befreiungskampfes und Entwicklungshilfe", in Ulrich van der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, and Hans-Georg Schleicher (eds), *Die DDR und Afrika* (Münster, 1993), pp. 192–208, 194.

²⁷Solidaritätskomitee der DDR, "Zahlen und Fakten über die Solidaritätsbewegung, 31 March 1980", SAPMO BArch DY 24/14367.

²⁸All the magazines were published monthly, with the exception of *Bummi*, which was published every second week from 1965 onwards. In 1990–1991, *ABC-Zeitung* and *Frösi* were discontinued. While an attempt to re-establish *Frösi* in 2005 failed, the children's magazine *Bummi* still exists at the time of writing.

²⁹Chohanetz, *Die Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR*, p. 14.

³⁰Christine Lost, "Kinderzeitschriften und -zeitungen der DDR: Zwischen verschiedenen Betrachtungsweisen", in Christoph Lüth and Klaus Pecher (eds), *Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2007), pp. 180–202, 181.

³¹Gunter Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe der Partei. Eine Mediengeschichte der DDR* (Cologne [etc.], 2002), p. 214.

magazines published per child per month.³² While no detailed account of the subject of freedom of the press in the GDR can be given in this article, it can be assumed that the Socialist Unity Party had a direct influence on the media. It can also be presumed that this direct influence explicitly affected children's newspapers and magazines as well, since all press products in the GDR were subject to a licence, according to which the press office checked whether the newspapers and magazines complied with GDR law.³³

The significance of children's magazines in international education can be seen, above all, in correspondence to and documents from those magazines. Thus, a consultation about the contribution of the children's magazine *Bummi* to international solidarity states "that special solidarity actions for the age group of preschool children are necessary for communist education".³⁴ The development of these qualities is also clearly identified as a goal of the children's magazines. Hence, the annual plan for the children's magazines for 1971/1972, for example, emphasizes the educational goal of internationalism.³⁵ Furthermore, solidarity is described as a "valuable character trait" that "has been continuously generated with 'Bummi' for years".³⁶ Meanwhile, the result of a collection campaign for Nicaragua illustrates "how deeply compassion and solidarity are already developed and anchored in the thinking and actions of our children and Thälmann pioneers".³⁷ References to children's role vis-à-vis internationalism are especially noteworthy in documents relating to a 1983 collection campaign in the children's magazine *Bummi* (Figure 2). Entitled "Brother Sam and His Little Black Sister", it depicts the fate of a Namibian boy, Sami, and his family who end up in Angola during the war between the liberation movement South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the South African occupying power. Conditions in the refugee camp are described as follows: "Sami has nothing to play with, no cot, not even a little shirt. Sami's sister Sally has no dress and no panties."³⁸ For this reason, *Bummi*, the yellow bear that gives the children's magazine its title, calls for donations of clothes and toys and once again clarifies: "Everyone helps!" The collection campaign is particularly interesting because documents from the estate of the editor-in-chief, Ursula Werner-Böhnke, which can be accessed in the archives, illustrate the importance of child solidarity, but also the role of the children's magazine in the international solidarity complex. Thus, the campaign is assessed by kindergartens and parents as a central educational tool. One family's evaluation of the *Bummi*

³²Rudi Chownetz, "Erziehung zum Bürger des Jahres 2000. Erfahrungen unserer Kinderpresse", *Neue deutsche Presse*, Zeitschrift für Presse, Funk und Fernsehen der DDR / Verband der Journalisten der DDR, 15 (1970), pp. 21–23, 21.

³³Holzweißig, *Die schärfste Waffe*, pp. 26f.

³⁴"Beratung über die Aktivitäten der Redaktion 'Bummi' auf dem Gebiet der Solidarität, 11 February 1987", SAPMO BArch DZ 8/570.

³⁵"Einschätzung der Arbeitspläne der Redaktion 'Fröhlich sein und singen', 'ABC-Zeitung', 'Atze' und 'Bummi' für das Schuljahr 1971/72 in Auswertung des VIII. Parteitages der SED und des IX. Parlaments der FDJ, 4 September 1971", SAPMO BArch DY 25/2745.

³⁶"Zur Auswertung des VIII. Parteitages der SED und des IX. Parlaments der FDJ, Zum Schuljahr 1971/72 (September-Juni-Plan) *Bummi*, 1971", SAPMO BArch DY 25/2858.

³⁷Manuscript of a speech, n.d., SAPMO BArch DZ 8/570.

³⁸"Brüderchen Sam und seine kleine schwarze Schwester", *Bummi*, 7 (1983).



Figure 2. *Bummi* title page for the collection campaign “Brother Sam and his little Black Sister”, *Bummi*, 7 (1983).

Source: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (Leipzig), ZA 40173.

campaign states: “It is important to teach children at an early age the basic ideas of international solidarity in an appropriate way, as you do with success ...”³⁹

Kindergartens were especially grateful for the educational support provided by the appeal of the children’s magazine. With the cooperation of the campaign, “helpfulness, compassion and the idea of solidarity” were awakened in the children. Another kindergarten teacher emphasizes the long-term effect of the appeals for donations on her own life: “Being part of a ‘Bummi generation’ myself (born in ’53), I remember the effect of your earlier campaigns on my emotional development.” The voices of children from pioneer groups and school classes are also mentioned in the files, emphasizing, above all, their compassion and solidarity with Namibia. Certainly, this collection of quotations from the estate of *Bummi*’s editor-in-chief must also be viewed with caution, as they are often only small excerpts torn from the context of entire letters, which were intended to emphasize positive perceptions of the campaign. At the same time, however, it was one of the largest and most successful collection campaigns ever coordinated by a children’s magazine, exceeding even the government’s expectations. The excerpts are thus an important source, on the one hand, for the self-perception of the children’s magazine *Bummi*

³⁹See for this and all subsequent quotations of the paragraph: Verlag Junge Welt “Über die Bummi-Solidaritätsaktion ‘Hilfe für Brüderchen Sam, seine kleine schwarze Schwester Sally und ihre Freunde’, Nachlass Ursula Werner-Böhnke, Bummi, 1973–1989, 1983”, SAPMO BArch NY 4674/26.

within the complex of state solidarity. On the other hand, they depict the stubbornness of the citizens of the GDR, as the campaign also contradicts Döring's assumption of a reduced understanding of and willingness to show solidarity in the 1980s.⁴⁰

The examples shown here provide a first insight into the role of children's magazines in the state's programme for donations and education for anti-imperialist solidarity. What follows is an examination of the content of the magazines.

“Dear Parents, Please Help Me Again”: Transgenerational Education in Bummi

Following the presentation of the role of children's magazines in the complex of international solidarity, the question arises as to how the children's magazines differed from each other in their calls for solidarity. On a quantitative level, *Bummi* featured the greatest number of articles calling for solidarity. Furthermore, in terms of the quality of content, the children's magazine seems to play a particularly important role compared with that of *ABC-Zeitung* and *Frösi*. While the latter two focus on reports about children's donations, acknowledgements of donations from the editors or recipient countries, and stories in which solidarity donations play a role, most direct appeals for donations can be found in *Bummi*. This seems strange at first glance, considering that the addressed age cohort is between three and six years old, and therefore unable to either read the magazine or donate money independently. In appeals for donations, the editors seem to assume that the children's magazine is also consumed by parents. This claim is not unjustified, considering that children's newspapers and magazines were often not intended for individual consumption. In addition to the standard subscription option, they were also acquired collectively by schools, after-school care centres, and the pioneer organization. As stated in a handbook for the education of younger school children aimed at teachers and pedagogues, the magazines were intended to function as a textbook supplement in school lessons and to be used in the extracurricular sector, as a guide for activities with the pioneer organization or to be processed by reading together with parents, educators, and teachers, who were encouraged to become familiar with the medium of the children's press and to put the content of the magazines into context for the children.⁴¹ According to a survey of readers of the children's magazine *Frösi* from 1968–1969, the integration of children's magazines into teaching seems especially questionable: three quarters of the young respondents stated that the magazine was not used in class. However, if one looks at the role of parents, three quarters of the respondents also stated that they talked about contributions in *Frösi* with their parents. Furthermore, according to the respondents, “most parents” were reading the children's magazine themselves.⁴² The same can probably be said for the children's magazine *Bummi* – especially given the age cohort addressed – but there are no detailed studies on the matter.

⁴⁰Döring, *Entwicklungspolitik und Solidarität*, p. 33.

⁴¹Walter Günther (ed.), *Die Erziehung des jüngeren Schulkindes. Handbuch für Klassenleiter, Lehrer und Erzieher* (Berlin (GDR), 1976), pp. 360–365.

⁴²Lost, “Kinderzeitschriften und -zeitungen”, pp. 195–198.

In contrast to *ABC-Zeitung* and *Frösi*, however, the involvement of parents in *Bummi* is very clearly highlighted by another aspect. Their role vis-à-vis the children's magazine is defined by the bi-monthly enclosed brochure *Bummi for Parents*, published from 1976 onwards. In this supplement, everyday questions of education were brought into focus via detailed articles. Printed letters to the editor allowed for an exchange of opinions and discussion. The brochure is particularly valuable for this article because it contains background information on solidarity actions as well as direct instructions for parents on how to implement them. Therefore, *Bummi for Parents* also demonstrates how the ideal of international solidarity was shifted to older generations of society. The booklet contains detailed information on the most substantial solidarity campaigns: "Hearts for Tania's Dad" (Chile, 1978); "The Marble Bead Campaign" (Vietnam, 1979); "My 2nd Sunday Dress for My Friend" (Vietnam, 1980); "The Little Christmas Spoons" (Namibia, 1983/1984); two untitled campaigns for Nicaragua in 1985; and the already mentioned fundraising campaign "Brother Sam and His Little Black Sister" (Namibia, 1983). The role of parents in these campaigns is manifold. Firstly, they are included in the children's magazine as addressees of the donation campaigns. The campaigns ask for a mixture of monetary donations and donations in kind. Often, the collection of money is also combined with the making of gifts, which is intended to directly address the parents' commitment to helping. In "The Marble Bead Campaign" of 1979, marbles and beads were to be collected to be sold afterwards at the National Youth Festival in Berlin and the proceeds were to go to Vietnam. As part of the solidarity action, parents were asked to sew appropriate bags in which to pack the materials.⁴³ In one of the two campaigns for Nicaragua, washing bags were to be sewn and donated along with monetary donations.⁴⁴ In addition to parents, other adults were also involved in the solidarity actions of the children's magazine. Thus, in the campaign "Hearts for Tania's Dad", a large woollen blanket was made up of several pieces mainly knitted by editorial staff, authors, and kindergarten teachers.⁴⁵ It is clear from the direct appeals to adults that they should see themselves as an immediate part of the solidarity actions – which are primarily directed at children. Nevertheless, these examples do not just show a mere positioning of parents as the addressees of a children's magazine. In an evaluation of the *Bummi* magazines, the following handwritten comment can be retrieved: "It is very good that 'Bummi' also addresses the parents of its young readers. They are directly involved in the creation of the initiatives. In this way, 'Bummi' serves as a direct educational influence for the parents."⁴⁶ This comment can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the passage indicates that parents are not just recipients, but are also acknowledged as a societal cohort that benefits from children's magazines and is meant to be educated through them. This implies that the magazine serves as a means not only to educate children, but also to

⁴³"Solidarität – jetzt erst recht", in *Bummi für Eltern* 4, *Bummi*, 7 (1979).

⁴⁴"Unsere Solidarität gilt verwundeten Kämpfern", in *Bummi für Eltern* 5, *Bummi*, 9 (1985).

⁴⁵"Herzen für Tanias Papa", in *Bummi für Eltern* 1, *Bummi*, 1 (1978).

⁴⁶"Einschätzung 'Bummi'-Hefte Sept. 1973 bis Februar 1974, 21 February 1974", SAPMO BArch DY 25/2745.

extend education to other segments of society. Consequently, the children's magazine plays a crucial role in fostering transgenerational learning and promoting anti-imperialist solidarity. On the other hand, the educational mandate of the parents in their responsibility towards their children is emphasized. With the assistance of the children's magazine, they are responsible for conveying a basic understanding of international solidarity to their children. Thus, below the children's articles, they are encouraged to use *Bummi for Parents* to learn about the conditions in the respective recipient countries and to use this as a point of discussion with their children. International solidarity is understood as "an important and good character trait" to be passed on to children.⁴⁷

Letters to the editor from parents commenting on the campaign "My 2nd Sunday Dress for My Friend" for Vietnam and published in *Bummi for Parents* show the self-image of parents as guardians who use the children's magazine to achieve precisely this positioning with their children. A mother from Dessow reports: "Our daughter Yvonne is five years old. I told her about the children who needed help. She immediately agreed to pick out a few things." A father from Saalfeld says: "The children truly experience what solidarity means. Our son is three and a half years old. He wore all the clothes until recently and didn't like to part with his little coat. When I explained to him that soon a little boy in Vietnam would be happy about it, he was pleased." A couple from Berlin let it be known under the heading "Always talk about solidarity": "We will always talk to our children about the idea of solidarity so that they learn to help other people and always stand up for peace."⁴⁸ Again, it should be noted that these letters were most likely printed very selectively and therefore only represent a small sample of the opinions expressed by parents. Nevertheless, this selection shows a level of significance that reaches well beyond young readers. The letters also function as a form of social control for the parents who deal with the children's magazine: in a reciprocal interplay of invocation and enthusiastic implementation in practice, they not only help to establish an image of a solidary society, but can also be understood as a transgenerational identification measure. The necessity of conveying international solidarity to the children, which is evident in the examples shown in this article, is about more than the moral education of the youngest generation. Moreover, practices of solidarity are regarded as transgenerational participation in the formation of an international community.

"Solidarity Ought to Hurt a Bit": Generating Children's Solidarity through Magazines

Even though the state's educational strategies are evident from the examples provided so far and it is certainly necessary to look critically at how states in Latin America, Asia, and Africa are portrayed. It would, nevertheless, be short-sighted to view children's

⁴⁷"Liebe Eltern!", *Bummi*, 22 (1970).

⁴⁸For all the quotations mentioned here, see "Gedanken von Anke, Jana, Stefan, Holger und unseren anderen Leserkindern, Eltern und Kindergärtnerinnen zu unserer Solidaritätsaktion 'Mein 2. Sonntagskleid für Vietnam'", in *Bummi für Eltern* 3, *Bummi*, 5 (1981).

magazines only from the aspect of indoctrination, or even to see them as a kind of trap set by the state for children desperate for entertainment. As Kramer describes it: "Since the youthful readers in the everyday-grey-socialist lead deserts thirsted for any kind of pictorial variety, they naturally also looked at these propaganda products."⁴⁹ Viewing children's magazines solely from an indoctrination lens limits the perspective on childhood in the GDR. Concerning the research gap around the readership of children's magazines, the indoctrinating effects on readers are barely researched and difficult to reconstruct.⁵⁰ Viewing the GDR children's press only from the point of indoctrinating influence undermines and cuts short the analysis of its educational potential and neglects the dimensions that are inherent in it concerning internationalism in the GDR. According to Christiane Lost, to reduce research on GDR children's magazines exclusively to their function of indoctrination would even constitute a form of indoctrination itself.⁵¹ Rather, factors such as the popularity of the products, the orientation towards the children's world through games, encouragement of independent activity and assistance, their artistic-aesthetic significance, and the individual resistance of some authors to political orders must be taken into account.⁵² Considering that internationalism was a concept that was not experienced by most people as a lived practice but one that existed primarily in the media, as Bodie describes in the introduction to this Special Issue, widening one's perspective helps to highlight the multidimensionality of the children's magazines. Thus, the children's magazines must be seen as one of the few opportunities available to children to practise a form of connection with other states. Or, as Witkowski puts it: "Their donations could cross borders and have an impact – even as they themselves could not visit those places."⁵³

Considering the children's magazines in this context, the question of how children's commitment to internationalism is generated is particularly significant. Again, the focus will be on all three children's magazines, for even though in the magazine *Bummi* the focus is on a transgenerational approach, this is to be understood primarily as an extension of direct appeals to children. Although *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi* are aimed at different age cohorts, they address their readers in similar ways. In addition to establishing Fanta from Mali, Sloa from Vietnam, or Sam and his little sister Sally from Namibia as figures of roughly the same age as the readers with whom they can identify, and thus providing the children with a point of contact with international discourses, the readers' commitment to anti-imperialist solidarity is to be achieved via three different means: suggestion; competition; and renunciation.

Rhetorical questions and suggestive statements are intended to help the children not only position themselves morally, but also actively participate in practising solidarity. For example, readers are encouraged to "show what they are capable

⁴⁹Kramer, "Schwarz-weiß-Klischees", p. 180.

⁵⁰Lost, "Kinderzeitschriften und -zeitungen", pp. 193f.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 191.

⁵²Klaus Pecher, "Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR. Erziehungsstaatliche Okkupation der Kindheit", in Christoph Lüth and Klaus Pecher (eds), *Kinderzeitschriften in der DDR* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2007), pp. 12–43, 41.

⁵³Witkowski, "Between Fighters and Beggars", p. 89.

of”;⁵⁴ elsewhere, they are asked: “Have you thought about how you will help Sloa and Thien and the people in their country?”⁵⁵ The request and the question reveal a certain requirement that children must meet concerning anti-imperialist solidarity, which works on both a practical and an ideological level. The article “Children Paint for African Friends”, published in *Frösi* in 1978, also demonstrates this requirement to adopt a certain position. In order to express solidarity with the liberation movements in Southern Africa, a picture is to be drawn that describes “the happiness of children under socialism”. This is accompanied by the invocation of children as included among “all progressive people” who condemn the policy of apartheid.⁵⁶ A differentiation of childhood into socialist and non-socialist is carried out here, against a setting in which the children are supposed to take a moral stand for socialism. Despite or precisely because of the suggestion, readers are presented as active protagonists, who are expected to take a stand on the questions raised, to know what it means to be happy in socialism, and to develop ideas and ways of helping. The presentation of internationalism has a self-evident position in the children’s magazines through the means of suggestion.

Another dimension is competition, which can be seen as a motivation for readers to contribute to anti-imperialist solidarity. Before identifying specific dimensions of competition in the form of direct comparison and reward, it is worthwhile examining the relationship between the individual and the community or collective. While calls for donations from children are addressed to both individuals and the entire pioneer organization, donation and collection results are only reported in a collective form via kindergartens, school classes, or the pioneer organization. In this way, the practice of solidarity is framed as the merit of a community. The dimension of competition ties in with this collectivity. Thus, for example, the collection results of the school classes with the highest collection rates in a campaign for Vietnam are printed in *ABC-Zeitung*.⁵⁷ In addition to the prestige that comes with being named in the magazine, there is also an element of social control here: it is possible for school classes that are not mentioned to draw a direct comparison with their performance from the results, which, in turn, could become a motivational factor for improvement in the next fundraising campaign. Not only does the publication of collection results serve as a motivation for others to donate for anti-imperialist solidarity, but prizes are also awarded to particularly diligent collectors. For example, *Bummi* readers are asked to donate money, as well as a painted picture, for Vietnam. Readers who donate at least three marks will receive a *Bummi* friendship badge, which, in turn, will play a role on the first day of school. A lack of friendship badges could well have led to exclusionary effects among school beginners, which can at least be presumed to be an aspiration given the name of the campaign, “No school beginner without the *Bummi* Vietnam badge”.⁵⁸ But rewards for donating can also be found in *Frösi*. In the article “Children Paint

⁵⁴Frank Frenzel “Kennwort: Pionierhilfe”, *Frösi*, 4 (1987), pp. 30f.

⁵⁵*Bummi*, 22 (1973).

⁵⁶“Kinder malen für afrikanische Freunde”, *Frösi*, 7 (1978), p. 3.

⁵⁷“Solidarität mit Vietnam”, *ABC-Zeitung*, 3 (1973), p. 3.

⁵⁸Solidaritätskomitee der DDR Vietnam Ausschuß, “Umlauf Vorlage, 12 June 1974”, SAPMO BArch DZ 8/113.

for African Friends”, described above, the first one hundred picture submissions to take a positive stance on childhood under socialism were “awarded hand-signed anti-apartheid caricatures by GDR press artists”.⁵⁹ And in an entry calling for donations for an unspecified African country, the result of the collections is to be entered on a lottery ticket, which will then be used to award various prizes including toys such as figurines, puzzles, and remote-controlled cars, but also tote bags, books, T-shirts, and caps.⁶⁰ These contributions in particular illustrate the attempt to frame the act of donation playfully and thus possibly make it more compatible with the world of children. The extent to which the direct comparison and the rewards actually contributed to an improvement in commitment cannot be traced from the sources. It should be noted here that appeals for donations that go hand in hand with rewards are rather rare and, for example, are not part of the large solidarity activities in *Bummi* described above.

A final aspect that appears in the context of children’s engagement is the propagation of renunciation. Here, the commitment to internationalism is evoked differently than in the two examples mentioned earlier. This method creates an attitude of solidarity by invoking the children’s sense of responsibility. Thus, in the course of a collection campaign for Vietnam, children are encouraged to do without “presents, sweets, a carousel ride, candy floss”,⁶¹ or they are asked by *Bummi* to invest the money for a Christmas present in collecting for solidarity instead.⁶² The renunciation of Christmas presents seems to have been a routine demand, as it can be found in several articles. Children are seen as having a strong sense of responsibility in these demands. They are considered able to understand the importance of anti-imperialist solidarity and to commit themselves to it in such a way that they even accept a disadvantage for it. “Solidarity ought to hurt a bit” is how it is described in a brochure about the Thälmann Pioneers accompanying the children’s magazine.⁶³ Solidarity as a core part of education for internationalism thus emphasizes the sacrifices that must be made by citizens of the GDR and thus also by the children.

The three levels described in this section – suggestion, competition, and renunciation – are linked by an overarching commonality: addressing children as active participants. It is made clear that the projects depend on the children’s involvement and that they have to become active and even renounce some of their own privileges for the active practice of solidarity. Use of the imperative in addressing children also plays an important role. In most of the contributions, children are addressed directly and asked to take responsibility, to take a stand, or to donate. The readers’ commitment is portrayed as significant. Hence, it can be seen how the appeals for donations, such as for the construction of two orphanages in Nicaragua,⁶⁴ or for schools in Vietnam,⁶⁵ also allow the readers to be entrusted

⁵⁹“Kinder malen für afrikanische Freunde”, p. 3.

⁶⁰“Die Emmy will nach Afrika, weil sie noch nie den Urwald sah!”, *Frösi*, 4 (1983), pp. 14f.

⁶¹“Zauberzeck im Kaspereck. Wer jagt den Zauberer mit uns weg!”, *Bummi*, 20 (1973).

⁶²“Bummis größter Weihnachtswunsch an euch”, *Bummi*, 21 (1973).

⁶³“Beiheft. Unsere Pionierorganisation ‘Ernst Thälmann’”.

⁶⁴Frenzel, “Kennwort: Pionierhilfe”, p. 31.

⁶⁵“Bummis größter Weihnachtswunsch.”

with responsibility for the realization of larger projects. Childhood in these magazines is constructed as an autonomous phase, and meaning is attached to children's engagements. Therefore, they seem to contain an aspect that is hardly discussed given the common narrative of socialist childhoods as manipulation and indoctrination:⁶⁶ the appeals address children as members of a society in which they actively participate and which they can change and shape through their actions.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the complex interplay between politics, ideology, education, and propaganda in the GDR's international aid efforts, and the important role played by the children's magazines *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi* in this context.

Appeals for donations in the GDR were an expression of anti-imperialist solidarity, which focused on (post-)colonial states and liberation movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The socialist understanding of aid differed from that of Western aid in the way it was justified and legitimized. The GDR perceived Western aid as an embodiment of neo-colonial expansion, while the aid provided by socialist countries was framed as economic and scientific-technical support, while still reproducing Eurocentric stereotypes. In addition to foreign policy factors such as the Basic Treaty with the FRG in 1972 and the entry into the United Nations in 1973, the GDR's aid efforts were characterized by a strong pedagogical focus on internationalism from the 1970s onwards, which emphasized education for friendship between peoples and international solidarity. These factors likely contributed to the increasing number of appeals for donations in children's magazines in the 1970s and 1980s.

The analysis of planning documents for children's magazines and letters to the editor provided valuable insights into the importance of anti-imperialist education for children and its delivery through the medium of children's magazines. This article has highlighted that children's magazines played a crucial role in promoting international solidarity among children and in shaping the political consciousness of (not just) young readers. The three children's magazines studied in this article took different approaches to promoting solidarity, with *Bummi* containing most of the direct appeals for donations. Thus, this children's magazine can be considered to have a special function in education aimed at anti-imperialist solidarity: while children were the primary audience for these magazines, parents and other adults also played a significant role in the solidarity campaigns promoted by *Bummi*. Through the enclosed booklet *Bummi for Parents*, they received background information on the recipient countries as well as instructions for the implementation and mediation of the solidarity campaigns. This involvement suggests that children's magazines were not just educational tools for children, but that they also served as a means of educating other parts of society about the importance of international solidarity. Furthermore, through letters from parents, it

⁶⁶Martina Winkler, *Kindheitsgeschichte. Eine Einführung* (Göttingen, 2017), p. 121.

was possible to show both their role and the role of children's magazines in the emergence of solidaristic thinking and practices.

The campaigns featured in the magazines embodied one of the few opportunities for children to connect with other states; thus, an international consciousness had to be generated among the children through the medium of the children's magazine. This goal was achieved through various means, including techniques of suggestion, competition, and renunciation. The use of rhetorical questions and suggestive statements created an expectation that children would achieve a required level of anti-imperialist solidarity. The competition aspect tied in with the collectivity of the practice of solidarity, while renunciation involved giving up something to support anti-imperialist causes. While, when looking at transgenerational education and how engagement can be generated, one can certainly note that the children's magazines served a clear educational purpose in propagating internationalism, they cannot solely be considered from an indoctrination lens. A shift away from the narrative of indoctrination highlights them as important sources in the discourse on internationalism in the GDR. Thus, despite the Cold War context in which they were published, these children's magazines offer valuable insights into how media can be used to promote social and political values, and how children can be empowered to become agents of change in their communities and beyond.

Overall, the analysis of the three GDR children's magazines *ABC-Zeitung*, *Bummi*, and *Frösi* has shed light on the significance of children in the concept of education for internationalism, providing a deeper understanding of the role of media in promoting anti-imperialism and solidarity. A complex interplay emerged between state requirements and the importance attributed to international education by parents and educational institutions. Appeals for donations in the journals combined ideology and practice in an exceptional way. Anti-imperialist solidarity exercised by children connects support for the fight against colonialism with an international socialist future to be shaped by those same children. Nevertheless, this analysis merely provides a basis for the importance of children's media in education for anti-imperialist solidarity. While this study focused on the role of children's magazines in promoting internationalism through donation campaigns, further research is needed on additional ways in which children's magazines supported the educational goal of internationalism, the role of other (children's) media, and the interplay between internationalism and children's media in other socialist states, to name a few. Ultimately, the aim is to elaborate on the role of children's media in shaping public opinion, promoting political ideologies, and thus also in framing the international as something ordinary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of childhood in socialist states.