

"Ku'damm 56"

Sophie Lange /

Humboldt University of Berlin, Berlin Center for Cold War Studies

Germans have been reliving the Cold War, at least on-screen. *Bridge of Spies* played in cinemas in 2015; a documentary series shedding light on [Secrets of the Cold War](#) aired on ZDF Info this year. The Vietnam War also seems to be constantly re-emerging as a storyline. The ZDF three-part miniseries [Ku'damm '56](#) with frontline Berlin as its focus also appears to delve into the topic, at least at first glance. Instead, screenplay writer Annette Hess – also known for the series *Weissensee* – sketches a different kind of Cold War, a generational conflict waged on the dance floor: polite society dancing vs. dirty rock 'n' roll.

The strict owner of the "Galant" dancing and etiquette school on West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm boulevard will seemingly stop at nothing to get her three daughters advantageously wedded off to good families. It's up to the unlikely black sheep Monika (Sonja Gerhardt) to puncture her mother's manic search for sons-in-law: "Do women need a man at all?" Essentially this is about gender roles and how the topic was discussed in the 1950s. Abortion, husbands deciding whether their spouses could work outside the home, and West Germany's anti-homosexuality law ("Paragraph 175") also figure.



As a backdrop for this look at crumbling social conventions, the Cold War is just a context full of clichés. Here the newly-built Hansa Quarter in bright light and the Ku'damm straight out of a postcard; there the dark and gray eastern half of the city, still lying in rubble. With the family father, believed missing since 1944, the stereotypical East-West confrontation arrives in the family's home. As penance for a Nazi past, through which the Schöllack family had acquired the dancing school seized from a Jewish family, the father (Robert Schupp) stayed in East Berlin after his release as a POW to help build a new society. Those who wish can detect allusions to East Germany's foundational myth. But this helps us understand the historical context about as much as an offhand reference to a dance pupil with a "hairdo like a hydrogen bomb" does. That's too bad. The confluence of the Cold War with newly defined gender roles deserves more – and especially more thoughtful – attention.

Sophie Lange, M.A., is a research assistant at the [Berlin Center for Cold War Studies](#) and a doctoral candidate at the [Humboldt University Berlin](#).

Recommended Citation:

Sophie Lange, "Ku'damm 56", 05/04/2016,
<http://www.berlinerkolleg.com/en/blog/kudamm-56> (please add the date of the last call to this page in brackets).