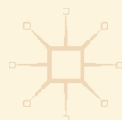# Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies

memories of everyday Life

edited by
Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, Zsuzsa Millei

Childhood and Schooling
in (Post)Socialist Societies

"The authors of this beautiful book are professional academics and intellectuals who grew up in different socialist countries. Exploring 'socialist childhoods' in a myriad ways they draw on memoirs and memories, personal experience and collectively history, emotional knowledge of an insider and a measured perspective of an analyst. What emerges is life that was caught between real optimism and dullness, ethical commitments and ideological absurdities, selfless devotion to children and their treatment as a political resource. Such attention to detail and paradox makes this collective effort not only timely but also remarkably genuine."

—Alexei Yurchak, *Professor of Anthropology,*
University of California, Berkeley, USA

"How can the intimate stories of childhood – the memories and experiences of everyday life – disrupt colonial/modern accounts of history and political change? In this highly original volume, rich and evocative memory stories of (post)socialist childhoods are weaved together to offer profound insights into the possibilities for decolonising childhood. The thoughtfully situated auto-ethnographic and collective biographical accounts presented here brilliantly reveal the cultural-political significance of childhood. In doing so, this volume breaks new methodological and theoretical ground for the fields of childhood studies and comparative education."

—Arathi Sriprakash, *Lecturer, Sociology of Education,*
University of Cambridge, UK

"Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies offers a thoughtful and diverse series of reflections on memories of living with socialism. The chapters weave vivid accounts of childhood experiences with nuanced theoretical insights. The book provides a key intervention in cross-disciplinary scholarship about childhood memories and their role in understanding societal transitions."

—Peter Kraftl, *Professor and Chair in Human Geography,*
College of Life and Environmental Sciences,
University of Birmingham, UK

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Editors

Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies

Memories of Everyday Life

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Acknowledgments

The idea of this book emerged as we shared our memories of growing up in different countries on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain. We felt a very personal connection during storytelling—almost as we were related—and we were curious to explore these connections further. Our more intimate exchanges have gradually developed into more in-depth and organized conversations, drawing in a larger number of colleagues. Over the last four years, we have organized multiple meetings, workshops, webinars, and conference panels to explore our memories and experiences together. Some colleagues who participated in those gatherings are the authors of chapters in this book, while others wrote their own books (see Katerina Bodovski, 2015), published articles in a special issue we coedited in "European Education" (see Silova, Aydarova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2016), or entrusted their memories informally to us—all moving our thinking forward in different ways. This book would not have been possible without every contributor and reviewer who shared their personal and academic insights along the way.

We would like to especially acknowledge the work of Elena Aydarova and Olena Fimiyar who started this project with us in 2012. We really enjoyed their intellectual friendship and collaboration on conference presentations and papers. We are especially grateful to Elena for working on the book proposal with us, helping us find a publisher, and moving us forward in an organized manner as we searched for contributors, reviewed chapter manuscripts, and communicated with authors. While Olena and Elena were unable to continue this project with us, their intellectual presence is nevertheless felt in this book.

We have received invaluable feedback on this book's introduction and conclusion chapters from colleagues at the Article Seminar at the Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of Tampere, Finland. Our coauthored chapter was also reviewed by the same group. We thank the Faculty of Education at the University of Tampere, Finland, for providing funding necessary for indexing. Zsuzsa Millei thanks the Institute for Advanced Social Research and the Space and Political Agency Research Group/ RELATE, University of Tampere, Finland, for the fellowships under which this project was developed.

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Our collaborative writing grew into a complex and beautiful friendship. While working through multiple ups and downs, we have experienced an ongoing deepening of our relationship and a continuous transformation of our own selves. Through our friendship, we have learned to recognize each other's strengths, weave our ideas and insights together in interesting (and sometimes unpredictable) ways, become vulnerable together, and ultimately open ourselves to critique and further learning. We especially enjoyed 'tickling' each other's brains and emotions, wondering together, experiencing unexpected turning points and transformations in our thinking, and emerging through our collaborative research and writing as who we are.

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Remembering Childhoods, Rewriting (Post)Socialist Lives

Nelli Piattoeva, Iveta Silova, and Zsuzsa Millei

In the history of modernity, children have commonly embodied societies' hopes and desires for the future (Stephens, 1995). Perhaps more than any other group of human beings, children were and continue to be viewed as central to the political, economic, and social (re)making of societies. In recent history, the socialist modernization project stands out for its particular preoccupation with childhood as a construction related to the socialist utopian ideal, and children as an embodiment of a new social order (Mead & Silova, 2013). Surrounded "by the care of the entire nation," Soviet children were expected to grow up "healthy and physically strong, cheerful and full of joy in life, educated and cultured" in order to continue "the project begun by the older generation of builders of Communism" (Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 1952, p. 134). As Kirschenbaum (2001) notes in her study of Soviet childhood, party leaders, thinkers, and even adults in general tended to "conflate (or confuse) the 'real' children who had to be fed, clothed, and educated [with] the metaphorical children who stood as icons

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of the revolution's future" (p. 2). Across the socialist region, constructions of childhood thus often mixed the needs, capacities, and interests of idealized children with those of real children attending preschools and schools. Consequently, these constructions shaped knowledge about childhood and children, as well as children's everyday social lives through various institutional practices, after-school activities, play, physical spaces, and objects. Not only did Soviet and other socialist constructions of childhood become spaces for putting revolutionary visions into practice, but children themselves were imaged as rational, independent, and powerful agents of building a socialist future. Collectively, they were viewed as "the ultimate model citizens of the … state" (Kelly, 2007, p. 110) and "a powerful icon of revolution" (Kirschenbaum, 2001, p. 159)—presumed to be actively engaged in building a bright socialist future.

But let us pause for a second here to make an important observation. In our opening paragraph, "they"—*"the icons of socialist modernization"*—does not refer to some unknown heroic children in faraway lands. "They" are us—the editors of the book—who grew up in the former socialist countries of Hungary, Latvia, and Russia. "They" are also our contributors to the book growing up in the countries of Southeast/Central Europe (former Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Poland), Soviet Union (Ukraine, Russia), and Asia (China and Vietnam). As subjects to socialist ideologies who were expected to embody the ideal of the "model socialist citizen," we personally experienced some mixed feelings of attachment, optimism, dullness, and alienation associated with our participation in "building" socialist futures. We also experienced "ethical and aesthetic paradoxes" inherent in our socialist (or not-so-socialist) lives—paradoxes, which could not be easily reduced to the dichotomies of official and unofficial, the public and the private, the state and the people, or childhood and adulthood (Yurchak, 2006, p. 6). In this book, we explore some of these ambiguities and complexities by remembering and re-narrating—both individually and collectively—our lived experiences from the perspective of cultural insiders.

As we shared memories of our childhoods, we felt a connection—almost as if we were related—like adults who grew up together and could chime into each other's memories about kindergarten, school, and after-school activities. We felt the need to explore these connections further. What emerged from our conversations, reflections, and memory stories is that living socialism often meant something quite different compared to the official interpretations offered by state officials and academic researchers on either the Western or Eastern side of the Iron Curtain.

The predominant descriptions of the region often employed the framework of totalitarianism and discussed socialist countries in monolithic terms, highlighting the dichotomies between the East and West. From a Western perspective, socialist childhood often appeared as ideologically rigid, politically controlled, and therefore entirely homogeneous. For example, Bronfenbrenner's (1970) comparative study of American and Soviet childhoods concluded that "Soviet children, in the process of growing up, are confronted with fewer divergent views both within and outside the family, and in consequence, conform more completely to a more homogeneous set of standards" (p. 81). Following a Comparative Education Society's field study in the USSR in the 1950s, American educators arrived to similar conclusions, confirming that "[Soviet] classrooms generally are old-fashioned and severe … correct posture and discipline are strictly enforced … [and] the emphasis is on drill, industry, and basic learning" (Bereday, Brickman, & Read, 1960, pp. 142–143). And while some Western observers acknowledged the diversity of educational experiences and noted paradoxes of socialist childhood and schooling, they were unable to explain them in meaningful ways. Commenting on the visits to Soviet classrooms, schools, and camps during a trip to the Soviet Union sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Redl (1964) wrote:

> The gamut ranged all the way from highly formalized, rigidly structure-conscious, and heavily efficiency-oriented—with the children becoming props invented to show how efficiently things can be done—to unusually casual, proudly flexible, and relationship-focused styles of child care, with the emphasis noticeably on the production of "warm place for kids to spend the day in". *We never were able to find out just what accounts for the existence of this amazing discrepancy* …. (p. xiv, emphasis added)

Offering a cursory view of education in socialist societies, such studies chronically ignored the "spaces for dissent, transgression and resistance" and the "more mundane spaces of everyday life" (Stenning & Hörschelmann, 2008, p. 326). These narratives also brushed off the "variety of geographies [and periods] of socialism, overdetermined by relationships with Moscow and Comecon, positions of centrality and peripherality, the so-called nationalities question, local political and ideological debates, the role of non-Party organisations (such as the church) and myriad other social, economic, political and cultural formations" (Stenning & Hörschelmann, 2008, p. 318.) In addition, they obscured internal differences and overlooked connections to and similarities with

the West across different spheres of life, thus (re)producing a familiar yet inevitably one-sided image of the Cold War world through dichotomies such as capitalism/socialism, religious/atheistic, imperialist/liberationist. In this context, difference and divergence found in socialist (and later postsocialist) societies were unproblematically collapsed into universalizing accounts and later into discourses of educational convergence towards Western norms.

In addition to misreading "socialism," the mainstream literature commonly framed childhood as "an isolated phenomenon, intelligible only through the lens of "experts" who have studied the child through the dominant telescope of Western discourses like developmental psychology" (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 3). Rather than viewing children as political actors per se, political socialization literature saw them as manipulated or instructed by adults. Ironically, this blindness to children's agency was common to postwar academic research about children on both sides of the Iron Curtain even though state socialism regarded children as political actors in Pioneer organizations or socialist camps. This commonality ties in with Connell's (1987, p. 215) observation that political socialization research and the related pedagogies left out "the politics of everyday life" in which children led their lives.

Writing against this historical and epistemological background, we felt compelled to decenter the "master narratives" of both (post)socialism and modern childhood in order to open spaces for sharing more complicated and varied accounts. On the one hand, by moving beyond the implicit or explicit reproductions of Cold War binaries—perhaps most vividly captured in the spatial partitioning of the world according to the three-worlds ideology—we attempted to create space for sharing untold stories, giving new meanings to (personal) histories, and revisiting forgotten relations between space and time, while trying to avoid romanticization and nostalgia. On the other hand, by decentering narratives that constituted a binary of "Western" and "socialist" childhoods and the socialization frameworks that constructed children as passive receivers of societal norms, we aimed to better understand our lived experiences re-narrated through memories.

Decentering Dominant Narratives About Childhood

Decentering dominant narratives about childhood involves rethinking epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions about how we approach research. Epistemologically, this entails the task of overcoming a

predominantly top-down and socialization-oriented research about childhood and children. While acknowledging that childhood is socially constructed—and that ideas about what childhood is or should be shape and regulate children's lives—these constructions do not reflect the ways in which "real" children experience their childhoods in their daily lives. As we have briefly alluded above, socialist ideology framed childhoods in very specific ways, yet children understood those governing mandates on their own terms—sometimes explicitly resisting them, sometimes being oblivious to them, and sometimes infusing these mandates with their own meanings. Thus, when we use the term "socialist childhoods" here, we do not aim to subsume children's lives under the official ideological framework or universalize children's experiences in socialist societies. Rather we use the term to set memories of various lived experiences of childhoods against those studies that scripted children's lives within official state ideologies and Cold War binaries. In other words, we strive to capture the multiplicity and complexity of childhoods.

Ontologically, we need to overcome a dominant view that considers children as human becomings expected to be molded into fully human adult beings through the process of political socialization. Rather than viewing childhood in terms of a vision of the future society (or nostalgic past), we understand children as active participants in the *present*, acknowledging that their lives and actions have meanings in and relevance to present societies. Similarly, we understand children as beings and child becomings, acknowledging the multiple and shifting ways of emerging as a child (Lee, 2001). As James and Prout (1990) argue, such temporal reorientation of childhood goes beyond the critique of age-based constructions of generational difference or developmental models of child socialization. Rather, it is a formulation of the ontology of children as "beings-in-the-present" (James & Prout, 1990, p. 232), about their existence "as continuously experienced and created" (p. 231), and therefore about the extension of children's capacity and agency "as active beings in a social world" at all points of their lives (p. 233). In parallel movements, as public spaces for children's participation have gradually opened up—to speak, act, and be part of democratization projects[1]—researchers too have increasingly acknowledged that children should be studied as "social actors, as beings in their own right rather than pre-adult becomings" (Holloway & Valentine, 2000, p. 5). From this perspective, it is not enough to simply reposition children as the *subjects*—instead of *objects*—of research. Rather, children should be engaged as *participants* in the research process and as *researchers* themselves (Punch, 2002).

Methodologically, such a shift raises important questions of representation: Who can represent children's lives and what might those representations mean for children themselves? Would adult researchers ever have access to children's lived experiences and make meaningful interpretations of those? Without making a claim to an ontological difference between adults and children, we agree that there is a form of "otherness" of children in representing the world. As Jones (2013) explains further, children's "otherness" produces differences between worldview, experience, and representation that limits adult researchers in intimating "how children have to live within adult orders, spaces and systems, and how they seek to, or have to, build their own spatialities within that—how children's becoming suffuses through adult spaces in ways which are not easily knowable by adults, but perhaps can be glimpsed in various ways" (p. 4). Jones (2013) further elaborates, "[a]dult agency produces space. Children's agency reproduces that space in its own terms as best it can. There is ongoing flow of interconnects and disconnects between these two becomings-in-space"—'adult becoming' and 'child becoming' (p. 10).

If it is children who can best represent their lived experiences, and the resulting representations also help in removing colonizing frames (Balagopalan, 2014), how is it possible to gain access to these representations? One possible (though not ideal) way to convey how children view, experience, and represent the world from within is through adults' memories of their childhoods (Jones, 2013). However, memories of childhood are folded into the present of the adult person remembering—the adult as s/he is becoming while remembering—and therefore the milieu of child becoming cannot be isolated in the adult's memories. Rather, "adult becoming has child-becoming folded into … [in] very complex and obscure ways" (Jones, 2013, p. 6). Seeking children's accounts about living in historical (post)socialist societies is not possible anymore. The best intimation we can achieve is through memories of researchers' lived experiences as children.

Working with Childhood Memories and Writing Life

In this book, our contributors draw on their own memories to re-narrate their past lived experiences through methodologies that encourage anti-essentialist approaches, as well as multiple articulations and representations. By validating testimony and memory as important sources of knowledge, their memories speak against different forms of homogenization to contest and remake dominant history, revealing strong connections

to postcolonial research. In postcolonial studies, autobiography has been "increasingly recognized as a powerful counter-hegemonic practice" (Boehmer, 2000, p. 756), which can take diverse and multiple forms—ranging from autobiographies and autoethnographies, to duo- and collective biographies—thus giving expression to both individual and collective subjects in remembering and narrating their lives. As Spry (2011) explains, autoethnography enables a subaltern and indigenous contestation and remaking of history, breaking "the colonizing and encrypted code of what counts as knowledge" and positioning "local knowledge at the heart of epistemology and ontology" (p. 500). Autoethnography begins, she insists, with "a body, in a place, and in a time" (p. 500). Here, the subjects of knowing become *knowing* subjects who are now authorized to speak on their own behalf (Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2017).

Through their memories, our contributors speak against both scientific and political master narratives that dominate the space of (post)socialist childhoods. It is not only the Western academia that has often denied or misrepresented their personal experiences, but the political projects of state- and nation-building across the former socialist region have equally tended to enforce dominant discourses—whether patriotic, demonizing, or nostalgic—at the expense of other narratives. Our contributors are creatively experimenting with different types of life-writing, highlighting the importance of lived experience for the decolonization of knowledge production about childhoods. They document "the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737), opening space for "contradictions, gaps and ambiguities of multiple and conflicting interpretations" (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 25). By creating this multiplicity of views, memory research thus highlights that "ways of understanding the world are cultural and political productions tied to and influenced by the discourses of class, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation" (pp. 25–26). Following this epistemological stance, our intention is not to replace one authoritative narrative with another, but rather to multiply the accounts of childhoods under socialism and what came after.

Although autobiographical research has been criticized for privileging one particular way of writing a life—the one based on a Western inscription of "an abstract and unique individual agent moving through time and space" (Rupprecht, 2002, p. 35)—this is not the only way of seeing life-writing research. New forms of life-writing distance themselves from this type of research, using "memory stories to examine the ways in which individuals [now and in the past] are made social, [and] how we are discursively,

affectively, materially constituted in particular moments that are inherently unstable" and "how things come to matter in the ways they do" (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p. 6). Remembering thus becomes "a lived process of making sense of time and the experience of it" to explore "relations between public and private life, agency and power, and the past, present and future" (Keightley, 2010, pp. 55–56). Imagination is inseparable from memory work, as both require each other in order to move "beyond their own limits as we think of the patterns of change and continuity in our sense of ourselves over time, and the diverse ways in which the past is represented and used as a resource in all aspects of cultural life" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012). Furthermore, childhood as a sociohistorical construct provides an analytical incision into the social issues and concerns regarding socialism, cultural/ideological changes, and subject formation.

Given the importance of lived experience for life-writing in general and decolonization of knowledge production in particular, we need to address another critical issue: How can we reconcile access to lived experience through memories? According to Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (2012), experience and memory are in a "vital relationship" with each other, wherein experience is an analytical category for memory studies (p. 3). They also differentiate between "experience as process (lived experience) and experience as product (assimilated experience—the knowledge crystallised out of previous experience) [that] correlates with the equally common distinction between the process of remembering and memory as the product resulting from that activity." Experience as lived and interpreted occupies the space between selfhood and social order, and it is through experience that we understand change and continuity. Both experience and memory "are viewed as personal and social, situated and mediated, proximate and distant" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 4).

Remembering is a creative and imaginative process. As we create our memory stories, "the past is not directly transmitted to us in pristine form; it comes back to us only in fragments out of which we puzzle together their connections and distinctions, patterns and configurations" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 7). In this process, our scholarly voice is tamed and combined with a novelistic tone so memories become vivid. We move between a scholarly voice claiming critical objectivity, and a more narrative, almost fictive writing style, where we emerge as characters in a novel, acting in richly described and emotionally charged environments. This movement helps us to create multifaceted analyses, in which we highlight complexities, ambivalences, and emotions without falling back on the explanatory

power of binaries inherited from Cold War rhetoric. In this work, different kinds of remembering help us, from "bodily remembering, where memory is felt as intense physical sensation, through mémoire involontaire with its joltingly evocative madeleine moments, to intentional memory as part of an effort to build up detailed and connected maps of meaning across entire lives or communities" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 5).

In acting as our own biographers, we pattern our lived experiences through narrative representation, and with the help of our imagination we create stories, "actively concerted recollections [where] … storytelling builds creatively on the order of sequence [plotmaking] inherent in memory, despite its lacunae and points of disjunction" (Keightley & Pickering, 2012, p. 35). Lived experiences, appearing as textual representations, imaginatively connect together in our memories to contribute to the longer-term maps of meaning (patterns) to which we refer. In sharing our memories, we produce texts for their illuminating effects, their ability to reveal what had not been noticed, and to inform. We ponder new questions and relate our memories to phenomena outside of our research text with an obligation to reflect and critique rather than to offer accurate pictures (Holman Jones, 2005). Our goal is to analyze personal experience in order to examine cultural experience and its politics (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Holman Jones, 2005), as well as to understand our multiple and situated selves in social life.

A Glimpse into the Memories of Socialist Childhoods and Schooling

This book is a living kaleidoscope of memories written by scholars who had firsthand experience of (post)socialist childhood and schooling and who engaged in re-narrating their experiences of being and becoming children in (post)socialist contexts. We prompted our contributors to recall their experiences by posing a series of intertwined questions: What were the pedagogies, materialities, and spaces of socialist childhoods and schooling, and how did they intersect with the daily practices, experiences, emotions, and sensations of being children? We asked our contributors to reflect on the spaces of childhood and schooling in the broadest possible sense, including camps, collective farms, after-school activities, and familial, educational, and other relationships. Furthermore, we considered the following questions: How were differences—language, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, race, (dis)ability, and other—constructed and experienced? How

did they matter in children's everyday lives? We were also interested in exploring what these memories tell us as researchers about how we have mastered (and been mastered by) particular theories and understandings of (post)Soviet/socialist transition, education, and childhood, if at all. These questions enabled the contributors to share their memories and engage in analyzing how they constituted and experienced their own childhoods and schooling, and how children emerged as social and political beings.

The picture of socialist and postsocialist childhoods and schooling that has emerged from these memories is far from uniform or univocal, highlighting the diversity of the region's histories and individual lived experiences. The chapters reveal many inherent paradoxes and the coexistence of different and even opposite value systems and practices across time and space, unravelling the diverse and often contradictory ways of being a (post)socialist child and living a (post)socialist life. In *Memories in Dialogue: Transnational Stories about Socialist Childhoods*, Helga Lénárt-Cheng and Ioana Luca draw on life-writing scholarship and memory studies to highlight their personal narratives that created a space for paradoxes to coexist, casting into doubt the inherited paradigms of the "communist child" as either an icon of socialist utopia or a traumatized victim of the repressive regime. They write, for example, about their participation in routine after-school activities—such as Helga's annual trips to "construction camps" in Hungary or Ioana's "voluntary" community work of collecting recycled paper in Romania—which were simultaneously riddled with fun and boredom, optimism and meaninglessness. Having grown up in the 1980s, the authors explain that they nevertheless inhabited quite disparate worlds of childhoods, offering fascinating interpretations of the stark differences in their lived experiences through a dialogic writing.

In *A Dulled Mind in an Active Body*, Libora Oates-Indruchová shares her personal "mundane epiphanies" that reveal the ambiguities of socialist education in her experience as a child growing up in Czechoslovakia. She focuses on both the formation of her intellectual consciousness and gender identity by re-narrating the experiences of classroom activities and sporting events. While painting a fairly grim picture of socialist childhood—where she was taught how "not to reflect," "not to take initiative," and do what was required of her without any questioning—Libora also writes in one of her epiphanies about her spontaneous confrontation with the teacher who attempted to restrict girls' participation in a sporting event, arguing that cycling was for boys only. Interestingly, Libora explains that

her courage to challenge the gendered assumption of the teacher was not necessarily powered by a conscious will to resist the teacher's authority, but by her strong feeling of entitlement to ride a bicycle like any other child and her desire to participate in an activity that promised to be fun. Although perhaps unintentionally, a child can thus introduce "minute internal displacements and mutations into the [dominant] discursive regime" (Yurchak, 2006, p. 28), enabling her to produce unanticipated meanings that may not necessarily coincide with those explicitly enforced by the state.

In their chapter *On the Edge of Two Zones: Slovak Socialist Childhoods*, Ondrej and Branislav narrate their childhood memories against Slovakia's chiefly Christian and agrarian traditions, which encountered the newly introduced atheism and industrial way of life during the era of "building communism." The symbolic contrast between the "two worlds" shaped the personal identities of their inhabitants that emerged out of the conflicts generated by these worlds. Accompanied by photographs from family archives, their chapter shows that the nature and timing of the communist transitional rituals borrowed heavily from their religious counterparts, illustrating the tensions between the two parallel worlds of socialist Slovakia and revealing ways in which children casually but skillfully crossed the borders between them.

In *Growing up as Vicar's Daughter in Communist Czechoslovakia*, Irena Kašparová compares her childhood to a "theater stage," where acts of resistance take place; school personnel as well as pupils and parents are envisioned simultaneously and interchangeably as protagonists, directors, and spectators of the play; and theater is often perceived as reality and vice versa. Reflecting on her own original diary entries and letters to a Russian penfriend written as a 13-year-old girl during the 1980s, Irena writes about her experience growing up as a daughter of a protestant minister in a rural periphery of communist Czechoslovakia. Her childhood spanned two contrasting spaces of Christian religion and communist state ideology, which she learned to navigate carefully as a child. Unlike other memory stories, which describe children participating in official socialist activities for the pleasure of spending time with friends—either exhibiting disinterest in the ideologies that supposedly drove those activities or adding their own interpretations of the activities to make them more meaningful to their lives—Irena narrates a story of active resistance. Her experiences of resistance

ranged from participation in a subversive school play that explicitly critiqued the socialist regime to more implicit acts of resistance such as daydreaming about permeable borders while watching Western films or being silent when all children were loudly chanting "comrade" in unison.

The political nature of socialist childhoods is a central focus of the next three chapters. In *Uncle Ho's Good Children: Award and State Power at a Socialist School in Vietnam*, Violette Ho explores how state power shaped youth's concept of nationalism. Embracing the teaching of Ho Chi Minh's philosophy and Marxism-Leninism, Vietnam's school programs and activities in the 1980s were designed to evoke patriotism and to ensure Vietnamese children would revere Uncle Ho and stay loyal to the Communist Party. In the name of the nation, this system also motivated youth to dedicate their lives, to commit their time and energy, and to sacrifice personal interests for "the success of communism." Within this system, symbolic rewards, such as the "Uncle Ho's Good Children" award, provided important meanings that could potentially turn childhood under socialism into an experience that was fulfilling and memorable.

Anna Bogic tells the story of *Tito's Last Pioneers and the Politicization of Schooling in Yugoslavia*. Drawing on her memories of eight years of elementary schooling during the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia (between 1987 and 1995), she shares some of her personal experiences of childhood and schooling while connecting and juxtaposing them with the wider socioeconomic and political context of the time. Anna's memories suggest that schooling practices in socialist and postsocialist periods were informed by particular political standpoints that shaped her life both inside and outside the school. Paradoxically, the violent ethnic realignments accompanying changes from socialism to postsocialism were inextricably linked to the disintegration of the country and the introduction of a new value system, yet schools and schooling practices somehow "protected" children from the harsh impacts of dizzying changes and unrelenting instability of the war period. In both socialist and postsocialist periods, children's active participation in celebrations, events, and political debates offered a sense of stability through routine schooling practices and activities.

In *Hair Bows and Uniforms: Entangled Politics in Children's Everyday Lives*, Zsuzsa Millei, Nelli Piattoeva, Iveta Silova, and Elena Aydarova shift our attention from official to everyday politics in children's lives. Drawing on their memories of growing up in Hungary, Russia, Latvia, and Ukraine, they suggest that official politics in children's lives during socialism took various forms, ranging from school curriculum, youth organizations, and

celebrations in everyday life. Drawing on current scholarship about children's politics and their collective biography work, they explore the everyday contexts of childhood—ranging from mundane to ideological—to make visible the multiple ways in which children's political agency emerged in particular spaces and times. Their memory stories are about hair bows as a part of school uniforms and the multiple roles these bows played in being and becoming schoolgirls and political subjects. The emphasis is on how wearing (or not) a hair bow helped children work with/in or against the norms, as well as feeling the pain and desire to be or act otherwise.

Finally, the last three chapters offer a close-up of multiple ruptures, continuities, and relationalities between different (post)socialist experiences in terms of time, space, and identities. In her chapter *Interrupted Trajectory: The Experiences of Disability and Home Schooling in Post-Soviet Russia*, Alfiya Battalova shares a personal account of school and homeschool experiences in Russia by using various perspectives on disability. She seeks to foreground the context of homeschooling by problematizing transition as a linear and uninterrupted path and illuminating the complex nature of living with disability in post-Soviet Russia. Through the discussion of the education system for children with disabilities, Alfiya positions herself in a broader sociocultural context as she analyzes the issues surrounding negotiation of access to education. She also engages with theoretical constructs of overcoming, staring, and internalized ableism to demonstrate the ambiguities of personal experiences and the role of institutional structures in shaping them. Above all, her chapter emphasizes the relational aspect of disability and schooling to recognize possibilities and narrate creative ways of being a child with a disability in the structural constraints of post-Soviet Russia.

The continuities between socialist and postsocialist experiences—in terms of space and time—are also examined by Ela Przybylo and Polina Ivleva in *Teaching it Straight: Sexuality Education Across Post-State-Socialist Contexts*. This chapter explores how sex education is navigated in postsocialist sites in relation to discourses of purity, childhood innocence, and nation-building. In particular, Ela and Polina examine how the politics of sexuality education render students sexual subjects through official, evaded, and hidden curricula, in a municipal secondary school in Yekaterinburg, Russia, and a Polish diasporic immersion school in Alberta, Canada—two geographically distant contexts which share continuing endurance of socialist legacies. The authors argue that education and sex education are involved in what they describe as "teaching it straight"—the

continued insistence on (and frequent failure of) straightening students into heteronormative life paths and desires. Drawing on the works of queer theorists and their own autobiographical voices, Ela and Polina develop an oppositional method of "telling it slantwise"—looking at contradictions, silent moments, and queer possibilities within the normatively ordered school life.

Jinting Wu explores continuities between socialist and postsocialist experiences in China in her chapter *Erasure and Renewal in (Post)Socialist China: My Mother's Long Journey.* Through autoethnographic accounts, her chapter narrates her mother's long journey in China's Cultural Revolution and present-day market reform to examine the fraught relations between the party-state and its youth, between education and political socialization, and between public values and authoritarian limits that continue to tug the social fabric of today's China. Jinting argues that the state works as a powerful pedagogical node shaping people's sense of self, social change, and their own place in the midst of it. Nevertheless, life is a performative space of self-making where one receives whatever comes and gropes to make better meanings out of it. Jinting mother's narratives highlight the state's shifting modalities of power and illustrate that (post)socialist conditions are mediated by the continual assertion of political authority alongside people's creative agency.

Reading across these chapters, we cannot help but notice multiple interconnections that weave together complicated and ambiguous histories of (post)socialist childhoods. Collectively, our contributors acknowledge and write from the space of ordinary but often neglected personal experiences. They problematize the analytical frameworks of West's normality and superiority, the centrality of political indoctrination and oppression in everyday lives, and the images of passive or victimized (post)socialist citizens who lived under the shortage of goods and ideological decay. Echoing emerging writings on lived socialism, these accounts shed light on the complex ways in which childhood and schooling extended the state's ideals while producing genuine beliefs in socialist values as well as voluntary and joyous involvement in the building of socialism (see Klumbyte & Sharafutdinova, 2013). At the same time, the everyday spaces enabled multiple interpretations, regular circumventions, or simple ignorance of official policies and practices. They induced alternative perspectives and understandings of official activities and produced unexpected spaces of resistance and subtle shifts in official discourses. Despite the perceived uniformity of the region and the idea that children

encountered consistent ideological and political messages in school and at home (e.g. Redl, 1964), the lived encounters, sentiments, and loyalties of children were not devoid of multiple possibilities, and children engaged with them more or less deliberately, often capitalizing on ambiguities and turning them to their own momentary advantage.

Equally importantly, the chapters in this book reveal how socialist ideologies and institutions played diverse roles—and often did not play a role at all—in children's lives. Memories of these experiences were entangled with memories of what came before, during, and after state socialism. Traversing multiple spatial and temporal borders, children seem to have been able to inhabit—and sometimes remake—these different spaces and times in unexpected and meaningful ways, enabling common historical experiences, temporarily suspending the official socialist order and reinstating a familiar sociality of everyday lives. Here, participants of the bordering encounters—including contributors to the book and perhaps some of our readers—recognize each other "as 'normal people' striving to obtain a 'normal life'" (Dzenovska, 2014, p. 271). Perhaps this is why we, as book editors, felt so intimately connected to our book contributors through the process of sharing our memories. As Dzenovska (2014) points out, this connection does not necessarily stem from feelings of empathy, compassion, and common humanity—or the shared vulnerability that emerges through memory writing and sharing—but rather from our historically shared understanding of the conditions that have shaped our lives and formed public sociality that connects us to one another as equals.

Aiming to move away from singular history writing, we are fully aware that this introductory chapter offers *one* possible interpretation of the rich collection of memory stories in the book. In what follows, memory stories speak for themselves, each one extending and deepening our understanding of the histories of (post)socialist childhoods. To keep the space open for multiple interpretations, we close the book with a series of afterwords, which build on the memories shared by the authors and place the discussions we started in a broader context by connecting them to the fields of childhood studies (Marek Tesar), political science and international relations (Robert Imre), postcolonial and gender studies (Madina Tlostanova), life-writing methodologies (Susanne Gannon), and comparative education and philosophy (Jeremy Rappleye). These afterwords are striking in their interconnectedness and emphasis on shared human experiences across different historical conditions. While some afterword authors speak from the perspectives of cultural insiders, others write from

an outsider position. Some afterword authors combine their scholarly voices with a novelistic tone, continuing the autoethnographic genre of the volume through their own childhood memories and encounters with (post)socialism. Collectively, these multiple afterwords help us evade intellectual closure by opening the space of childhood to a wide range of insightful interpretations. We hope that these reflections will strike a familiar (or perhaps an unexpected) chord among our readers, engendering emotional responses, triggering forgotten memories, and bringing into the conversation new layers of complexity that will further advance our understanding of childhood and the (post)socialist condition.

NOTE

1. Efforts worldwide to operationalize the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) created spaces for children to become part of societies and act on their own rights rather than being considered only as members of families. Seeing children as competent actors who have views on their lives and can make decisions, in turn, helped to change children's role in societies, allowing them to get involved in more and more realms, such as different parliaments or participatory projects designed to seek children's views about issues that concern them.

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Memories in Dialogue: Transnational Stories About Socialist Childhoods

Helga Lenart-Cheng and Ioana Luca

In recent years, archival, testimonial, and artistic engagements with socialist and post-socialist times have come to the fore in both national and international contexts. As the immediate memory of 1989 receded and the former guardians of power gradually lost leverage on the dissemination of knowledge, sources and discourses about the past have multiplied exponentially. A part of this memory work involves artistic projects such as feature films, literary portrayals, documentaries, diaries, exhibits, and so on; another important component is the scholarly and archival work, which is facilitated by the increasing access to a wide variety of archives and the foundation of new ones. Outside Eastern Europe, transnational and exiled writers who translated their experiences into global contexts have nuanced Western audiences' fascination with "The Other Europe."[1] Similarly, writers from the Eastern Bloc who reached large-scale international circulation, like the Nobel Prize-winning Herta Müller (2009) or Svetlana Alexievich (2015), have contributed to bridging the real and imagined divides.

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The present chapter is a collaborative exchange across continents, between two Eastern Europeans, brought up in the late 1970s and 1980s in Hungary and Romania respectively, who currently work as literary scholars in the USA and Taiwan. Our experimental piece is the result of an exercise in auto/duo/ethnography, in which we co-constructed our common and differing experiences of socialist education through a series of dialogues. We started the project from a genuine interest in each other's educational experiences. The primary purpose of our endeavor was to highlight the double-edged and ambivalent effects that socialist education had upon us. While all autobiographical narratives can claim an alternative epistemology by acting as sites of counter-memorialization, we focused more on the rhetorical and performative aspects of our narrative exchange. Our aim was to explore how our personal narratives reveal and conceal the very process of witnessing while also pointing to the pitfalls of recounting children's firsthand experiences under socialism.

The first section draws on life-writing scholarship and memory studies in order to present the mnemonic landscape of post-socialist representations of childhood, as well as the methodological challenges that accompany such narratives. The short personal narratives that follow are evocative rather than argumentative in nature, but they are informed both by our knowledge of other Eastern European life stories and by our engagement with theories of life-writing. In the concluding section, we return to these theories to suggest a few possible avenues for further research.

(Post)Socialist Life Narratives in Critical Context

Autobiographical literature constitutes a special subset of (post)socialist memorial practices. While debates about certain forms of public memorialization continue to be politically charged, it is interesting to note that individual mnemonic practices (such as memoirs, diaries, and letters) seem to enjoy a less politicized reception. Some historians posit that in opposition to historical national revisionism, which remains highly problematic and "excitedly rejected," "autobiographical revisionism" has been "tacitly accepted" (Antohi, 2007, p. xiv). A sign of this can be seen in the special portfolios dedicated to memoir literature at major publishing houses across the region, which continue to enjoy large and appreciative audiences.

Questions about childhood under socialism—including those regarding the impact of multiple forms of repression, control and censorship, the effects of promised utopia on its young members, and the factors

shaping the long-term development of socialist youth—do not figure much in these debates yet.[2] An important exception is the abundance of studies within the field of education, where questions regarding state education under totalitarian regimes have triggered significant scholarly interest. Studies by researchers in education, sociology, and anthropology that focus on textbooks, school records, and teachers' engagement with the curriculum often question the assumptions regarding the unifying effects of a national curriculum in totalitarian states. Their work also contributes significantly to the reevaluation of the child's position as a witness, agent, and epistemological subject (Griffiths & Millei, 2012, 2013; Kirschenbaum, 2000; Mead & Silova, 2013; Mihalache, 2014; Pilbrow, 2010; Silova & Brehm, 2013). As a result of this burgeoning research, the stereotypical images of the child as an icon of socialist utopia, or the child as a traumatized victim of a repressive regime, give way to more ambivalent depictions, layered forms of knowledge, and deeper understanding of institutional settings and their effects on the former young subjects in the Eastern European countries.

This rising critical interest reflects the increasing diversification of mnemonic objects and strategies related to this era. Childhood memorabilia from the socialist era are often exhibited and exchanged in the digital world as part of both individual and institutionalized recuperative projects. Former children of these regimes dedicate personal blogs, Facebook pages, and file sharing websites to their memories and memorabilia. Toys, school objects, badges, textbooks, children's books, and socialist games are easily available in these online venues, most of which serve as sites of com-memorialization. These virtual locales are mostly characterized by what critics call "restorative nostalgia," an act of reconstructing "truth" and tradition, a determined rebuilding (Boym, 2001, p. xviii, pp. 41–9), or "post-communist nostalgia," "a special memory case" (Todorova & Gille, 2010). Artistic projects tend to offer more nuanced and even humorous readings of the past. Many installations, exhibitions, and literary recreations do not pretend to "just archive" the past, but they are conscious of their "archiving" gesture and the ways in which they shape contemporary perceptions. These creative representations are a welcome change in today's mnemonic landscape, where most personal blogs and nostalgic pages still rely heavily on binary paradigms inherited from the Cold War. Overall, every archival and imaginative interpretation is useful in that it adds to the multiplicity of voices representing "the socialist child."

In the humanities, the disclosure of autobiographical detail in scholarly work has become the norm rather than the exception. The last 25 years have witnessed a significant shift in the role of the personal, including an engaged "movement to recognize the autobiographical voice as a legitimate way of speaking in the academe" (Behar, 1994, B1).[3] As a result, memoirs by academics have proliferated, and they have often been enthusiastically welcomed by critics. Similarly, in the social sciences, the genre of autoethnography has gained growing prominence, although autoethnographers are constantly criticized for their hybrid methodology, insufficient rigor, and autobiographical bias (Ellis, Tony, & Arthur, 2011; Wambura, Hernandez, & Heewon, 2016). Finally, since our case involves personal reflections by two scholars of autobiography, we also need to acknowledge the so-called danger of "theoretical nepotism" (Smith, 1995, p. 52), which is particularly pronounced in the case of life-writing theorists. This nepotism "makes the critic's job of writing about autobiography dangerously like writing autobiography" (Burt, 1982, pp. 18–19). Admittedly, our theoretical background contaminates its object in our piece as much as the autobiographer corrupts the theorist.

What can the present chapter contribute to the existing representations of education under socialism, and what theoretical debates informed our narratives? Given that this volume was conceived as a collection of testimonial evidence, it may be helpful to first clarify our roles as co-witnesses. Although we did conduct oral interviews with each other through Skype, we resisted privileging orality over composed and edited narratives partly to avoid the seemingly non-rhetorical nature of testimony. Joining critics who warn against the idealization of testimonial narratives, we prefer to read the "poetic aspects of reparative practices against the grain of the political containment of their meaning" (Emberley, 2014, p. 6). Consequently, our primary focus is not on how our narratives arbitrate historical truths about childhood under socialism. It is clear that as sites of meaning-production, all such autobiographical narratives elicit new knowledge about historical events, and that they often act as means of counter-memorialization. However, instead of wishing to claim an alternative epistemology, we also want to explore how our narratives reveal and simultaneously conceal the very process of witnessing. For this we need to focus on the performative aspects of our exchange. The concept of performativity—implying that our words do not just "say" things but perform actions, and that as a correlation, our identities are never just described but performed—is paramount to our understanding of this auto/duo/ethnographic exercise.

Life-writing critics first used the notion of performativity to explain rhetorical strategies characterizing certain subgenres of life-writing, such as *testimonio*, letters, and family memoirs. They soon realized that "performative dialogism" applies to all forms of life narration (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 164). Consequently, the focus of life-writing studies has gradually shifted away from the genre's truth-value or the self's struggle with identity towards "a new emphasis on *graphia*" (Smith & Watson, 2010, pp. 129–137) and its multimodal forms of discourses. Acknowledging the complex terrain of life narration and criticism in contemporary culture, critics foreground such terms as "performativity," "positionality," and "heteroglossic dialogism" (the multiplicity of "tongues" through which subjectivity is enunciated) as instruments of mapping the complex terrain of autobiographical acts (Smith & Watson, 2010, pp. 143–147). Our own emphasis on the performative nature of our memory-exercise can thus be seen as a reflection of this shift within auto/biography studies.

Performativity permeates the collaborative aspects of our dialogue, the relational nature of our act of remembering, as well as our active engagement with cultural forms of knowledge. In our performative act of remembering, as each other's first readers and first editors, we became co-witnesses in the sense that by bearing witness together we co-constructed each other as witnesses, while co-constructing each other's narrative (Emberley, 2014, p. 7). For instance, by bringing us together in time (literally co-writing this piece simultaneously), our memorial exercise both reenacted and reinvented the co-temporality that brought us together, presumably, as contemporary witnesses of a shared historical period. If oral histories and collaborative autobiographies are often characterized by an unequal power structure, contamination, and corroboration,[4] sharing our memories about schooling implied scholarly contestation at every stage. The interest and curiosity which initiated this project soon turned into constant requirements for clarification ("explain," "inside knowledge, further clarify," "are you sure?" "who are you writing to?" "how is this possible?"). In a way, these amiable challenges reenacted the censorship that we were born into: they made us continuously wonder to what extent we are performing older or more recent scripted conventions and ideologies through what we think are private recollections.

In terms of methodology, we first set a number of questions we both answered in writing, then we exchanged answers, then another set of questions via Skype, writing, and exchanges. Our process raised a host of questions both regarding the limits and the nature of our exercise. As

scholars of autobiography correctly emphasize, childhood memories are subject to constant revisions and creative imaginings as they are told and retold, both to the adult self and to others (Coe, 1984). This implies two things: first, that childhood memories reveal significant aspects about the narrating adult and the remembered childhood (Gullestad, 1996), and their autobiographical rendering is a synthesis between the author's child and adult selves (Douglas, 2010); second, that childhood memories are always mediated by the cultural texts and discourses that invite us to remember (Davis, 2007; Douglas, 2010). Our individual narratives are perfect illustrations of these theoretical insights and we readily acknowledge all these potential pitfalls. We considered, for example, the risks involved in co-witness contamination and the desire for factual corroboration. We concluded that neither co-witness contamination nor corroboration was an issue in our case, even though some similarities in our narratives may hint at this possibility.

It is known that children under socialist regimes were both objects of state efforts to raise future ideal citizens for a utopian society and agents in their own rights, caught within a multiplicity of repressive or enabling regimes. Our main challenge in this exercise was to acknowledge this dual position without falling into binary paradigms. It seems particularly tempting to use the child-self as an agent who can claim—through its unique power to point out the nakedness of the Emperor—a private and unadulterated domain that remains immune to political pressures. The child with her own sovereign world seems like a perfect candidate to challenge the common adage according to which "the Communist morality left no room for the Western notion of the conscience as a private dialogue with the self" (Figes, 2007). In claiming this independent space for our child selves, by reenacting this "private dialogue with the self," we both faced the same question, namely, how can we recognize the subjectivity of the child under totalitarian pressures while also acknowledging the fact that the very separation of private and public, or personal and political (no matter how real it felt at the time), is only a fiction designed to perpetuate a certain status quo? Another challenge we faced was the reconciliation of our highly divergent narratives. In spite of having the same age, similar family background, and comparable professional trajectory, we realized that as children in the 1980s, we inhabited rather disparate worlds. There is, of course, nothing surprising about this, given that we grew up in two different countries with distinct ideologies. Still, just as most similarities in

our narratives were not due to our cohabitation of the same space and time, most differences in our readings of the past were not due to the variances between our contexts. We therefore tried to allow the paradoxes and oppositions—experiential, mnemonic, and interpretative—to coexist without distorting them for the sake of effect.

Panda Bear Pens: Remembrance of a Romanian Pioneer's Things Past (by Ioana Luca)

The first thing I recall as school objects are Chinese pens or pencil cases— small colorful pens with a panda bear drawing at one end, and nicely compartmentalized pencil cases, with mirrors inside and beautiful patterning. These were stationery objects I always liked, but they were always hard to get. Their Chinese origin spoke of other realms, more beautiful than ours.

The way I experienced socialism as a school girl has had a lasting influence on me: it implied an entire way of thinking marked by authoritarianism, control, censorship, and implicit self-censorship, and I grew up with it. It meant inhabiting multiple realities, and there always was a double-sided dimension to our lives. The distinction between the personal and the political, the private and the public, is part of my growth history. As a child, it seemed possible to separate the political part of one's life and stay away from it.

There was little doubt about the political significance of our various forms of belonging to the grand system of utopian communism[5]: in kindergarten, we were "falcons of the nation" (*soimi ai patriei*), in primary school we were "pioneers" (*pionieri*), and in high school we became members of the "communist youth" (*Uniunea Tineretului Comunist*). The accompanying rites of passage to "real communist" status were part of my growth experience: with every step I acquired one more uniform, a new badge, or a red scarf. These were all stages associated with my growing up: there were new activities to be involved in and school trips to do. No matter how ideologized they were (a visit to a famous jail where communist heroes had been imprisoned, or trips to nationally relevant historic sites), these events were enjoyable and I never internalized their political dimension. Patriotic poems or songs were associated with each such event: "I've got my red scarf/I'm now a pioneer…" (*Am cravata mea/Sunt pionier*)—I can still hum the lively tune and remember its verses, which we of course learned by heart.

The gap between the official discourse about the country's proclaimed terrific achievements and the reality around us was so glaring that the possibility of ever believing or taking seriously the official discourse was always almost null in the 1980s Bucharest. The symbolism of the red pioneer scarf (the blood of our ancestors and communist heroes), which served as a token of national socialist pride, never meant much to me. The intensely red triangular piece of cloth, bordered by the national tricolor flag, was made of poor-quality material; any carelessness while ironing it, which I enjoyed doing, would easily lead to its ruin, thus making me intuitively aware of the impoverished reality around. With the dearth of products and merchandise in 1980s Romania, the falcon of the country or pioneer paraphernalia had, however, its glamour. When new, these products were attractive, like the pioneer belt with the colorful country emblem as a buckle, or the tresses one acquired when becoming the leader of a group, class, or school in the colors of the national flag. However, such connotations failed to impress me.

At the same time, I always knew that communists forcefully took over in 1945, with support from the Soviet Union, that we were on the wrong side of a dividing line, and that everything we were officially told was shallow. A clear distinction between how things "happened" and what we "were officially told" was part of my upbringing. The stories that my parents and grandparents shared with me, as well as the few glimpses I had about the pre-socialist pasts and of the other countries (I collected anything foreign that fell into my hands, from the Haribo gummy bears logo to chocolate wrappings, as they were colorful, beautiful, and lasting), made it impossible for me to ever believe in the official speeches at school, on TV, or the radio. As a young child I knew well that a sound education was the only key to a better future, and so school meant rigorous learning. My parents often told me that unless I study hard, I would end up digging ditches or working the fields. The socialist songs celebrated workers, but such a possibility never looked really appealing.

In the school I attended, at the very heart of old Bucharest, teachers never enforced the official discourse and rarely rehearsed party propaganda. We knew which professor was a high-ranking party member, but except for the Monday school gatherings or public speeches,[6] the classes proper were rarely politicized. The literary and the history canons were of course highly "selective." It may sound paradoxical to say that classes were not politicized when the curriculum was highly "selective," but the point is that my teachers never indoctrinated us, they never made us "buy"

the glory of socialism. By way of explanation, it is important to note that critical thinking, asking questions, or group projects did not feature in my school years until after 1989. Learning was a relatively straightforward enterprise, not necessarily exciting but very serious: we needed to know the lesson in the textbook well, read as much as possible in connection to it, do as much extra work as possible, and comply with all (and very numerous) requirements. Consequently, simply sticking to the lessons was a good way to avoid direct political indoctrination.

When I think back to my literature and history textbooks, I feel there are a good number of aspects to be questioned, but at that moment it was exciting to learn new things. Learning was important, questioning what we had to learn was never an issue, and in the few instances when I could detect red flags (workers or peasants fighting the "evil bourgeoisie" was a constant pattern), I simply took matters as school material rather than historical fact. During secondary school, we mostly learned ancient and medieval world history, which offered a wealth of knowledge about other places and other times (pharaohs, pyramids, knights, etc.). Early Romanian history provided a large number of exciting twists and turns so as to make class or ideology conflicts irrelevant for a secondary school pupil. Browsing the old history books now, I would say it was the nationalist character of Romanian communism that featured most prominently (the greatness of our people, the heroic voivodes, the national martyrs) rather than an overtly political dimension, which *a young child*—constantly surrounded by blatant state propaganda on radio, TV, newspapers, or magazines—could easily detect. Whatever I learned about our past, no matter how distorted it might have been, was often way more exciting than the official present, which in 1980s Romania meant a couple of hours of TV celebrating the presidential couple, the achievements of the party, the five-year plans, and other obvious propaganda.[7]

My world was so manifestly celebratory of the "golden era" we were living in that one needed a terrible and very literal myopia, combined with strongly dulled senses, in order to ever believe what we were told, the slogan banners we were seeing, the historical connections the "people" parades taught us, the poems we were reciting, or the songs we were singing. It was common knowledge (from family, jokes, etc.) that Ceauşescu and his wife had barely finished elementary school and that all the current achievements were due to a very strong repressive system. Whatever the school textbooks included, they did offer a window, no matter how opaque, to other times and other worlds.

The five-year plan of socialist achievements trickled down to us and we all had to contribute to it and meet particular targets. We had to recycle paper and bring to school used bottles and jars, but I never had a sense of actually making a contribution to or actively participating in anything. The very terms acquired a clear connotation, which seems lost in translation: collecting recycled paper, bottles, and jars (*colectarea maculaturii, sticle și borcane*) was a meaningless undertaking for both pupils and teachers, and thus we all just went through the motions. "Voluntary community work" (*muncă voluntară*) was another school activity that supposedly enhanced our "socialist achievements." It was anything but voluntary—it meant that we had to go to school on Sundays, clean the schoolyard, rake the leaves, or dig and delve in the neighborhood parks. I don't remember the schoolyard or the parks looking much different afterwards—the brooms were usually inefficient, the rakes broken, and none of us worked really hard. However, we all did go to school on such occasions. My teachers were very strict when it came to how we behaved during "voluntary work." Even if working hard or actually accomplishing something was not an issue, we did have to behave (we were not allowed to talk loudly or run, and we had to be very polite with the passersby) as the prestige of the school was in question. There was an unspoken mutual understanding that activities were imposed upon all of us—it was both routine and ritual, which we all conscientiously performed.

On the other hand, I greatly enjoyed a wide range of extracurricular activities my parents arranged; swimming and tennis classes, painting or pottery pioneer clubs, as well as lots of DIYs we devised *ourselves*, amateur art projects, or handmade puppet shows made my school days anything but bleak. The music teacher always encouraged us to go to the opera house, which happened to be very close to our school and which, with its beautiful costumes and distinct stories, was another type of fantastic time travel. I also remember how my Romanian teacher redecorated the classroom, and during one whole spring vacation, I helped her with clipping portraits of writers, creating various literary maps and collages in order to turn an indistinct classroom into a Romanian literature one.

There was a wealth of school materials available for nation-wide competitions: math exercises, mind twisters, grammar books, suggested readings for all subjects, and I personally never ran short of them. No matter how hard it was at times to acquire the extra materials, my parents made sure I had them all. They all were "safe" learning resources, which only helped in learning more along the pre-established paths.

While the party assured us of the glorious communist future, my family staunchly believed in better times to come and tried to prepare us for the future. My children sometimes ask me questions such as, "Where exactly was I in this picture?" and "What exactly did I do when not learning or doing school-related activities?" I tell them that I avidly read adventure books (Karl May, Jules Verne, Romain Rolland, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, together with a large array of Romanian children classics, ranked high in my young preferences). I often dreamt about a new outfit that my parents might manage to "procure" or my grandmothers might sew. I climbed trees and ate cherries from annoyed neighbors' gardens, played street games with friends in the neighborhood, sleighed on a piece of plastic on my way back from school, and ruined a newly and difficultly "acquired" winter coat. I produced handmade Christmas cards while turning to pieces beautiful Christmas decoration so as to have glitzy margins for my cards. Or I eavesdropped on adults' gossip and (informal) political updates when standing in long queues.

Together with the Chinese pencil cases and panda bear pens, these activities are the ones I remember most vividly. They come to mind easily, without invoking Mnemosyne, without having to do Google searches or double checking the accuracy of my school memories. While these moments of universal childhood experience are the ones that would come to my mind when speaking about my upbringing, I join scholars from the region in the belief that we "drank deconstruction with [our] mother's milk" (Zaborowska, Sibelan, & Elena, 2004, p. x). Traces of the past are always translated to the present in ways of thinking, dreaming, or simply shopping. Trying to untangle the impact of the socialist childhood on my adult self seems like one of the impossible tasks, which requires help from the magic helpers of my childhood tales or a dissection on a living body, painful and impossible. The "socialist" part of my childhood—its numerous forms of regimentation—has become internalized (as it grew on me as I was growing up), and I'll leave further examination for my (even) older years.

Squirrels and Gas Masks: Navigating the Swampy Ideological Terrain of Late Socialism in Hungary (by Helga Lenart-Cheng)

There is no need for me to try to recall my socialist childhood. Its marks are omnipresent in my daily actions, instincts, and even my body. As I sit at my desk, typing these reflections, I see the cut mark on my lower arm

caused by a grape shear during a school-organized harvest: a sixth grader's contribution to her country's five-year plan. How do I explain to strangers asking about the mark that the so-called communist "construction camps" (*építőtábor*), the ones involving school children and community service, were actually fun, that we spent the whole year looking forward to the next one? Instincts and automatisms are even harder to explain. Driving home from work, I like to sing all kinds of songs to myself: rock songs, folk songs, and Soviet songs. One of my favorites is the Soviet national anthem, which we always sang at school assemblies. I still sing it in Russian, with the sparkly eyes of a little choirgirl. But as my voice picks up the distinctive tone of propaganda songs, I catch myself rolling up the windows. After all, I live in the USA, and who knows what the people in the cars next to mine might think.

My early school years in 1980s Hungary were marked by the optimism of these songs. What was there not to like about "happy little squirrels jumping around smiling pioneers" (*Mint a mókus fenn a fán*) or singing about the "heroes liberating us from the oppressors of the past" (*Felszabadulás éneke*)? I had no reason to doubt the tales about the Bolshevik Revolution or the glory of our victory. And it wasn't just the kids. Some adults, too, seemed genuinely excited about our rosy future without imperialists. We lived under the so-called Goulash-communism, which was built on make-believe.[8] People pretended that we still adhered to Marxist ideology while most sectors were quietly adopting the rules of a free market economy. The highest-ranking pioneer leader of my school was a beautiful, young teacher, and she was a role model to all of us in her impeccably ironed uniform. Of course, I did not like the looks of the old and bald socialist veterans, but somehow the shiny medals on their coats made up for their lack of physical attraction. And there was the warm smile of the lady at the post office, who looked just like the woman on the realist socialist painting behind her, except that she was sitting in an office chair instead of driving a tractor in a cornfield. As a child, I breathed in the air of political optimism. I knew that our neighbor was a successful communist official because he was chauffeured around in a black *Volga*. Yet, the final evidence of our victory came not from him but from his daughter, who one day confided to me that she owned *twelve pieces* of underwear. To me, this unheard-of luxury was the ultimate proof of the triumph of socialism, and I felt proud to be a part of it.

My awakening was not a gradual process but a series of powerful revelations, the first of which came on a chilly March day in fourth grade. The little group of pioneers I belonged to was gathering at our house, boys and

girls mixed, chattering about our plans for the afternoon. As in previous years, our task was to visit all the parents in our class who were members of the Communist Party and to greet them with a bouquet and a little congratulatory poem. What a noble mission!—I thought. Sitting on the steps of our entryway, we were wrapping our bouquets in cellophane when my father appeared behind the glass door. He had just gotten home from work, and taking off his shoes, he glanced at us, wondering what we were up to. "We are going to honor the communist parents in our class!" I declared, pompously. "No, you are not," he rebuffed, without further explanation. I stood there speechless, stupefied. I did not understand his reaction, and yet, somehow, I suddenly understood everything. It was like that first moment when you peek in through the keyhole and see your parents prepare Christmas presents in secret, and you realize instantaneously that it was all just a dream, or maybe a deception. All of a sudden, I realized that we did not all belong to the same reality, that my world had a backside, a parallel universe where people did and thought different things.

I still do not understand why it was that particular moment that triggered my father. Looking back, our innocent little celebration of communist parents certainly was not the worst form of collaboration. Perhaps it was his sense of personal pride that ignited his quiet anger. Maybe there was something personal about comparing him to other parents, something absurd about honoring those who conformed. Still, why did he not say anything earlier, when I volunteered to be the leader of our pioneer troop, or when I proudly interviewed communist militants (*munkásőr*) for our school's oral history archive, or when I danced in our school's mass formations, or before any of the other daily socialist rituals? There was only one kid in our school who did not join the pioneers, a quiet girl in fifth grade who my classmates sometimes whispered about. She never came to any of our school events, dances, or camps because only pioneers were allowed to, and I felt bad for her because she never had a chance to try the Soviet gas masks and grenades that we played with on our field trips. I understood as a child that she was an outsider, but I was convinced that I was not, and my parents were not either…. or were they?

On that day in March, I had an immediate realization of my father's belonging to a world apart, even if I did not yet understand the consequences and the ethics of independence. My father's simple act of resistance did not suddenly make him a hero in my eyes. Of course, I did eventually learn to separate propaganda from reality, and his truncated "No, you are not" certainly played a key role in this process. But somehow

my father's enigmatic words had the opposite effect of what one might expect. Instead of acknowledging the power of resistance and autonomy, I began to focus on moments of weakness. I wondered about all those other moments when he did not say anything. I developed a strange fascination with cowardice, with those moments when we simply lack the courage or the willingness to fight, when we are a bit too ready to compromise, a bit too quiet to say the truth. And I began to listen to my surroundings, to the words of the adults around me, tuned in for these delicate moments of feebleness.

My school life in the late 1980s was a rather swampy ideological terrain to navigate, especially as a teenager. A couple of incidents stand out as memorable moments of dilemmas. One was my nomination for a camp in eighth grade. Camp Zánka was the most prestigious pioneer park in the country, close to the Lake Balaton, with all the amenities that socialism could ever offer. During the school year, Zánka had a special month-long camp designed to train future youth leaders, and we had to compete for the much-coveted spaces. I was thrilled to find out that I was accepted, but my excitement did not last. Our principal asked me into her office and explained in a gentle tone that I would have to cede this place to someone whose parents belonged to the working class. "They have fewer chances than you do," she explained. I was angry. I did not know how to explain to her that in a country guided by the motto "Workers of the world unite!" if anyone had privileges, it was not I. At home, my parents did not say anything either. But a week later the principal called me back into her office, annoyed, and said that my parents had complained and that she would let me keep my place. The absurdity of my parents' act did not dawn on me until I came home from Zánka. My head full of pol-beat songs,[9] having learned more about the Soviet Union than I would ever want to know, I wondered: why would someone opposed to a regime have their children train to be leaders in that system? Was this a moment of weakness on their part, or at age 14 was I the one to blame? Had I become an accomplice?

This nagging sense of responsibility tortured me quite a bit in junior high and high school. I remember another awkward moment in eighth grade. My history teacher pulled me aside one day. He and I were the only ones left in the classroom, so at first I did not understand why he whispered. "What did your parents tell you about 1956?" he asked so quietly that I could barely hear him. This was 1987. We were still two years away from the day when a member of the Central Committee of the Communist

Party would raise a scandal by calling 1956 a "popular revolt" instead of a "counter-revolution" (the latter was the official term used by those who crushed the revolution, while the first term raised the possibility of the legitimacy of the revolt). I was only 14, but I was already quite conscious of the political implications of his simple question. And I had a vague inkling that I could trust my teacher because I had heard rumors that he was recently arrested for distributing *samizdat* literature. Still, I struggled: how do I *know* whether I can trust him or not? Do I tell him what I know about 1956? I suspected that he suspected that my parents had already explained it to me. That is why he asked. He wanted a confirmation, a secret sign from an accomplice, a wink from a fellow doubter. I also knew that he would like me more if I revealed what I knew. And yet all I said was: "I don't know," and I walked out of the classroom.

Two years later in high school, I took my first trip to the West, to Germany, and I marveled at the world I did not even know existed: bananas and oranges without having to stand in line, people wearing cashmere sweaters and sparkling white tennis socks, housewives filling huge carts in giant supermarkets. Soon enough Hungary, too, was inundated with the wonders of a capitalist market, and which teenager could resist the rows and rows of hairsprays and deodorants in a country where everyone smelled the same? The revelation of all that existed outside my world was powerful, but it did not stop me from wondering about all the things that remained hidden. In school, we still used the old history books because it takes a while to rewrite history. But I found in the basement of our library a Western history book, a German one that I could read. Our own history book, with its ugly brown cover and heavily censured content, was as unattractive as a history textbook could ever be. This other one had a multi-colored layout, shiny paper, and real photos, winning the comparison by its sheer appearance. As I lifted it off the shelf, I glanced around with guilt, as if I had found a porn magazine. What? The Red Army had raped women? Communists were persecuting members of the opposition? Elections with more than one candidate actually existed? Needless to say, I was shocked to read about the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and all the other post-1945 conflicts from the other side's perspective. But again, I was more fascinated with what remained hidden. I continued asking questions about all the stories that remained untold, about all the secrets that my parents kept from us, and about my own responsibility in concealing and revealing things. Today, as a scholar specializing in life stories, I still wonder about all the stories about communism that remain untold.

Co-witnessing (or With-nessing): A Temporary Conclusion

The current piece contributes to existing accounts of (post)socialist childhood and schooling not simply by providing more "insider information," but by highlighting three crucial aspects of this memory-exchange: first, the importance of allowing contradictions and ambiguities to inhabit such narratives; second, the heterogeneity of experiencing socialism (even when one belongs to the same generation, family background, and/or economic situation); and third, the importance of probing into the limits of co-witnessing in the case of accounts about totalitarian regimes focusing on child protagonists.

Halfway through our conversations, one of us posed the questions: "Why do we want to write this as a collaborative piece?" "Why not alone?" "Why the *duo* in our auto-duo-ethnography?" This forced us to think through not only our roles as individual witnesses, but also the meaning of co-witnessing. Moreover, the fact that this volume was conceived as a collection of testimonial evidence lends further urgency to our questions about co-witnessing. No matter how we interpret the social functions of witnessing, witnessing is always about someone relating *knowledge*.

Our two stories present the child as an epistemological subject, as a knower or not-knower. However, the two narratives approach the limits of the child's knowledge very differently. While the first narrator occupies the position of "I always knew," the protagonist of the second account seems to gradually acquire knowledge through a "series of powerful revelations." The confidence of the first narrator's "I always knew" seems further bolstered by the child's environment, in which everyone seems to know everything, including the fact that nobody knows anything. Relying on the authority of this "common knowledge" could, of course, be read as the author's reflexive repetition of the self-censuring measure practiced by all citizens of repressive regimes. However, the author herself undermines this reading by pointing out that this illusion of a private sphere free of political contamination was itself a product of the socialist ideological discourse. The second account seems to be structured very differently, like a *Bildungsroman* in which the child slowly acquires the knowledge necessary to join adult society. Yet, here too, the knowledge itself turns out to be compromised so that each new discovery only leads to greater insecurity, both in an epistemological and in an ethical sense.

While our two narratives are ethnographic rather than literary in nature, certain concepts developed by literary scholars are useful for attempting to draw more widely applicable conclusions about how to read such child-focused accounts about totalitarian regimes. In our view, the most intriguing aspect of these narratives is the reader's active involvement in "supplementing" the child witness's perspective. This phenomenon has already been studied by narratologists with reference to fictional writing (Zsadányi, 2015); however, given the complexity of the performative aspects of autobiographical writing, it would be beneficial to extend these studies to non-fictional narratives as well.

In this brief conclusion, we can only point to two authors whose work could be further developed in this direction. First, Julia Emberley (2014) puts forth the idea of "witnessing the witness," which implies "questions of how, in the process of constructing the witness, the reader or viewer comes into play as a witness and whether an individual can 'witness' her- or himself without the presence of another, who, willingly or not, comes to participate in the making of a community of people 'bearing witness' and, thus, carrying the knowledge of historical or personal events" (p. 7). This notion of co-witnessing seems particularly relevant to memory exchanges like ours, where willingly or unwillingly we become each other's first witnesses, whose reactions and feedback shape the accounts even before publication. Given dominant preconceptions about the supposedly unreflected perspective of the involuntary child witness who often appears in such narratives as an unreliable narrator, it could be tempting to reduce the role of this co-witness to establishing the authority of the witness. Instead, it might be more fruitful to think about the role of this co-witness as developing alternative forms of knowledge distinct from those we gain from unveiling secrets. Regarding our roles as co-witnesses, we could then ask with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: What is it that remains invisible not because of the never-ending task of unveiling the secrets of communism, but precisely due to our paranoid optic as experienced readers? (Sedgwick, 2003, pp. 123–153).[10]

Second, in examining the process of how we co-construct each other as witnesses in such autoethnographic accounts, we could build on Jean-Luc Nancy's interpretation of community. Nancy (1991) radically reinterpreted the *co-* of community, and insisted that community is not a communion or a product to be completed or achieved. "Being-in-common does not mean a higher form of substance or subject taking charge of the

limits of separate individualities" (p. 27). What community does is simply *expose* individuals to their own finitude by revealing their existence outside themselves. According to Nancy, the ontological condition of being-in-common disrupts all attempts to figure identity as an immanent totality: both individual and community are only exposed in the *with* of the "being with." As Nancy put it: "I therefore preferred to concentrate my work around the 'with': almost indistinguishable from the co- of community, yet it carries with it a clearer indication of the spacing at the heart of proximity and intimacy. 'With' is plain and neutral: neither communion nor atomization; just the sharing/dividing [partage] of a place, at the most, contact: a being-together without assemblage" (quoted in Nichols, 2013, p. 51).

Extending Nancy's concept of community to the community of witnesses involved in such autoethnographic explorations, we would like to suggest that Nancy's reconceptualization of the co- as *spacing* has consequences for our understanding of co-witnessing as well, since the assumed power of co-witnessing depends on the assumed co-presence of the two witnesses. Yet, following Nancy's logic, our co-construction of each other as witnesses can never be about confirmation but only the articulation of our mutual co-exposure. In short, the most we can do in this community of two is *with*-ness each other.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Dubravka Ugrešić, Slavenka Drakulić, Aleksander Hemon, and Gary Shteyngart.
2. Exceptions include Georgescu *Ceaușescu's Children* (2015), Bădică & Popescu *Remembering Childhood* (2013), Alexandra Lloyd & Ute Wölfel *Childhood in German Film after 1989* (2015). Publications in national languages also exist as evidenced in volumes such as *Childhood under Socialism* in Bulgarian edited by Ivan Elenkov and Daniela Koleva (Sofia: Centre for Advanced Study/Riva, 2010), *In Search of the Lost World of Communism* (2005) by Paul Cernat et al., or *The Book of Childhoods* (2016) edited by

Dan Lungu and Amelia Gheorghiță in Romanian, but they tend to either "document" or judge the past rather than problematize the socialist times, and in so doing they look like a published extension of the online archives or blogs.

3. Impressive studies have been dedicated to the "impact of autobiography and subjectivity in the work of scholars across the disciplines" (Freedman & Frey, 2003, p. 1), and important work has been published on the autobiographies by scholars from various fields.

4. See Eakin's (2004) edited collection about ethics in life-writing and Couser (2004) for different forms of vulnerability in collaborative life-writing.

5. Romania was a socialist state which promoted a communist ideology, and communism was perceived as an ideal stage our country should reach. The very name of the country was changed by Ceaușescu from People's Republic to the Socialist Republic of Romania; he also reversed the name of the party from Romanian Workers' Party to Romanian Communist Party. In employing the terms "socialism" or "communism" throughout the autobiographical essay, I have this understanding in mind, and communism refers to specific ideological instances of my socialist upbringing.

6. The political propaganda which reached us in school was basically "wooden language" as it was called even then and just discourse. We all knew we had to put up with it: we listened patiently to the school director's speeches, we recited poems, and so on, as part of school duties.

7. Due to the strong focus on communist nationalism and the nonaligned foreign policy in Ceaușescu's Romania, there was no Sovietization of literary and historical canons in the 1970s and 1980s; thus, the focus was on "national heroes," with the communist pantheon alongside the early voivodes. The propaganda about the present was too blatant for us to believe, and earlier Romanian or world history was fascinating, irrespective of the wooden language and communist jargon.

8. The term—a semi-humorous reference to the Hungarian dish "goulash"—refers to a special variety of communism practiced in Hungary from 1962 to 1989, which was characterized by a unusual mix of Marxist ideology and elements of free market economy.

9. A special type of political beat music focusing on social and political issues.

10. Kosofsky Sedgwick cautions that our faith in knowledge as exposure may lead us down an epistemological tunnel where any conclusion that is *not* a rehearsal of the paranoia of oppression seems like a dangerous denial of the gravity of oppression. See "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You are So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You" in *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.*

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A Dulled Mind in an Active Body: Growing Up as a Girl in Normalization Czechoslovakia

Libora Oates-Indruchová

I wanted to be an artist. I don't know when I forgot about that, but I do know when I remembered. It was in the 1990s, because that was when I began to think again. I first began to think and then to remember—and reflect. At first only introspectively, but as I progressed through my post-graduate studies of cultural and gender theory in England, at an American university in Hungary, and at a host of summer schools taught by North American and West European academics, I began to remember and, more importantly, to reflect with an increasingly East-West comparative and theoretical perspective. This remembering still goes on today amidst the research interest of "the first post-socialist generation," to paraphrase Alexei Yurchak (2006), in state-socialist nostalgia (or Ostalgia), everyday life, or popular cultures of state socialism (see, e.g. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 2015; Ghodsee, 2011; Pehe, 2014). This chapter is a part of the process of (critical) remembering, "exploring the temporally inflected relationships between personal life, social relationships and public culture and how these contribute to the construction of personal and collective identities" (Keightley, 2010, pp. 66–67).

Three questions arise from the re-discovery of my childhood ambition: How could I forget? What ambitions, if any, replaced it? And, most importantly, do the swings in my personal ambitions have something to

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do with the state-socialist political doctrine and/or gender politics? To pursue these questions, I chose the method of autoethnography, "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). Autoethnographies "look *inward*—into our identities, thoughts, feelings and experiences—and *outward*—into our relationships, communities, and cultures" (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 46). It is a method that answers to C. W. Mills's call for connecting "personal troubles" to "public issues" and allows the researcher to use personal experience as data to examine the "relationship between personal growth and understanding and public discourse about that understanding" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, pp. 14–15, interpreting Mills). Typically, autoethnographers engage "'epiphanies'—remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life […], times of existential crises that forced a person to attend to and analyze lived experience […], and events after which life does not seem quite the same" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 6). An epiphany does not have to be a single incident, it can also be a "mundane aesthetic moment" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 70); however, both kinds "prompt us to pause and reflect; they encourage us to explore aspects of ourselves and others that, before the incident, we might not have had the occasion or courage to explore" (p. 47).

I will use several such "epiphanies" and aesthetic moments as the base material to unpick the cultural contexts surrounding the possible answers to the questions I posed.[1] None of the epiphanies would have constituted a dramatic or even significant incident to an outside observer. Rather, they are more like James Joyce's epiphanies in *Dubliners* (Joyce, 1966)—*mundane* epiphanies. Neither the situations nor the words spoken imply that something life-changing might be happening. The incidents gain significance only in the connection of the personal, cultural, and historical. I will try and establish these connections by "situating" (Haraway, 1988) the epiphanies in the context of the knowledge available to me at the time and now. The interpretations of the epiphanies "then," which I will try to reconstruct, would have been based on the partial perspective of my own experience with educational institutions as a child or young person, and there would have been no reflection of their specific cultural or historical context. In contrast, the reflection on them from my current position is informed by available historical research on state socialism and by my own scholarly engagement with gender studies,

cultural discourses of gender during state socialism, and conditions of the Czech educational environment of the 1970s and 1980s.

An encouragement or discouragement of intellectual and physical activities by state-socialist educational institutions and educators forms the kernel of each of the epiphanies. The epiphanies can be seen as practices of forming intellectual consciousness and gender identities of children and young people. Their central theme is the ambiguity of state-socialist education: restrictive and conservative, while at the same time strangely liberal and progressive, confirming and challenging stereotypes, encouraging individual development in some areas, streamlining into dull uniformity in others. All except one epiphany occurred in the 1970s, during the period known as "normalization" in Czechoslovakia. This period followed the military suppression of the reform movement that culminated in the Prague Spring of 1968. "Normalization," as it is now referred to by historians, began about a year after the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968 and lasted until the regime's demise in 1989, or "Velvet Revolution." Thorough loyalty screenings of all Communist Party members were conducted during the first year of normalization that led to a large number of job losses and professional blacklistings. What is less known is that normalization did not stop there, but that at least in education and academia, policies and legislation continued to tighten the ideological grip on the professions all the way to 1989 (Oates-Indruchová, 2008).

One other concept that needs to be considered at the outset is the notion of "growing up." It obviously implies "achieving maturity" in various respects, but when exactly does that happen? In state-socialist Czechoslovakia, an individual came of age, like in most European societies, at 18: from one day to the next, one formally became a citizen with full rights and responsibilities, whatever those meant in that political context. As the educational system at the time encouraged children to stay at school until the age of 18, most young people reached majority during their last year of secondary school while preparing for the *maturita*, the school-leaving examination and a formal prerequisite for university entry. Its metonymic name is "the test of maturity." Today it still carries the cultural status of a rite of passage. Under state socialism, I often wondered, a passage to what? If turning 18 was to mark the passage from "the age of innocence" to "the age of accountability" in the legal sense, did the completion of secondary school with the *maturita* certificate mean that one was now wholly *responsible* for one's life? In the epiphanies that follow, I will be considering also the threshold of growing up as achieving "the age of responsibility."

Epiphany no. 1

I must be attending the second grade, because I can write. Our class just read a story that told about the lifecycle of a blackbird. The teacher set the task—or so I thought—to write down a summary of the text. I bend down over my exercise book and start writing. Then I stop, because I hear the teacher say: "So how could we begin?" She starts calling up one pupil after another to offer the first sentence. I am confused: what is going on?

After three or four suggestions, she formulates a sentence and begins to write it on the blackboard. I froze: I did it wrong. I misunderstood.

*   *   *

I thought we were supposed to write down our *individual* summaries of the story, which was simple enough in my opinion. Now I saw that my own thoughts were not called for, that we were supposed to produce one *collective* story.

*   *   *

Writing a collective summary may not be a method specific to the state-socialist classroom, but placed in the historical and political context, it acquires special significance. During the years to come, I often remembered this sea-change moment of my educational socialization, and adjusted my future responses to class assignments accordingly: do not offer your own opinion, and if you do, wait for the teacher's approval and only then cement it in writing as knowledge to be memorized. But it was not until several years ago, when I was researching science and cultural policies of Czech normalization, that I reflected on its larger political ramifications. This episode must have taken place in the academic year 1972–73, at the same time as the vetting of all educators for their loyalty to the Communist Party occurred and the Soviet-led military invasion that followed after the defeat of the Prague Spring was completed (Otáhal, Nosková, & Bolomský, 1993). Large numbers of people, especially in education, lost their jobs (Míšková, 2002; Tůma, 2002). Therefore, the anxiety of those who stayed increased and their intention and attention not to stray from safe methods and content, not to stand out in any way, must have been extreme. Allowing pupils to express their individual opinions, no matter how trivial the topic was, would have meant facing the risk of potentially far-reaching consequences. Czech state-socialist

educational institutions always demanded political conformity, but at that particular time, surveillance in that regard intensified, although what the exact rules were was not always clear due to the vagueness of the language of Party decrees and educational policies (Oates-Indruchová, 2008). In the situation when every aspect of life could be politicized and nobody knew what exactly was allowed and what was prohibited, it was better for the educators to play safe and rely on trusted authorities. At the same time, they themselves acted the role of authority and provided the benchmark of what was desirable and permitted for the pupils.

Epiphany no. 2

Same age, same schoolteacher. A policeman enters the classroom. He is recruiting pupils for a bicycle agility contest that is to be held at the occasion of the International Children's Day on 1 June. Nobody signs up. The teacher encourages, "Come on boys, which of you would like to try?" I want to sign up because I love riding my bicycle and I love competitions. But, incomprehensibly, the teacher only called for the boys to enter the contest.

After the class, I approach the teacher, "Comrade teacher, I am really interested in this, but I didn't raise my hand because you said it was only for boys."

"Oh, no, not at all. Of course you can participate."

* * *

And so I did. I did well, in what must have been a co-ed contest, because I was not competing in a separate girls' category, but with the boys. I was issued an official driving license for bicycle by the police at the age of eight. That meant that I was certified to ride on roads without being accompanied by an adult (I believe the regulations then stipulated that without this test a child could ride a bicycle on roads from the age of 10). I was extremely proud of it.

What I learned from this experience was that (1) only boys were meant to do some things and (2) they were not necessarily more accomplished at it than I.

* * *

Today, two moments strike me about this experience. First, the teacher's original appeal to boys only and, second, my brazenness in approaching the teacher after class. I think the teacher acted impulsively out of her own belief in gender roles rather than out of adherence to the educational policies of the time. It is true that governmental policies began to turn from their radical approach to the dismantling of the gender order in the early 1950s to the traditional gender roles by the early 1960s (B. Havelková, 2014; H. Havelková, 2015) and that the relaxation of the political situation in the 1960s brought with it the re-emergence of an anti-emancipation discourse in public discussion (Roubal, 2014). Nevertheless, the public political rhetoric of normalization kept the expressions of "women's movement" and to a lesser degree "women's equality" (*rovnoprávnost*) alive (Nečasová, 2011, pp. 248–249; Oates-Indruchová, 2012, p. 363). The teacher, who was middle-aged and came from a traditional rural background, probably just did not expect that girls would be interested or possessed the skills to participate. When I informed her of my interest, she might have quickly corrected her assumptions to match the official policy of equality.

While it is easy to find an explanation for the teacher's response, I am still at a loss at my reaction. Given my prior experience with the blackbird and probably a host of other socializing impulses, how on earth did I get the nerve to say that I wanted to participate despite being clearly excluded? The only answer I can come up with is that my passion for cycling got the better of my reason. Perhaps at the back of my mind there was logic or a lack thereof: perhaps I was asking myself even then, during that class, why should I not be entitled to participate? The policeman expressly said "children" and "Children's Day"; I am a child and I like riding a bicycle, so the event must surely be meant also for me. So I decided to ask the teacher. I do not think that at that time I would have confronted the teacher about something that would have been clearly against the rules or inappropriate.

The thing is, there are more events that happened during that school year prior to this exchange with the teacher. We did not have a specialized history class yet, but we must have had some subjects that covered historical—and political—issues. In one such class, the teacher told us about how the capitalist factory owners in the past exploited the working classes. When she finished, I raised my hand and when called upon, I stood up and said proudly: "My grandfather was a capitalist."

"And did he own a factory?" the teacher asked, smiling incredulously.

"Yes. He did."

In the evening, I related the story, with considerable family pride, to my parents. They were horrified. They both came from families persecuted in the 1950s, as children with "ideologically unreliable backgrounds." They were banned from the education they desired, yet they supported the reform movement of 1968 only to be thwarted again. Now they were determined not to do anything that would taint the career prospects of their children. My father looked at me gravely and said: "Remember this: neither of your grandfathers owned a factory."

He was right, I later discovered. It was my *great*-grandfather who owned one of the larger enterprises in town, but I was confused then by my father's assertion. What I also did not know was that my maternal grandfather was a political prisoner in the 1950s and that my paternal grandfather—who I knew spent two and a half years in a concentration camp for Sokol resistance activities during World War II[2]—had some quarrel with the communists too. Both of them I know now were followed by the secret police as evidenced by the existence of files in their names in the archives of the Security Services. My father knew all of this and did not want his daughter to call attention to the family ghosts during her classes and hamper her educational prospects.[3] At the time, I simply learned the lesson a lot of other children of my generation learned: there was one way to talk at home and another way at school about the same thing.

That is why I would have exercised more caution had I thought that girls were explicitly excluded from the cycling competition. I would not have wanted to draw attention to anything that was freely discussed at home, but might have been iffy outside of the home—such as, that my parents encouraged me to ride bicycles. As I did talk to the teacher, I must have had a notion from the institutional educational environment that it was ok for a girl to ride a bike, that there was no inappropriateness attached to it. Or perhaps, by that time I was sufficiently schooled in state-socialist hierarchies: I ascribed superior authority to the policeman and his reference to "children" rather than to the teacher's gendered definition.

I cannot say that I sailed through the rest of the eight years of elementary school without confrontations, but I cannot remember any further epiphanies. However, in my second grade, my socialization into state-socialist educational institutions was apparently successful. I avoided volunteering my opinion (at least for the most part) and, ever more seriously, I pursued sporting activities—earning the praise of my educators. I was doing very well academically, too. I earned straight As all the way from grade six to

grade eight, but no special notice or award. I suppose the attitude was that the point of school was for everyone to learn a set of subjects, so as far as I remember, the school did not give any prizes for academic performance, but sporting activity was something beyond that. When our all-girl school team won second place in the national round of a para-military, physically demanding competition "*O partizánský samopal*" (A Partisan Machinegun), we were praised all over the school and received an award from the principal. We also got a feature-length article with a blow-by-blow account of the contest in a national magazine aimed at young men doing the obligatory military service (Tesař, 1979). This latter recognition was coincidental, because the journalist who was assigned to cover the competition happened to choose to run with us rather than with another team, but the article illustrated the importance that state policies placed on fitness for both sexes (Appeltová, 2016; Oates-Indruchová, 2003; Roubal, 2003).

So perhaps symptomatically, the next epiphanic moment arrived the day after the end of my elementary school attendance, as soon as I closed the door on one educational institution and found myself in the liminal space before entering another. All sorts of things can happen in liminal spaces. They are spaces of change and exchange; certainties are up for questioning; fixed identities melt and transform. Emiliya Karaboeva applied van Gennep's and Turner's concept of liminality to state-socialist physical and symbolic spaces in her research on the experience and imagery surrounding Bulgarian truck drivers. Their constant movement between East and West made them the regime's emissaries but also potential risks as they were exposed to the ideological temptations and decadence of the West (Karaboeva, 2014). Liminal spaces are also carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) even though hierarchies and values may not be turned entirely on their heads—they are not fully fixed.

Epiphany no. 3

I am 14 and this is my first day at an outdoor summer camp for 14–18-year-olds. The campsite is a stretch of a meadow bordering a brook on one side and surrounded by forests. We have to build almost everything by ourselves, a washing facility in the brook (upstream), a latrine in the forest (downstream). This is the late 1970s, and such things are still possible without the anxious parents and health authorities converging on the organizers from the sports union for exposing the children to undue hardship and health hazards (real or imagined). A group of us—consisting of

both sexes, youngsters in relation to the older camp participants—is assigned to lighter work. We are to prepare the flagpole for the assembly point in the middle of the campground. A thin tree has already been felled and appropriately trimmed for the purpose.

"Knot this rope to the pole, so that we can raise and lower the flag on it," says the summer-camp leader, handing me a length of rope.

"OK," I reply after the tiniest hesitation, accepting the task, and set down to work.

* * *

What happened in that split second before the "OK" is this: I panic, I am ashamed of myself, I become determined—in that order:

Panic

Who will tell me how to do it? I have never done this. I need to sit down in a corner somewhere, think about it, try it out, and then show you how I want to do it and you'll see if it's ok. You mean, I have to do it right now, in front of everyone? The horror of exposure should I fail is momentarily overwhelming.

Shame

Horror blends into shame. The camp leader is a friend of my father. What would he think of me and what would my father think if he learned that I was not equal to the very first task on the very first day of the summer camp for "grown-ups" to which I so much wanted to go? I have always been at the top of my class, I have won prizes, I will be starting a *gymnázium* after the summer, and the first time I step out of my familiar bubble and into the world, I fail.[4]

Determination

No, not yet. I will manage. Somehow. I have to be able to do this, I am smart, I can do things with my hands. It is ridiculous that I, of all people, should not succeed in what the camp leader obviously considers a simple task.

So I say, in a tone that I hope sounds matter of fact, "OK"—*and I knew that I became soup.*

* * *

The soup metaphor was used in an autoethnographic piece by Mark Orbe to reflect on his own socialization in academia and how that gradually silenced a part of who he was. The metaphor refers to what happens

to a frog if it is dropped into boiling water (it gets out) and if it is placed in cold water that is gradually brought to boil: "it will stay put and eventually become soup" (Orbe, 2014, pp. 206–207). Obviously, I read about the metaphor years after the moment at the summer camp, but it is an uncannily fitting description of what I learned about myself then. I had lost resemblance to the child who eagerly sat down to write her own account of the blackbird, without waiting for the teacher to tell her what to write.

This must have been the first time in my educational experience that I was given a task without step-by-step instructions. I was asked to think, figure out the procedure, and execute it all by myself. Worse, the camp leader handed the rope to me in the group of about four of us, which meant that 'I' was supposed to think, figure out the procedure, *delegate* parts of the task to the other three, and *supervise* the completion of the team effort. All of that without solitary time to think and grapple with this towering responsibility. It was pride that prevented me from asking any questions about the assignment. Even in that moment of conflicting emotions, the task seemed far too trivial to justify questions.

With hindsight, it was probably also all of those years of practice of *un*learning to take initiative, think independently, and ask questions. If the two previous epiphanies fall into the category of "socializing," that is experiences that helped me get along *with* the educational establishment, this one was "individualizing." It was for me and about me *in* the educational establishment. It kept swimming to the surface of my memories for years afterwards; a cartoon taped to an office door, summarizing a worldview in one apt image: a kind of a motto, or rather, a memento—of acquiescence. No longer a camouflage for the establishment, the acquiescing patterns of thinking passed into the bloodstream and I could not tell the difference myself. In a somewhat different context, J. M. Coetzee wrote that the constant need to read one's writing through the censor's eyes makes one "internalize a contaminated reading" (Coetzee, 1996, p. 36). His subject was creative writing and self-censorship during South African apartheid. The parallel lies in the absorption of communication strategies to such a degree that they became indistinguishable from one's own intellectual processes. I learned to follow what was asked of me so well that I no longer knew how to ask questions, solve problems, or, indeed, think for myself.

The whole environment of the summer camp was liminal, in a sense. It was intended for young people between childhood and young adulthood. The organizers were probably placing themselves at risk (by being

responsible for all these sexually mature individuals away from home) and were under greater scrutiny by their supervising authorities because of the age group. The camp was run by an outdoor section of the mass sports union, but the camp counselors were mostly former members of Scout and Sokol when these organizations were briefly renewed in the late 1960s. That meant that although they observed all official regulations, their approach to their charges was less collectivist than in the summer camps run by the Pioneer organization. They steered the camp rituals and activities through the narrows of a condoned alternative on the port side and a suspect subversion on the starboard.[5] Team activities prevailed, but within them, each person could usually distinguish themselves at least in some small way.

What I also realize now is how amazingly consistently egalitarian that environment was: boys and girls shared in all activities, and all teams were always mixed. Gender hierarchies were temporarily suspended. I also know that this was not something I noticed as unusual at the time. I took such equal treatment of the sexes for granted. That is not to say that Czech culture and even education were gender-neutral, of course, but that the official rhetoric of the equality of the sexes within educational institutions could have produced a change in individual expectations in relation to gender roles and interaction. The consequence could have been liberating and allowed for broadening of activities and skills. Alternatively, it might have produced almost the opposite effect by providing a smoke screen that concealed one's own gender inequalities.

The latter was one of the striking findings in the interviews I conducted with women of various generations on their experience of the transformation from state socialism in the early 1990s. Participants typically insisted that they were equal to men and then, without any reflection on the contradiction, proceeded to list all the ways in which they felt disadvantaged in their families and society (Šmejkalová et al., 1994).[6] I argued elsewhere that despite the persistent gendered culture and social interactions of Czech normalization, occasional spaces have opened in which gender markers were removed, hereby creating pockets for creative reconfigurations of certain concepts, such as the body in the expert discourse on physical culture (Oates-Indruchová, 2003). The summer camp belonged institutionally to that discourse and carried its concepts over into practice. At 14, I was not conscious of the freedom with which I could pursue sporting activities. I took it for granted. Whether at the summer camp or outside of it, I enjoyed and embraced it. I made a "pact" with my parents

and the school that as long as my grades were good, I could devote as much time as I pleased to sports.

On the intellectual front, the wake-up call experienced at that first summer camp of my adolescence was not followed by systematic honing of independent thinking on my part, but I did change my strategy vis-à-vis the institutional environment: I turned into myself more deliberately, and I carried out my educational obligations with equally deliberate detachment throughout the next four years at the *gymnázium*. There was a conscious separation between what I did because it was required and what I did because I wanted to do it. The acquiescence began to wash out from my bloodstream and I developed a protective crust, like the notorious Potemkin village, working as a façade with nothing behind it. In this case, no frantic intellectual activity was taking place underneath the crust.

From the perspective of the present, one could say that I was seduced by the "soft power" (Nye, 1990) of the system that encouraged activities in one area to promote its own ideological aims (such as, the instrumental use of sports in the Cold War competition) and did not notice the coercive power that discouraged pursuits in another area (critical thinking outside of the epistemological framework of Marxism-Leninism).[7] That power was definitely coercive or *also* coercive, as plentiful evidence of sanctions for deviations from the prescribed course documents: from obstacles to higher education entry to the harassment of dissident intellectuals.[8] From the perspective of gender, however, the encouragement of girls to pursue physical activities included a real empowering potential that would have carried over to areas other than sport. At the age of eight, I learned that "I could do things," a message reinforced in subsequent years. If the "curriculum" of sporting pursuits includes learning how to run, jump, or throw, for example, the hidden curriculum teaches one generally applicable "survival" skills, such as competing, pursuing a goal, enjoying triumphs, and getting up after a defeat. In this sense, I was a "grown-up" by the time I took the *maturita* examination at the local *gymnázium*.

Epiphany no. 4

It is the Spring of 1990, a few months after the Velvet Revolution and I sit in an evening class of English literature, taught as the advanced stage of English as a Foreign Language instruction, in one of the London colleges of higher education. We are reading *Paradise Lost*. I, as most of the class, struggle with the verses. At the first reading, we can hardly understand the

meaning of a single line. The lecturer explains patiently the meanings of the individual words, draws diagrams of action, until gradually, the story begins to make sense. Once we understand the story, he proceeds to explain the historical context in which Milton wrote and how it had bearing on his poetry:

"The English Civil War was a conflict over the Book of Common Prayer." He pauses and adds, "There are some Marxist theories that claim it was a class conflict, but that's far-fetched."

I am astounded. Does he mean that there are other than Marxist interpretations of history? Or worse, are there more ways than one—the "correct" one—to look at historical events? Or interpret literature?

*   *   *

I was supposed to graduate from my Czech university the previous spring, majoring in English and physical education and sports, but did not. Instead I applied for and was granted a break in my studies one examination short of completion, so that I could get the dean's permission to leave Czechoslovakia for six months. That was the dean's condition, he would give his consent, but only if I did not complete the degree. Leaving without completed higher education was supposed to serve as a deterrent to emigration. And so I arrived in London in the early summer of 1989. My British lector in Prague arranged for a family to take me in for the duration of my exit permit. It took more than a year to cut through all the red tape of travel restrictions to the West and arrange the trip. I should say that the "cutting" did not include a Communist Party membership, bribing anyone, or even being asked to collaborate with the State Security Services. It probably sounds unbelievable, because it was unheard of to leave legally in this manner back then. Needless to say, I did not go back in six months. The Velvet Revolution intervened, and when I called the Czechoslovak Embassy in early December about the possibility of extending my exit permit because I wanted to complete the yearlong course at the college, they actually laughed and told me not to worry about it.

Immediately after the summer holidays, I started the literature course. By spring we had already covered several novels and now we "graduated" to poetry. It was a whole new experience for me. We were assigned a handful literary works for the year and we read and analyzed them line-by-line

in class. During my Czech education, we never analyzed literary texts; instead, we learned synopses of dozens of literary works, biographies of authors, and learned to characterize the various literary-historical periods. After almost five years of this, I found myself in an international class of ("Western") students from all walks of life. There were one or two other students, but mostly working people: mainly women working in hospitality services, and also an Italian priest (I remember him because he was only the third member of the clerical profession that I ever met). The humbling experience that I felt acutely was that, although I was perhaps the best-read person in class, I had nothing to say about any of the texts—unlike almost everybody else.

And now the lecturer handed me the key to unlocking the puzzle of why I found the class difficult and often had little idea of what was going on. I was not used to *thinking* about what I was reading, I was used to absorbing "preexisting knowledge" communicated by "mediators," professors, and authors of textbooks, in "authoritative language" (Yurchak, 2006, p. 75). I was not used to paying attention to individual words, their meanings, and how those meanings might shift if one word was set next to another one. In short, I did not have the concept of "interpretation." I was not able to articulate it in exactly these words then, but I understood the difference and the process of changing from the one way of approaching literature to the other. Today, I recognize that I gradually *re-learned how to think*. This re-learning started at the moment the lecturer implied that what I studied about those particular historical events at the university in Prague were not given facts, but an ideologically situated perspective.

With fascination and dogged determination, I began to notice words and their arrangement on the pages of literary texts, reading not just for the story as a sequence of events, but for the nuances of meaning. I began to oil the rusty cogs of my brain until they engaged and got into the habit of reflecting on words, read and spoken by friends, family, or politicians. It took even more effort to learn to formulate my own thoughts in writing without waiting for prompts and hints from teachers.

It took a few more years before I remembered that, once upon a time, I had the concept of myself as an independent spirit and wanted to be an artist.

Much more labor was still to come when, as a lecturer, I began to teach literature to Czech undergraduates in the 1990s. It was a frustrating, never-ending *déjà vu*, for they too were the products of that same and slowly reforming educational system that taught them not to think.[9]

Typically, when I entered the first class of the semester, only a couple of the students would have brought the text assigned for the class, but most would have waited with their pens poised over their notepads, waiting for the "truth" to start pouring out of my mouth. Every class was a wrestling match with a bear, or at least that's how I felt afterwards. But if at the end of the semester at least half of the students produced a short, coherent essay, I felt that it was worth the effort and that there was hope—hope that the "children" from Week 1 would become more reflexive, thoughtful, and, in short, more *mature* human beings.

Conclusion

This brings me to the question raised in the introduction: When does one grow up in the sense of passing into "the age of responsibility"? A significant amount has been written about state-socialist tutelage and paternalism. The Hungarian intellectual Miklós Haraszti described with biting sarcasm the comfortable life state-socialist artists could lead in exchange for the appearance of political conformity (Haraszti, 1987). I argued that state paternalism also reached into the imagery around models of masculinity and femininity; and by co-opting some images as desirable for a socialist citizen and others as subversive, it effectively reduced the number of discursive positions available to men, but broadened the spectrum for women (Oates-Indruchová, 2012). I suggested above that thanks to the intense engagement in sports, which the institutional environment around me encouraged, I could consider myself in some respects a grown-up by the time I graduated from *gymnázium*. I cannot, however, dare make that claim when it comes to being responsible for the ideas about the world that I had expressed. I can see now that the passage to that kind of maturity only began in my early 20s after several more years of education in that evening class in London. Up to that point, I either learned "facts" and did not reflect on how these facts came about or were constructed, or learned not to pay too much attention to the meaningless phrases from the authoritative discourse and, by extension, to language in general. This is the pattern of behavior demonstrated by Václav Havel's greengrocer who installs a political slogan that he no longer believes in his shopping window. The act of display has no significance to the greengrocer—he does not even think about it. It is, however, a ritual of conformity, and that is why Havel calls it "living in a lie" (Havel, 1992).

I take the liberty to quibble on Havel's phrase and call such behavior "living in childhood," for the greengrocer acts like a child in a way. Children are told to do and say certain things for their own good or because it is "proper." They accept certain views because parents or teachers say so. As they grow up, they begin to question, rebel, and, hopefully, reflect and take responsibility for their own lives—at least that is the idea. It was only from that epiphanic London experience in the spring of 1990 that I began to learn to reflect on the meanings of words in their political, cultural, and historical context—and to take responsibility for formulating my opinions. This is not to say that everybody who grew up in state socialism had no ideas of their own, while everybody who is born into a Western democracy takes full advantage of the possibility to develop into a critical thinker. The observation I wish to make is much more limited. State socialist education was directed at teaching one to *transmit* knowledge and views without question or modification, and thus it kept one in the state of perpetual childhood, with the State taking on the role of the parent and guardian.[10] Inevitably, this system fostered intellectual mediocrity. It usually did not pay to overperform or to underperform, one had to get it just right—in the middle. That was a logical consequence of mass approach to education, organized leisure pursuits, or culture.[11]

Gender aspects of this system that did not foster intellectual competition and excellence are still largely unexplored. That makes the approach to physical activity, and growing up *as a girl*, all the more interesting. I suggested earlier that the ever-present rhetoric of the equality of the sexes, combined with the Cold War division of all language into "good-socialist" and "bad-capitalist," produced the discursive consequence that some traditional binaries could not be politicized. In this discourse, feminine/masculine no longer stood in opposition to each other (Oates-Indruchová, 2003). The practical consequence for physical education and sports was, at least on the part of the institutions, a removal of traditional inhibitors to physical activity for girls. If dampers were put on intellectual pursuits of both sexes, structural measures were introduced for the inclusion and encouragement of girls into sports, a definite emancipatory effect. As a postgraduate student, I talked about this to an American feminist scholar working on the theories of the body. She confirmed that she definitely felt, when she worked with a group of Hungarian women basketball players who grew up under state socialism, that they "enjoyed their bodies" (her words) quite differently from how she as an American woman did. In my educational experience, I was able to find joy and self-actualization in

being physically active, although one cannot claim that there would have been no gender bias in informal social control. Outside of the institutional context, one's family and friends made sure that they communicated the gender norms concerning intellectual involvement and the level and kind of physical activity. They would have furnished me with well-meaning advice, such as "don't show boys that you are intelligent, they don't like it and you'll never find a man," or "archeology is not a profession for women." The adults in my intimate circle generally approved and encouraged my choice of physical activity but occasionally reminded me of the limits of propriety: "girls do not kick"—read "girls do not play soccer." Girls then found themselves between the contrary expectations of these two worlds, the institutional and the informal—and perhaps boys did too, although differently. From a theoretical perspective, this historical context and its possible lasting consequences for the transition period and the present is a rich resource that still largely awaits exploration.

Notes

1. I used Alejandra Martinez's autoethnography on inculcating masculinity in young children (Martinez, 2015) as inspiration for the visual structure of this article.
2. Sokol was a physical educational association founded in 1869 and disbanded in 1949 in the aftermath of the Communist putsch; needless to say that the Sokol anti-fascist resistance was not acknowledged in the Communist historical narrative.
3. The family background of an applicant for university study would be vetted for any political non-conformity (on university admissions during normalization, see Jareš (2012)). Parents like mine had their own bitter experience even with entry to secondary school on political grounds, although I have no evidence to suggest that that would have been the case also for my generation.
4. *Gymnázium* is an academically oriented secondary school, or high school in American terminology, whose aim is to prepare the students for university entry.
5. Petr Šámal (2009) researched the streamlining and molding efforts of state policies on the example of Czech libraries in the 1950s and the function of librarians to create an ideal socialist reader.
6. None of the researchers involved in that project ever published anything from the interviews. An opportunity offered itself to provide the transcripts of my interviews and those of Hana Havelková to a colleague within another research project who analyzed them and argued persuasively on

their grounds against the established Czech narrative of how men and women were united in their resistance against the common enemy, the communist power (Zábrodská, 2014).

7. The use of sports to ideological ends in the Eastern bloc is common knowledge. However, concrete evidence of its more nefarious aspects, such as the state-controlled use of steroids in Czechoslovak sports for a decade from 1979 to 1989, came to light only years after the bloc's demise (Pacina & Nekola, 2006). On the structural implementation of Marxism-Leninism in tertiary education, see Urbášek (2008, pp. 76–105).

8. The literature on such sanctions is vast and it often rests on or includes personal testimonies (such as numerous articles in *Index on Censorship* in the 1970s and 1980s). Pavel Kohout, for example, describes at length the harassment endured for his political dissidence in his autobiography (Kohout, 1987), while his daughter, the writer Tereza Boučková (1992; excerpt in English 1994), offers a fictionalized autobiographical account of how the state avenged itself on the children of dissidents.

9. That the post-socialist world was in need of an educational reform that would cultivate critical thinking was a mantra of the 1990s (Holmes, 1997; Čerych et al., 1999).

10. This conclusion leads naturally to the question of the receptiveness of thus schooled citizens to the ideologies communicated by advertisers and other players in the nascent democracies after the demise of state socialism, but pursuing this argument goes beyond the scope of this article.

11. For an account of the systematic effort toward cultural "middlebrow" in the early years of the Soviet Union, see Dobrenko (1995).

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On the Edge of Two Zones: Slovak Socialist Childhoods

Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala

The Nature of the Slovak Milieu in Czechoslovakia

If we were to picture the typical life of a young boy growing up in socialist Slovakia, then we might cast our minds to where his weekend world was spent—the garden colony. The little boy and his parents would regularly visit their garden, where his parents would live out their passion for the land that was rooted in the Slovak culture. They may have wished to pass on this passion to their children, and hence attempted, sometimes at least, to interest them in gardening. But this was not a passion shared by their children, who had begun identifying with the urban industrial world of the socialist housing block. In fact, one particular little boy, Branislav, devoted much of the time he spent in the garden colony entertaining himself in the family *Trabant* (an East German car typically owned by socialist families), committing to heart the entire car handbook and the functions of all the different knobs and levers. In no way did working in the garden strike him as time spent in a useful and pleasant way.

Branislav's experience was not typical of all children living in Czechoslovakia, but more common of those who lived in the Slovak part of the country. This chapter explores Slovak childhoods rather than Czechoslovak ones because, despite the common state, it is difficult to say whether there is any such thing as a Czechoslovak childhood. The two

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halves of Czechoslovakia had quite different historical roots and economic and social characteristics, which impacted differently on the nature and trajectories of the childhoods. However, the research conducted has been presented in general terms, so that an analysis that portrays itself as 'Czechoslovak' may in fact explore the reality of a Czech childhood (e.g. Kopelentova Rehak, 2014). Studies that deal specifically with Czech childhoods both accept and confirm this distinction (e.g. Nosal, 2002). It is also the case that research into Czechoslovak socialist childhoods only explores the Czech reality. There has been no research on Slovak socialist childhoods, which have remained in a silent vacuum. Therefore, in this chapter, we attempt to break this silence and present the reader with vivid narratives recounted in our memories of socialist childhoods.

Despite forming a single socialist state—the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic—substantial structural differences existed between the Czech and Slovak halves. These distinctions arose out of the historical affiliations between the Czech lands and the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the one hand and between Slovakia and the Hungarian part on the other; in the nineteenth century, Austrian and Hungarian interests were often quite distinct. One important difference was the earlier industrialisation of the Czech region during the nineteenth century, while what is now Slovakia remained an agricultural region until communism and beyond. The traditions of rural life are more deeply rooted in Slovak culture and many still persist today.

This connection to rural life had a direct impact on the reproduction of religious elements in the Czech and Slovak halves of the country. As Kvasničková (2005) has pointed out, even under communism, 'forms of folk worship' were practised in rural small-town Slovakia. Children, in particular, participated in church ceremonies and religious rites of passage. In doing so they helped reproduce Christian culture and what Kvasničková refers to as a 'collective religious memory.' The confrontation between these memories and the new socialist rituals is described in one of the narratives here. While these experiences were commonplace amongst children in socialist Slovakia, they were rarer in the Czech half. Images of Czech socialist childhoods tend to be associated neither with religion nor with children's participation in religious rituals (on Czech childhoods, see Nosal, 2002). This is one reason for the different trajectories followed by the dissident movements in the Czech and Slovak halves of the republic during communism. In the Czech half, the dissident

movement was formed by *Charter 77* signatories; in Slovakia, there were few such signatories, and the dissident movement was concentrated more in religious circles (Turčan, 2001). To a degree, this has influenced the current situation in the post-socialist Czech and Slovak Republics, where, following the fall of communism, barely a third of the population in the Czech half declared itself to be religious compared with more than four-fifths of the inhabitants of Slovakia (Valo & Slivka, 2012).

The Christian-agrarian principles found in Slovak culture formed a geographical experiential sphere that cannot be found in the Czech environment. This geographical experiential sphere directly affected the nature of childhood and children's leisure activities. Thus far, the literature on Czechoslovak socialist reality has dealt primarily with one particular element of enjoyment or leisure time—the *chata* (see Bren, 2002).[1] The culture of Czech families escaping to their *chatas* for the weekend was extremely widespread and built on the tramping and water sports traditions. Bren (2002) mentions Czechoslovakia in the title of her article, but it is worth noting that this culture barely developed in Slovakia. The Czech *chata* culture is one of leisure time and enjoyment and does not involve the agricultural aspects typical of the Slovak tradition (e.g. growing fruit and gardening). Instead, as the description of the young Branislav given in the introduction shows, in Slovakia, 'garden colonies' emerged as places to spend weekend leisure time. These were fenced-off areas with small provisional shacks (generally unsuitable for living in or spending the night in, since they rarely had water or plumbing), but they did have plots of land of a sufficient size for gardening. They quickly multiplied with the construction of slab-block flats and the emergence of large housing estates. Despite the high concentration of inhabitants in the towns and suburbs, Slovaks expressed the agrarian collective conscience through their desire to maintain links with the land and with agricultural traditions. In some parts of Slovakia, where the new communist buildings came into direct contact with the rural environment, one could even find blocks of flats with front gardens—a kind of high-density housing where one could maintain a rural lifestyle.

The stories that will be narrated in this chapter are based on the memories of its authors, Branislav and Ondrej, as part of an attempt to reconstruct the basic elements of Slovak socialist childhoods as portrayed through the authors' experiences.

Methodological Approach: Actors and Frameworks

The authors of this study are also its actors. Both are Slovak and have lived their entire lives in a country that was first of all part of the common state shared by the Czechs and Slovaks and which then became the independent Slovak Republic in 1993. Their childhoods (or at least a significant part of their childhoods) were spent in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Branislav (born 1965) spent his entire childhood and boyhood, including university and military service, which presumably 'would make a man out of the boy,' under socialism. His was a Czechoslovak (mainly Slovak) childhood fashioned from the mid-1960s to October 1989, the year Branislav's 12 months of military service ended; it was further shaped when the 'iron curtain' came down a month later to close the socialist era. Although lived as the story of one individual, distinctive material, symbolic, and ideological features of the socialist milieu shaped Branislav's childhood.

Ondrej (born 1978) belongs to the generation of children born into the socialism of the late 1970s, who spent part of their lives under socialism and another part in the transitional era that followed the collapse of communism. This generation was known as *Husák's children*, so-named because they were born when Gustáv Husák was the first secretary of the Communist Party and president of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The label stuck under Husák's leadership in the latter half of the 1970s because the Communist Party began pursuing pro-natal social policies in support of young families. Such social policies introduced a system of cheap loans for young families and offered new housing to families with children. This period was accompanied by high birth rates. Compared to the normalisation of the 1970s, the social atmosphere was freer and heralded the onset of great political, economic, and social change.

We used an autoethnographic approach to describe and reconstruct the ritualised elements of socialist childhoods in Slovakia. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000, p. 739), autoethnography is an 'autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.' For several years, we have planned to systematise and analyse the personal stories of our socialist childhoods. We have often recounted our stories to one another, seeking to understand what and who we became and why our lives took the paths they did. These informal discussions and meetings always produced an awareness in us that our individual stories were clearly related to our

socialist childhoods and schooling. We did wonder, though, how we might reconcile the natural subjective bias in our perceptions of the past with a generalised society-wide perception. However, it is possible to use different narratives and lenses to work with the space 'between the past as a generalized record which is open to relatively dispassionate inspection and the past as a remembered part of, or background to, one's own life' (Walder, 2011, p. 2).

Greater room for manoeuvre in this balancing act is provided by the duoethnographic approach (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012), which is based on the idea that a deeper understanding of the subjective processes can be gained through the dialogic sharing of experience with another person. As two authors who grew up in very specific eras and contexts, we therefore decided to construct our own personal narratives as the outcomes of an intensive process of dialogic sharing. In order to write the narratives and analyse them for the purposes of this chapter, we decided to spend several days outside our usual academic setting and travelled away from our homes and jobs so we could devote our time to our own personal narratives and the shared retelling of them. Thus, we entered into the duoethnograpic process described by Sawyer and Norris (2013, p. 4):

> In duoethnography, researchers construct their narratives as they deconstruct them. In this process, they create a context for personal praxis and change as their inquiry into personal experience acts as a creation of new experience. As they deconstruct their narratives in collaboration within a dialogic process, they simultaneously reconstruct them with more complex and layered perspectives.

Our personal narratives emerged as a result of this process of dialogic deconstruction and reconstruction. Care had to be taken when writing up the duoethnographic research because it involves two instances of dualism. The first is found in the fact that the authors of the chapter are also the actors. The second is that just as there are two authors, there are also two actors. The problem then revolves around who 'we' and 'they' are. In traditional research 'we' are most often the authors and 'they' are the actors referred to by the authors who shape the resulting study. Moreover, duoethnography is the capturing of two individual narratives in one study by two authors; although the authors are always 'we,' the narrative is by 'I.' This presents a grammatical issue: in which person should the narrative be written when two people are reporting their own individual narratives?

The reader is also confronted with this problem, since we switch from 'we' mode (signifying the authors of the chapter) to 'he' and back to 'I' (signifying the author recording the narrative). To help the reader, the 'I' or 'he' narrative will be identified by the names of the actor/author to clarify which author is the actor in the narrative.

Ivica from the 'Second Zone'

Building a socialist Czechoslovakia meant that Slovakia had to alter its traditional agrarian and Catholic heritage. The industrialisation and atheisation of Slovakia and related lifestyle changes were one of the constructionist imperatives of communism. They are embedded in one of Branislav's life stories that follows below.

Atheism and an industrial lifestyle became the natural framework of my life. My parents brought me up as an atheist from birth (reinforced of course in school and by my surroundings). I was born in a new housing block, which I considered to be the best housing available. My grandparents on my father's side lived in the same town, and I visited them almost every day, spending a great deal of time there. However, I did not consider them to be fully part of my life. They represented a kind of 'parallel' world.

The geography of this parallel world was highly symbolic and structurally significant. I viewed the small town I lived in as being divided into two different geographic zones. Naturally, the first zone was the one I lived in. It was the centre of the small town, ringed by blocks of flats built in the 1960s (our flat was in one of these blocks) and with all of the prerequisite civic infrastructure. The area continued to grow, incorporating new slab-block flats, which served to emphasise the dynamism and progressivity of my environs, which I liked. The second 'parallel' zone in the town comprised traditional multi-generational houses usually enclosed within small yards where farm animals were still traditionally reared and basic crops were grown for personal use. It was an agrarian world, and one which I perceived to be the 'old' world, rendered complete by the prayer books and holy icons my grandmother kept. She would never have the opportunity to influence me religiously in any way because of the clear triad existing in the dusty 'old' parallel world: house—agrarian way of life—religion. I could never let them into my 'modern' world, since my identity was geographically and, most certainly, mentally divided.

However, my grandparents are not the focus here. A generational prism will probably suffice as a means of explaining these divided worlds of ours. The existence of these 'parallel' worlds, as pictured through my

eyes, extended to my relationships with my primary school peers and schoolmates. The 'old' world was not just one in which old people lived. It also contained ordinary families with children, the schoolmates I saw and went to school with daily—from both primary and secondary school. In primary school, my 'agrarian' schoolmates were children from my hometown. I saw them as a distinct group of children and, I admit, as a child of the 'first zone,' my attitude towards them was clear: I looked down on them.

When I began attending the secondary grammar school in my town, my relationship sphere extended to include schoolmates from neighbouring villages, which displayed all the attributes of the 'parallel zone' of my town. These were villages with agrarian backdrops and traditional domestic buildings. Although my relationships with my schoolmates at secondary school were built on more complex, multi-layered events, experiences, and interests, there was an ever-present degree of separation between us 'first zone' children and those 'second zone' students.

The way the parallel existence of the 'two worlds' played out can be illustrated through the figure of my classmate (Ivica) from primary school and my relationship to her. Although Ivica barely featured in my relationships, and at school I exchanged few words with her (despite us being in the same class for eight years), she surfaces in the present-day memories of my school days with increasing frequency. It seems as if I understand my own childhood, and also Ivica's childhood, better from my perspective as a grown adult and that she is one of the figures who can help me gain a greater understanding of our childhoods. She is one of the figures to whom I now feel I owe something—an apology—although she herself would probably not understand why I want to apologise. Nonetheless, her existence is crucial to understanding one aspect of my childhood.

Who was Ivica? She was an ordinary child from the 'second zone' in our town—the zone my grandparents lived in and which I considered to be the 'old world.' Nonetheless, it was the original world of us Slovaks, a world that represented the strongly rooted agrarian and Catholic traditions. We, Ivica and I, were both confronted by the parallel existence of these two zones. For me, this confrontation was embodied in the very existence of this child from the 'second zone.' It was with a feeling of superiority that I dealt with the fact that our two worlds were different and that her world would never be capable of offering anything that my world did not already have. However, whenever Ivica, whose feelings I had little interest in, found herself outside her immediate family environment, she was presented with far tougher confrontations than I was.[2]

The stable conservatism of her traditional family upbringing, especially with regard to religious values, meant that Ivica was enrolled in the optional religious education lessons offered by the primary school. Something of a rarity in socialist primary schools, these lessons were offered by the communist regime as a means of demonstrating a certain level of tolerance towards religious families. On the one hand, the system did allow religious education but, on the other, the Party did all it could to ensure that as few children as possible took up this option, and the pervasive atheistic education always made it clear that religion was an obscurantism that had no place in the new world. Even parents who privately brought their children up in the faith did not enrol their children in religious lessons out of fear of publicly declaring their faith. The only parents to enrol their children in religious lessons were those for whom their faith was a fundamental value they could not live without. Ivica came from this kind of family, and, at the beginning of the year when pupils could enrol in the religious lessons, she was the only one in our class to raise her hand, following her parents' instructions. Although hers was the only raised hand and most likely not out of choice, it separated her from the rest of us, especially those of us from the 'first zone.'

Nonetheless, all children from both zones belonged to one children's organisation. We were members of the Pioneers, the children's precursor to the Communist Party (in all the years I attended school, I can only remember two sisters who were not members of the Pioneers—their parents were Jehovah's Witnesses). Ivica also became a Pioneer, presumably so she did not find herself completely estranged from her schoolmates' world. However, both symbolically and emblematically, she was left standing somewhere midway to 'truly belonging' in the Pioneers. It was not simply that the ideology of the Pioneers contradicted the basic values of her religious upbringing (most children were not explicitly aware of the ideological aspect of being a Pioneer, it was not enforced aggressively but inconspicuously and became ingrained subconsciously); it was that they had just introduced an obligatory uniform for the children—our cohort of Pioneers—to be worn on special occasions (a light blue shirt, dark blue trousers or skirt, and belt with a metal Pioneer's badge) and which parents had to purchase for their children. Until we got our uniforms, Ivica had been a Pioneer just like the rest of us; however, the uniform extended the distance between us again. Her parents simply refused to buy her the uniform. This was probably not for financial reasons but rather because it encroached upon the limits to which they were willing to go in adapting to the 'new' social requirements.

My memories are shaped by the confrontation between these two zones. In my narrative, this is strengthened by my perceptions of myself when I had occasion to temporarily leave my small-town industrial zone. During the summer holidays, I found myself in what was very clearly the environment of the 'second zone' in the village located in the Javorník hills where my other grandparents lived along with the many branches of my mother's family. This section of my family bore all the same hallmarks as my primary school peer Ivica—but this time it affected my family—the family with whom I had to form relationships. In many ways, as a child I had to confront the fact that my view of them was much the same as my view of Ivica. Their lifestyle struck me as strange and inferior; I didn't understand their insistence on religious values, nor on the many duties concerning the family business that the children, my cousins, were drawn into.

I didn't really understand the games they played outdoors in the village. They had many layers that differed from the ones played in my home town. My estrangement was evidently visible, so my adult relatives attempted to deal with this by seeking out alternative ways for me to occupy myself over the holidays. The readily available alternative means of suppressing my feelings of helplessness in this environment was to ensure I had a stock of books, but in the eyes of my 'agrarian peers,' this meant I was once more caught in the dichotomy of the 'physically labouring farmer' versus 'urban intellectual.' And since there was almost nothing to be found in the book collections of my agrarian, religious peers from the 'second zone' other than the Holy Script, I, a born atheist, returned home having read and reread the Bible in my attempt to maintain my lifestyle as a child of the 'first zone.' Reading it never really changed my deep-rooted atheism, but, somewhat paradoxically, these holidays expanded my cultural outlook and became a kind of bridge between the two different worlds of my family.

The Ontogenesis of a Pioneer

We have suggested that the lens through which we perceived the world during our childhoods has a strong spatial dimension, and it is also true that the personal histories of our psychological development have a material substrate (the culture we grew up in). The geography of the environment is crucial to the shaping of our developmental trajectories in terms of our cultural psychological development. Hence, in order to understand this development, one requires a sensitivity for its physical, cultural, and demographic characteristics, since these are key developmental phenomena and

vary in different parts of the world (Leung, Kim, Yamaguchi, & Kashima, 1997). One also requires a sensitivity for the material and ideological characteristics of the developmental events, which are the sociocultural practices and ethno-psychological constructs that accompany socialisation and development (Ogbu, 1981).

A key task facing a child from the communist world on his or her developmental path was to become integrated within the children's organisations of which the vast majority of us were members and which were sophistically controlled by the Communist Party. These organisations were the *Socialist Union of Youth* and the associated *Pioneers*. They did not operate outside school but directly within it and were part of school life and school socialisation; however, they also had a presence outside the schools and engaged in leisure activities. Becoming a member of one of these organisations and participating in the ritual practices that accompanied the transition from one part of the organisation to another represented an important developmental milestone. This was a developmental stage with parallels to those found in classical Western models of development and in developmental psychology textbooks.

What kind of developmental path did all children attending socialist schools follow? On entering primary school, we became members of the *Pioneer Organisation of the Socialist Union of Youth*. For the first three years, we had the status of novices or aspiring Pioneers. We did not immediately become Pioneers but were *Sparks*. Becoming a *Spark* involved a mass ritual during which we took the *Spark* oath and received the *Spark* badge, which from the mid-1970s on, was pinned to the *Spark* uniform worn on special occasions. We remained aspiring Pioneers for three years. The third year of school brought with it another developmental milestone: we became Pioneers. Again, our acceptance into the Pioneers was accompanied by a mass ritual at which we had to take our Pioneer oaths, performed at the most symbolic location in the town or city (a memorial to Communist heroes or to Soviet soldiers). We had to wear our new Pioneer uniforms and accept the new emblems—the Pioneer's badge and scarf—which we had admired as symbols of our new and greater status. We joined the Pioneers in the 1970s and remained members throughout primary school. It therefore seemed as if, in terms of the organisation at least, our developmental progress had come to a halt (Fig. 1).

This period of time was a long one, embracing children of a relatively wide age-range, and it was as if our ideological development had lost its dynamism. In procedural terms, however, this was not quite the case. As

Fig. 1   The Pioneer's Oath at a memorial to communist heroes before the scarf tying
Source: Ondrej's family archive
Note: We use Ondrej's photo due to lack of a similar photo from Branislav

children who attended school in the 1970s, the rites of passage we undertook in our lives as Pioneers included a new, rather opulent ritual known as the *Oath of Loyalty to the Ideas of Marxism-Leninism*. We performed this ritual in Year Seven of primary school, so we must have been around 13 years old, and even the very name of the ritual pointed to a faith in our cognitive competence since we could now openly subscribe to or vow to uphold the ideology binding us to our developmental path. What is interesting about this 'oath' is not just its overt content but also its format. Not only was the oath taken as part of a mass ceremonial ritual with the children clad in uniform, accompanied by fanfare and traditional roll calls, but the children's parents and families were also invited to

attend and their work enterprises and institutions were mobilised as well. Their participation mostly consisted of buying the presents we children habitually received on the occasion. To this day, Branislav can still remember the first white patent 'ladies' handbag given to his sister in celebration of her vow of loyalty to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism by his father's employer *Ore Mines*, a national state enterprise. The oath-taking was followed by a formal celebratory meal for all the participants, to which families brought, as a bonus, homemade or specially ordered cakes, gateaux, and other specialities prepared only for the most exceptional of occasions.

Taking the vow of loyalty to the ideas of Marxism-Leninism was a kind of ceremonial admission onto a higher level of cognitive ability. This developmental chain reached its peak once we joined secondary school, exchanging the Pioneer's uniform for another youth uniform, complete with new badge and tie. Thus, we collectively became members of the *Socialist Union of Youth*, where we would remain for the rest of our young lives, going on to take union oaths at university or in the workplace. Our secondary school lives as members of the *Socialist Union of Youth* did not simply mean adapting to the ideology the organisation espoused. Under its banner and outside school, other non-school leisure institutions, known as *Youth Clubs*, were established. As chance would have it, ours was located in the town park, part of which we considered to be in our geographic zone and where we would meet and spend time as we wished. The *Youth Club* (organised by the *Town Cultural Centre*) naturally 'belonged' to us (mainly grammar school children from the 'first zone'), so we could become involved in influencing the activities as we wanted and shape ourselves at the same time. We created our own local subculture, which was mostly related to music and experimenting with cigarettes and alcohol but also to putting on alternative theatre performances. Being a member of the *Youth Club* was thus an expression of intergenerational power relations, since a particular group was able to gain dominance over the other peer groups who only had limited access to this environment. Belonging to a particular subculture, especially in a small town where everyone knew everyone else, brought a certain amount of social prestige. Despite being under the banner of the *Socialist Union of Youth*, ordinary aspects of the youth hierarchy could take place independently of the ideology so that children from the same generation were socialised in different ways.

Moments of Physical Ontogenesis

There are other ontogenetic links with the Pioneer organisations in schools. For Ondrej, the areas surrounding the home in which he lived and the holiday trips to his grandparents in the countryside began to lose significance from the age of eight onwards. This is Ondrej's reconstruction of events:

Once I was visiting a friend and we were dribbling a football in the courtyard, when my uncle, who was watching, encouraged me to attend football training. From that moment on, I started taking football training and football matches seriously, and consequently, I experienced a kind of isolation from the activities that children ordinarily undertook—instead I spent the holidays at home because of summer training, and there was no Pioneer camp or other leisure activities for me. Since then, my childhood was a collectively organised childhood centred around sport. It was organised in a socialist manner on a variety of different levels.

The sports club was affiliated with a state enterprise, *Slovak Rayon Senica* (a chemical plant producing synthetic fibres). The trainers were employees of the factory, and there was a certain degree of collaboration between the state enterprise and the state school. At the request of the enterprise, we were excused from classes for matches and training sessions. This also affected my status in school organisations. Since I was actively involved in sport, I was selected to be the sports monitor for the class section of the Pioneers. The formal class activities in socialist schools included many different hierarchical positions associated with the Pioneers that pupils were expected to take up. Each class had its own section in the school's branch of the Pioneers, and the children held various different positions. The sports monitor was one such role, existing alongside the leader of the class section, the vice-leader, the cultural monitor, the treasurer, the chronicler, and the notice-board monitor. The sports monitor's duties were to promote sports events, gather nominations for them, and organise the pupils for sport. In fact, the sports monitor was the internal class driver of the collectivisation of children's sport. He or she played a crucial role during the *spartakiad*, a special type of socialist sports ritual.

The *spartakiad* was a kind of mass exertion of physical control over the body through synchronised collective exercise (see Roubal, 2016). This demonstration of control was performed in stadiums, most frequently football stadiums. All schools participated, and during physical education

lessons, each class practised an age-specific compulsory formation that was chosen centrally. In addition to being the contact point between the physical education teacher and the pupils, the sports monitor organised additional after-school exercises before the class was to perform at the stadium. The monitor was also the contact point during formation training and had to take his or her classmates through the exercises according to the teacher's instructions.

A key mechanism behind the socialist approach to child socialisation was to engage children in the system of public positions. At the whole-school and higher levels, the functions children held were clearly linked to the ideological basis of the children's organisations, but at the class level, the 'functionary' positions concerned the daily organisation of pupil life, and those who held these positions ensured that school duties were performed and that group activities were coordinated. The sports monitors were the catalysts behind the children's collectivist exercise, and the children appreciated this (although not the change in circumstance associated with the exercise) and were rewarded for their performances (some schools gave out certificates, for instance). Many family get-togethers revolved around the *spartakiad* performances and the photographing of these special events (Fig. 2).

Although children's physical education was ideological in nature, the children were not aware of this connection. When practising the formations with the blocks, for instance, we had fun linking them together and creating snakes or dragons. Symbolically, however, the act of performing these formations at the stadium was a public presentation of the building of communist ideals. The children symbolised the working class who were building the new communist world. At the *spartakiad*, the blocks were used as the basis of the many different exercise formations that were created for children and young people of various ages. As Macura (1992, p. 71) put it, the use of these blocks in the *spartakiad* symbolised the 'building of communism.' However, they were symbols that were aimed at the adult world, and the children who participated in the exercises did not engage in this aspect and were not alerted to it. It was more a kind of subconscious socialisation via physical routines (Fig. 3).

The *spartakiad* had further dimensions in Branislav's memories: I only participated in the *spartakiad* at district level but watched the largest Prague performance on television, and the collective synchronisation really did have an aesthetic impact on me. It was a similar aesthetic experience

Fig. 2 Ondrej and his sister after performing in the *Spartakiad* at the stadium
Source: Ondrej's Family Archive

to the one I had when looking through a children's 'kaleidoscope,' which used a system of mirrors and slides to create regular coloured mosaics resembling the synchronicity of crystals. I am convinced the *spartakiad* triggered my sincere interest in serious music (something the school music lessons never succeeded in doing) because one of the most imposing *spartakiad* female formations was performed along to Bedřich Smetana's *Vltava symphony* from *Má vlast*. The synchronised bodies in conjunction with the music formed the conduit along which serious music made its way under my skin.

Fig. 3 Younger pupils competing at the *Spartakiad* at Sereď football stadium in 1980
Source: School chronicle, Ján Amos Komenský Primary School, Sereď

Stolen Rituals

Just as the mass physical exercises were designed to embody socialist ideals, socialist rituals were designed to build new identities in children or to replace the old forms of children's identification. Let us return to the ontogenesis of the Pioneers and particularly to the *Oath of Loyalty to the Ideas of Marxism-Leninism*.

The loyalty oath was not taken nationally across the whole of Slovakia. It was taken by children living in areas of Slovakia where the parallel existence of the two zones was evident and where the second zone (the religious and agrarian one) only gave way to the first zone, that is, the new one, with great difficulty. Branislav lived in just such a zone. The *Oath of Loyalty* was taken in areas where religious traditions and values still prevailed and where children were brought up in the religious faith. Although, superficially, the state adopted a liberal approach in these areas, and children like Ivica were allowed to enrol in religious education lessons at school, it also propagated socialist practices designed to limit or, even better, entirely prevent children from being raised in the Christian faith.

It could not achieve this directly as this would involve violence and the contravention of basic human rights. Hence, we were involved in more sophisticated socialisation practices.

These took the symbolic rituals of the old world—the world of religion—and then offered us almost identical rituals, albeit infused with a quite different ideology. The ritual of the *Oath of Loyalty to the Ideas of Marxism-Leninism* was based on the same formalised principles as the traditional ritual of *Confirmation* that children of a certain age undergo as part of their religious trajectory. The ceremony had the same symbols and the same kinds of ritual elements (gifts, festive meals, family participation, the bringing of cakes), and these were designed to satisfy the ancient need for a child's life to have important developmental milestones—the ideological flavouring of the ritual was almost a secondary thought. We experienced these events as children, and children perhaps view such things more in terms of form than content, and so we may have had identical perceptions of these two very different milestones. The socialist developmental milestone with its new ideological content was accompanied by an attempt to mask the parallel worlds, the two zones, and sweep away the old zone in favour of the new (the very same rite of passage is cast first as *Confirmation* and later as the *Oath of Loyalty*) (Fig. 4).

However, it was not just the *Oath of Loyalty* that imitated the original religious ritual, informing our development and its milestones. Our developmental curve did the same, playing out in the background and being moulded within the context of our living environment where the socialist organisations of our childhood played a significant role. The rituals associated with the key developmental stages programmed into the youth organisations took on the form and timing of the original religious ones experienced by previous generations. The Pioneer's oath blended in with the receiving of the sacrament, the *Oath* with *Confirmation*. It also adopted the timing and, as we have shown, the substance of the ritual. Religious rituals were located on a temporal axis, embracing religious and ethno-psychological child development. In some way, the transitional stages in membership status within the socialist youth organisations modelled the developmental stages of a socialist childhood.

The attempt to replace religious rites of passage with new ideological ones involved co-opting the religious model of childhood development and religious socialisation. The same occurred with the initiation point of childhood development. *Christenings* were replaced by a similar formal ritual called *Welcoming the Child into the World*, which, under the patronage of

Fig. 4   One family's parallel rituals
Source: Branislav's Family Archive
Note: In the photo on the left, Branislav with his sister (in the middle) performing the flag-raising ritual as part of the Oath of Loyalty to the Ideals of Marxism-Leninism; the photo on the right shows Marta and Eva, Branislav's cousins, at their Confirmation

the *Assembly for Civic Matters*, took place in the national district and town committees rather than a church. District leaders took on the role of priest (committee heads) in a kind of artistic procession designed to add ceremonial and emotional aplomb. The artistic procession was formed of members of the *Assembly for Civic Matters*, generally consisting of local primary school teachers. The son of one of whom was Branislav, who often witnessed children's development rituals that had been established as the basic development childhood model. This aspect is reflected in the episode described below (Fig. 5).

Being the son of a teacher who was also a member of the *Assembly for Civic Matters* meant that I had to participate in these rituals, which were designed to resound in a particular way in me. The teachers were understandably perceived as the vanguard of the 'first zone' and the first world. Since they had influence over the children, they were to open the gates to the new world and become part of the deliberate process of socialisation by and for this world. Naturally, they were to achieve this through personal

Fig. 5 Welcoming the child into the world (early 1980s)
Source: Branislav's Family Archive
Note: *Welcoming the Child into the World* ritual held in the National Committee function room in Branislav's hometown. Teachers—members of the *Assembly for Civic Matters* (Branislav's mother is second from the left)—can be seen singing at the back. A nurse stands behind the crib symbolising the exemplary children's healthcare of the socialist state

example in their day-to-day teaching, through their own lifestyles, and in the parallel 'civic' ceremonies they took part in as exemplary members of the *Assembly for Civic Matters*. They were also to be an example of how one should live without religion and in the truth of Marxism-Leninism.

It would have been highly unacceptable, if not directly dangerous, if religious practices had found their way into their lives and the lives of their families and children.

Hence, my first initiation development ritual took place at the town national committee where I was 'civically welcomed into the world' as was befitting of a newly born child of the first zone and of a primary school teacher mother. Needless to say, it did not stop at this ritual. A child is not only the child of their immediate family but belongs to the wider family as well—to its grandparents, uncles, aunts, and so on. As I have mentioned, my extended family lived in the distinct and mixed cultures of the two zones. We straddled both, meaning the wider culture of my family could be viewed as heterogeneous. In the microworld of this extended family, there was an intermingling of different ideas on the developmental milestones of the children in the family, particularly on whether or not the rituals should continue to take the form of the symbolic traditional religious model or adopt the new model of the 'new zone.' As a child born in the 1960s, I found myself at a crossroads as the various microworlds inhabited by members of my extended family were dominated by different ideas about the kind of initiation ritual my life should begin with.

As the child of a teacher, my journey began with the 'civic ritual' of *Welcoming the Child into the World* described above, which was a modern alternative to a *christening*. However, my extended family, tied more to the traditional world of religion, did not consider this initiation ceremony to be sufficient. And so, without my parents' knowledge, at the age of three I found myself in my father's sister's hands as she decided that a traditional initiation ceremony was essential to my developmental path and carried me off to the local Catholic church where I was christened. Thus, my development passage as a boy from the first zone was secured by my undergoing a double initiation bringing together the two parallel worlds that would later feature in my world. As my life story shows, the first zone dominated my socialisation.

Concluding Thoughts

It is perhaps only with difficulty that one could conclude from the above narrative that children under socialism 'actively participated as supporters and producers of the totalitarian system' or that they 'were productive powerful actors that shaped their own totalitarian childhoods' (Tesar, 2014, pp. 80, 85). Instead our subjective reconstructions suggest that these are

generalisations and, rather than being subjectively rooted, are a favoured narrative shorthand for interpreting socialist realities. As Nosal (2002) has demonstrated, the greater mosaic quality of Czech socialist childhoods is emphasised by, for instance, the 'creative' aspect of children's lives under socialism. The great variation in childhood experiences is described by Kopelentova Rehak (2014) in the narratives of Czech dissident children whose childhoods were different from those described by Nosál or ourselves. Neither the research by Nosal nor that by Kopelentova Rehak, or indeed our own, presents a generalised image of a socialist childhood *in abstracto.*

What do our narratives show? They show that in socialist Czechoslovakia, socialisation was not the straightforward one-directional indoctrination and totalitarian domination of children it explicitly proclaimed to be and projected itself as. If we take into account the fact that socialism was never a finished project but remained permanently 'under construction,' then the act of building it was the significant rhetorical device underpinning the regime. The act of building indicated an unfinished state—one of permanent social construction and reconstruction (like the symbolic use of blocks in the *spartakiad* exercises, for instance). In our narratives, we encounter this in the construction and deconstruction of the living zones. As we have shown, these zones had various geographic distributions (not only within Czechoslovakia but also in Slovakia) and took on various forms: material and physical, symbolic and mental, and above all, they were interactive. The act of building was mainly played out in the encounters—the tensions and interactions—between the two zones. In our narratives, these two zones operated in parallel to one another and formed two closed worlds; however, according to Lutherová (2010), it is not unusual to find situations in which the socialist and religious zones collide with one another within the microworld of the family, and this may lead to an 'inner schizophrenia' (p. 679). In such cases, the combined impact of the two zones hit families hard, complicating childhoods and the rearing of children in a socialist regime. It was against this backdrop that the socialisation of children under socialism was undertaken.

Socialist childhoods were the product of the point at which the two zones met and interacted. It was at this point that the opportunities arose for an individual to make decisions, define oneself, and to form connections or to break away. This, however, did not constitute a unified totalitarian model of childhood encapsulating children's existence that inevitably involved collaborating with the regime. The fact that children participated

in the socialist rituals did not necessarily mean they were consciously and actively upholding socialist ideas. Although materially and symbolically the child's socialist development would indicate a direct ideological influence, this need not have occupied a substantial place in the child's perspective but rather would have left a space in which the child's culture and identity developed autonomously.

In conclusion, we should add that the process of autoethnographic writing had emotional significance for us. As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) have noted, this kind of writing has therapeutic effects. Naturally, these are felt most of all by the authors, since the process of writing enables them to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and the meaning of their existence and approach to life. When the writing is on socialist childhoods, the autoethnographic writing has a therapeutic effect on participants and readers alike. Immediately after the fall of communism, coming to terms with the socialist past was seen as a social taboo and was excluded from social life (Griffiths & Millei, 2013; Silova, 2010). Society acted as if all identification with socialism had been uprooted and any intentional consideration of the socialist past was viewed as expressing an undesirable affinity with communism. This led to personal anxiety, and people rejected and distanced themselves from the past. Now, a quarter of a century after the fall of communism, we can begin to look back. Therefore, the third consequence of autoethnographic writing suggested by Ellis et al. (2010, para. 4.2) is also important: 'writing personal stories makes "witnessing" possible.' It is encouraging for us to complete our stories, extend them, and then deal with them collectively.

Notes

1. Bren retains the Czech (or Slovak) term *chata* in her English language chapter. It is a term that denotes small recreational structures that formed '*chata* colonies—clusters of new, often aesthetically unattractive recreation cottages with rows of Trabant and Škoda cars parked out in front' (p. 125). These colonies were popular because 'to get away to the *chata* was to act on the desire to escape into the depoliticized private sphere' (p. 127).
2. In this study Ivica is a figure from the past who surfaces in Branislav's memories. Once she and Branislav had completed secondary school and moved

away from the town, their lives took completely different directions, and since then they have heard almost nothing of one another. In much the same way, Ivica's living zone, the 'old world' is also part memory and part history. The zone was torn down towards the end of the socialist era, and in its place a typical socialist housing estate was erected. Ivica's first name has been changed for the purposes of this chapter, and since she changed her name when she married, we would have great difficulty identifying her in any case. This is one of those instances where researchers adopting the method in which distant events are reconstructed on the basis of recollection inevitably encounter certain ethical boundaries.

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Growing Up as Vicar's Daughter in Communist Czechoslovakia: Politics, Religion, and Childhood Agency Examined

Irena Kašparová

During the communist regime, there was a great difference in how people treated and experienced private space of their families and public space of their other existence. Children and childhood were perceived in both spaces as symbols of hope for a better future. While in private space, however, children were often seen by their parents as one day being able to overcome the regime, thus symbolising a tool of empowerment and resistance. The public space presented them in an opposite way: as strong and cheerful supporters and promoters of the current political situation. Children were often torn between family and ideology interests, navigating their lives within both fields and actively influencing their mutual interaction and meaning.

In this chapter, I wish to examine my childhood memories, describing symbiotic but mutually exclusive fields of religion and socialism. I grew up as a protestant minister's daughter in a small border town in North Bohemia, Czechoslovakia.[1] While Protestantism and dissent culture formed my existence and interaction within the proximate family, religion was overlooked, denied, forbidden, or even persecuted at school.

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Under communist Czechoslovakia, rural hilly boarder regions were traditionally considered a periphery, where opponents of the regime were secluded—be it voluntarily or under pressure. My hometown Klickov, however, was somehow different. The more meaningless the town was within the geographical map of the country, the more active role did its communist leadership assume in erasing the apostles of the 'opium of the masses' from its ranks, manoeuvring them to the underground/dissent culture located at the very outskirts of this periphery. This included the school principal not allowing his teachers to attend Sunday services in town; as a result, teachers had to travel secretly to other cities in order to take part. Town leadership would threaten parents of children who participated in religious activities by assigning 'unfavourable cadres' opinion for their children once applying for further education. Cadres were essential in a local job market: despite her abilities, education, and experience, my mother—the priest's wife—could not hold a principal post in local musical school and had to satisfy herself with a regular teacher post, being happy to have such a job at all.

Events described below took place during the 1980s, the last decade of the socialist state.[2] I lived in Klickov until I was 17 years old, when I left for Scotland to study. My socialist childhood experience became the source of a culture shock there. However, over the years and with added anthropological training, the culture of my childhood gradually became rich ethnographical material. It remains helpful to me as I envision the plasticity of everyday human experience.

During the 1980s, Klickov had about 5000 inhabitants. Looking back, it provided an ideal site for ethnographic work: large enough to encompass most social institutions and infrastructure available in society and small enough for an individual to be able to penetrate most of them. Due to our unique status as the only vicar's family, we were public figures, known to most people around town. As the vicar's family, we represented values and ideologies that were unfavourably received by communist leadership; as such, associating with us was never a risk-free relationship. In our mutual interaction, people needed to take an active stance towards us, displaying their fears, protests, consent, or despise. These life episodes became part of my formal (school, health system, church, organised activities for children) as well as informal learning and local knowledge. My memories were captured in my diaries and draft letters to my Russian penfriend. I have kept these written materials over the years, and use them here as the backbone of this autoethnography.[3]

While reading through my memoirs, I saw various episodes of my childhood as scenes of a never-ending life performance unfolding slowly. As de Saint-Exupery expresses: 'No single event can awaken within us a stranger whose existence we had never suspected. To live is to be slowly born' (1969, p. 74). One scene led to another, the latter embracing the spiritual experience as well as material requisites of the former, the scenes through which I was slowly born. Thus, I explore my childhood as it unfolds through my memories with the *theatre framework* of Marc Abélès (1997).

Abélès draws attention to various devices traditionally associated with theatre, such as costumes, requisites, stage, precision in direction, well-played roles, charisma of actors, and he applies them to politics. A theatre play is an outcome of director-actors-spectators interaction. Likewise, in public events, political establishment as well as individuals interchange upon the director's post. In symbiosis, they make a play powerful enough to move people to believe they share in its reality. My childhood memories are full of these episodes, ranging from large events like staged celebrations of national days to very intimate and daily events, such as the formalised greeting of our teachers at school. Theatre and political action were inseparably intertwined during this period. As such, they penetrated all public actions, however meaningless and routinised they may have seemed at the time.

In addition, I propose to use the lens of *serious play*, as introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1988). *Serious play* is tangential to the theatre framework in the sense that a self-observed play, often starting as an experiment, adventure, or game, absorbs its actors to the extreme so that they stop being actors only and take on the role of directors, producers, and critics of the play. Out of this, a serious play is born—a play that replaces reality. In my memories, politicians, teachers, and school principals assumed this role. A self-contained system nevertheless provides a space for opposition by those who are not part of it. Several forms of resistance become available, depending upon innumerable variables. Occasionally, this may transform resistance into another version of a serious play. This paper is a story of resistance by a 13-year-old girl growing up in a religious family. While the theatre framework of Abélès contributes more towards understanding the processes and actions resulting from this symbiosis, the latter theory searches for meaning and brings forward the philosophical texture of the argument.

Last, I draw attention to current anthropological research on concepts of socialist childhood. Using developmental discourse and placing communist order at the peak of its evolutionary chain, the regime not

only socialised children into proper future citizens, but it turned occasionally to an overpowering approach to childhood, typical of the prenineteenth-century period (deMause, 1995). Thus, children were both moulded and shaped through education and ideology, and when not successful, they were physically overpowered and restrained from active participation. This gives away the fact that the regime acknowledged a great deal of children's agency and regarded them as strong political allies or enemies. My text offers several examples of such events.

Tools and Methods

The main sources of data that build up this text consist of my own teenage diaries and draft letters to my Russian penfriend as well as my current memories and interpretations. These are set against interviews with my parents and siblings in order to widen the analytical perspective. From this vast material, I focused on aspects that relate directly to schooling or learning experiences, setting them against the intimacy of our family life at the time.

I have selected a genre of autoethnographic short stories, where school/life episodes are discussed and mirrored in a family context. Text in italics is an English translation of a collage I have composed out of the original diary entries and letters as recorded by myself 27 years ago. The narrative is written in the first person, from the perspective of a 13-year-old girl attending the seventh grade of *Základní škola*.[4] I believe that its authentic boldness and coarseness has a unique power to approximate a child's experience of society at that time. The absence of analysis associated with these memories makes the readers pause, question, and think without any ready answers at hand. This tactic intends to simulate the setting back in the 1980s, when no single answers and explanations were available.

The plain text that follows makes a leap more than quarter of a century forward and provides a commentary and time-distance analysis of the diary entries. It reflects historical and geographical circumstances of the location, and it is framed in the wider context of current sociological and anthropological literature. I attempt to do this exploration in a manner similar to the method of Richard Price (1983), who introduced the powerful dialogue of emic and etic[5] accounts of a narrative to the public. Although both of my accounts are emic narratives, they are written in a diachronic perspective and are presented to the reader on a different but near-enough space. By such physical proximity, I hope the reader gains a sense of these accounts'

mutual dependence and interconnection, while being aware that they are experiences of two different worlds, times, and lives, interlocked in a single body.

All the events and persons presented in the paper are real, although their names have been altered in order to provide as much anonymity as possible in the autoethnography.

On Decisions and consequences (Diary Entries and Letters)

My name is Mira and I am 13 years old. When I grow up, I do not want to be a minister like my dad because ministers cannot travel anywhere. On weekends, they have to serve in church, and during holidays, they are not allowed to go abroad because the government won't give them visas. On the other hand, there are so many interesting people in the ministry. They talk about the meaning of life, discuss death, and ponder the soul. Today I discussed Jesus's resurrection with Pavel.[6] The debate made me shiver inside my chest, and I could picture people's souls in my mind. This feeling scared me and filled me with unspeakable joy at the same time. I love to listen to my parent's friends when they come to visit and debate all of this throughout the night. Our bedroom is next to the kitchen where they sit, so I hear most of it. Ministry is definitely more exciting than being a musician like my mum. I hate practising my flute every day. It is horrible to envision myself to have to do this for a living. But if I do not get all As on my next two reports, I will have to go to conservatoire because the communists will not let me study anything else but music.

I think you must really like your job in order to spend so much of your life doing it. Otherwise, what is the point in life? Both my parents love their jobs, saying it is their mission. I want to take after them in this … My dad wanted to become an acrobat and join a circus when he was young because he loved to travel, but his friends changed his mind and he became a protestant minister instead. Occasionally, he reminds us (and himself) that he is not so far off his original ambition. He says he constantly juggles with fire when preaching on Sunday, since our state is one big circus and you never know who is in the audience.

My grandma says I am a lucky child because I did not have to live throughout the war like she did or throughout the Stalinist 1950s like my mum. My grandparents are Protestants whose forefathers fled the country after the 1620s, when the Habsburg Catholic dynasty began its reign in Czech lands. Both my maternal grandparents were born in Poland, but they illegally escaped back to Czechoslovakia after the end of the Second World War.

Now they work in a textile factory, my grandad as a mechanic and my grandma as a tailor. My grandma also does a lot of tailoring privately because she lives in a town which is famous for its spa. Many tourists come, and the ladies who want to look beautiful spend a lot of money on clothes. It is against the law to own a private business, but grandma does not declare it anywhere. She says she is not afraid because she also makes clothes for two wives of communist party leaders in her town, and they also would have a problem if she got in trouble.

She is a good tailor, but she also has brains for business. In Poland she had a house, but she was unable to sell it legally because she is not a Polish citizen anymore. So she traded it for nylon scarfs and other fashionable textile items. Every summer, when she returned to Poland for her holiday with my mum and my aunt, they smuggled some of these textiles back to Czechoslovakia in their suitcases, which were specially altered for this purpose. Patiently, over the years, she managed to smuggle it all to Czechoslovakia, selling it illegally to the ladies and tourists in her spa hometown. The money she earned from it was enough to buy a house!

I would be absolutely terrified to do this. I envision my small mum, sitting upon the suitcase full of smuggled goods, trying to keep a poker face as the soldiers at the borders come to check the luggage, and I am absolutely sweaty all over. I get butterflies in my stomach and feel ill just from the idea. However, I think granny was very brave to stand up like this for herself and her family. My dad does not approve of smuggling; he says bad laws should be changed but sometimes not even a lifetime is enough to do that.

There are many rules in our school. For example, during the big break, we must eat our sandwiches while strolling in a double file line along the school corridors. It looks like ice-skating on an ice-rink, only without skates. Everybody moves forward in the same speed without a possibility to overtake each other. Once in a while, a supervising teacher says we must turn around and change direction. We must stay only with our classmates, unable to visit others. The big break strolling regulation is causing me a lot of trouble because my best friend, Lucie Malířová, attends a parallel class situated one floor up from our class. Every week we take turns and dare to come and see each other. When we meet up to talk, we are forced to hide at the girls' toilet. Then we must gather our courage to make the risky journey back to our classes.

Some while ago, I saw a film starring Robert Redford, who is our idol, Lucie's and mine, and he is the most handsome man on earth. The film, called Brubaker, is about a prison and the changes that take place within it. Redford arrives to the prison disguised as a prisoner, only to turn out to be the prison's

new director. Later, he installs new order. In this film, the prisoners walk about the yard in the very same manner that we do during our long break, but instead of teachers, the prisoners are supervised by guards.

I told Lucie all about this, and we made a little game out of it. Both of us cut the best picture of Robert Redford that we could find out of a magazine. Then we folded it carefully and hid it in a decorated envelope inside a pocket of our school clothes. When we walk the corridors now, we narrow our eyes, holding the picture of Redford inside our pocket and imagine Redford is walking with us. Like in the film, very soon he will reveal his true identity and bring down this nonsense, so we could go and see each other freely and talk like normal people without having to hide.

My mum found the picture in my trousers when she was washing it, so I told her about this game. My dad asked about the reason for walking the corridors during the parents' meeting at school. Principal told him that this is to ensure we get enough exercise as we spend most of the day sitting motionless on benches. Teachers supervise us because we would start running otherwise, and this could be dangerous and cause injuries. So walking practice combines both exercise and safety. My dad was laughing when he was saying this to us after the school meeting, but it was with a sarcastic smile rather than finding it actually funny. He said we will just have to bear this until he manages to get some support from other parents and tries to offer a different solution at the next parents' meeting. I hope this happens soon, and I hope this will last for some time too, since the exciting things do not tend to last for long in our school.

On Decisions and Consequences (Commentary)

The socialist Czechoslovak state exercised an overt control of public religious life. After university graduation, all priests-to-be had to preach in front of communist party members. They observed their social and intellectual activities throughout their study and later during their service. Should they find them more or less in line with socialist teaching, the minister candidate was given approval to attain a parish. Once in post, communist party members specially assigned to this task randomly inspected ministers during their weekly public activities and Sunday preaching. They could take away their approval any time, labelling them a threat to a socialist ideology. This eventually forced many ministers to move to remote parts of the country or to change their profession and take on meaningless manual jobs as no intellectual jobs were granted to them[7] should they be officially labelled a danger to the regime.

I remember my father improvising and changing texts he prepared for Sunday sermons on several occasions because he spotted a communist church secretary in the audience. It was the same man all the time, and his presence was not a secret. My father remembers these visits as tests of him staying alert. Like a clown in a circus, he had to respond to the demands of the audience. However, unlike a circus, he did not do it for the audience's amusement. Under the socialist regime, a sermon became a political play, with real dangers involved in this theatre-like performance. The threat of crossing an acceptable line and bearing its consequences was an integral part of every minister's job: preaching spiritual freedom within a state governed by spiritually restrictive ideology. Although my father approached these occasions with ease, its real-life consequences were always implicit. After each of these incidents, we anxiously awaited a postal carrier, worried she would bring my father an order to come to the regional communist headquarters to explain himself. An order that could change the future of us all.

Additional control was exercised through the minister's children, held hostage by the regime to a certain extent. Many of them were prevented from entering higher education of their choice because of their parents' occupation. Their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) was undesirable by the state, and the best way to stop it spreading was to prevent the children from attaining jobs that required education and promised not only personal development but also a possibility to influence others. Protestant families had several possibilities for dealing with this measure. One possibility[8] was to move to a remote region of the country where there was often more benevolent communist leadership, fewer inhabitants, and less competition for school places.

Proximity to a well-sealed border zone aroused feelings of isolation in some of Klickov's inhabitants, who unhappily referred to the region as the boondocks. On the contrary, others were inspired to break through the seal by the rare possibility to trade or even to smuggle goods from the outside world.

As such, the seal of the border was only illusory, and impulses for change came both from within and from the outside of the communist system. In my memories, this idea is personified by a smuggler, one of them being my own grandma. A smuggler is a traveller between the worlds, trading goods, ideas, and ideologies, while displaying both compliance and resistance to the regime, bringing its still waters into movement. Over the 15 years, granny managed to smuggle goods worth

a house, taking ownership of what the communist regime had taken away from her. In order to gain justice, she had to break the law. I learned at an early age that a law can protect, or discriminate, and that making choices has consequences that you must be prepared to accept.

In Klickov, most smugglers came from families who lived in this region for generations. As such, their knowledge of natural environment was much deeper than that of the soldiers, who usually stayed for only a short period of a year or so as part of their compulsory army service. It was public knowledge that the soldiers were silent benefactors of this black market trade, receiving their share in return for protection. This put many smugglers into an awkward position of double agents. In order to keep up their illegal trade and earn valuable extra income, they were frequently asked to collect information to over to the communist establishment. While a great portion of the public considered buying smuggled goods and wearing these illegal clothing items publically as a means of resistance against the state, others saw the danger that accompanied the benefits of foreign goods. They chose to abstain, not providing the establishment any pretext for subsequent counteraction against them.

Smuggling did not restrain itself to the movement of physical goods only. It also encompassed the movement of immaterial things, such as information and ideas that represented threats to the socialist regime. Under such restraint, information became a particularly valuable article and could be traded for personal benefits. It was never value-free. By giving away information, people hurt others but not themselves. In public discourse, informers were considered traitors, and a great deal of social stigma was attached to them. Since early age, children were brought up not to tell on others;[9] at school, child informants were always persecuted and ostracised by others.[10] While sharing information assumed compliance, withholding it was a powerful form of resistance. This is well illustrated in dissent literature of the time, including the plays by Vaclav Havel (1963, 1975).

Like adults, children were not merely silent observers of life under the socialist regime but were active participants. They too had many occasions upon which to practise their choice of response to the regime. *To tell or not to tell* was a modified existential question that both children and adults had to answer for themselves.

The story of compulsory school strolling mentioned in the accompanying diary entry portrays several layers of such resistance. At the heart of the issue, those who are meant to benefit the rule question its legitimacy.

Abélès ([1997](#)) sees conflict as one of the two[11] constitutive settings for any political play, where a common enemy becomes the cohesive part that connects all the actors and guides their responsive action. Children must stroll because it is an exercise that compensates for the movement-free periods spent in school benches. Movement is managed and supervised by adults in order to prevent injuries. Under organised modernity, there is a hierarchical relationship between an adult and a child, the former having the upper hand. While socialisation and persuasion are the state's chief disciplinary methods (deMause, [1995](#), p. 62), physical restriction can be applied when the former is not working (Wagner, [1994](#)). Children's action mattered and their agency was taken seriously by the state. The regime also saw children as potential smugglers of ideas. A child's disobedience had the same disruptive effects upon the state system as that of an adult regardless of their hierarchical inequality. Thus, I believe studying children's means of resistance has high informative value about the whole society and its state of affairs.

Children's resistance is well illustrated with the story of visiting my school friend during the break. It shows how resistance to the physical movement is intertwined with particular set of cultural/societal norms adopted both by individuals and the masses. Upon the individual level, the child is aware of the existing school hierarchy and recognises the unlikely possibility of having the rule changed upon direct negotiation. Different resistance strategies are therefore employed. First, there is the breaking of the rule by physical trespassing. The child runs away to meet her friend, taking turns with her, playing with each other by spreading the risk and reinforcing equality. Once successful, they hide in a private place (in a toilet) to satisfy their need to speak to each other. The private space of the toilet provides a sanctuary, like home, where they consider themselves safe from school rules, and they create a world of their own. They associate school with prison, where their basic need (to speak to each other) is violated. However, supportive role of the crowd is necessary for the success of the resistance of the individual children. No classmate gives them away, since they too are taking part in their game. Playing an important role of a protective anonymous crowd, children are united against a common enemy—the supervising teachers. They are safe yet vulnerable, like smugglers in the real world of adults, operating in the forests surrounding the town of Klickov.

Like a smuggler, in addition to physical trespass, children daydream about a better world where forbidden goods and ideas are available. Inspired by a film, they imagine a saviour, embodied by their favourite

actor who is here already hiding with them. He will rise one day and set them free to see each other whenever they want. They carry among themselves physical objects (his picture) to remind them of this idea and fuel their belief.

Despite obvious similarities with religious beliefs, there is a profound difference. This is recognised to be a game only, a device, which helps the two school friends to endure the situation or even to make the absurd situation enjoyable for some time. Likewise, the smuggler was not envisioned as a saviour but rather an opener of possibilities and easer of difficult times. A similar role was assigned to communist mass entertainers.[12]

Klickov school was a perfect example of a serious play (Bourdieu, 1988) in praxis. During the lessons, to be on the safe side with the regime, most teachers taught only the content of approved textbooks, minimising discussions, questions, and disagreements. On breaks, they supervised the quiet marching of children. Outside the lessons, there were spaces to show resentment by all actors. In such a system, simply being a part of the school meant receiving a role in a staged political performance (Abélès, 1997). Despite the political will of the principal, the teachers were the final executors of the regime. As such, the regime was often bent according to their personal favours and dislikes and subject to improvisation, like my father's Sunday sermons. Likewise, falling out of the assigned limits of the role had real political consequence for all involved, be it the loss of profession for teachers or prohibition for further study for students.

On Dangers of the Periphery (Diary Entries and Letters)

Two out of the three roads that run through our town end with wooden poles, barbed wire, and a police patrol in the nearby forest. Soldiers are dressed in green and brown uniforms with heavy boots and guns to protect the borderlines. Sometimes we go with my classmate Novák and observe them from behind the bushes, and when they see us, we run away. I think their job must be really boring. No cars or busses ever cross the line. Three kilometres behind our town, the roads change into forest tracks, not used for official transport. So they see nobody all day. At least they get to chase smugglers, otherwise they would do nothing all day. When there was a shortage of toilet paper, smugglers got much of it from Germany. It was remarkably soft compared to the grater-like type we had in regular shops or the newspaper cuttings that we have used. They also smuggle glittering leggings and nylon scarfs from Poland. They are very fashionable and popular among my classmates, but we don't buy things from them because they are spies and dangerous people. But I think smuggling is a really adventurous job. Running fast

and soundless through the secret passages of the forest like Winnetou[13] *and Old Shatterhand, scouting and reading the landmarks left by animals and humans, visiting foreign lands and meeting people speaking different tongues. I wish I would lose my fear of soldier, so I could become a scout too, crossing the borders whenever I please.*

Behind the forest, there are different countries, with people speaking a variety of languages. They could as well be Martians as we never see them. I only met Poles at my mother's cousin's wedding. I never met Germans. But I know they exist. My friend Eliska Neumannová has a German granny who speaks only German. Prior to the war, everybody in this town spoke German, but after the Nazis were defeated, all the Germans went to Germany. Eliska's granny did not have to because Eliska's granddad was helping the Czech partisans during the war. Once a year she travels across the border to visit her German family. She always brings a Milka chocolate and up-to-date Burda[14] *catalogues for Eliska. German people have much nicer clothes. We like to sit together in her room and flick through the magazines pages over and over again.*

I wish I also could speak German to somebody. Meanwhile, I can only speak Russian to you,[15] *but letters are not the same as speech. I like the sound of foreign languages, and I feel like I have a special power when I speak them. My dad is teaching me English. It is nice, but there is nobody to speak English to but him. There are no English films*[16] *in the cinema nor on television, so it is pretty useless. But perhaps not. Mum still speaks good Polish that she learned as a child. It is a very funny language; it has many 'gg' sounds. Anyways, I wish I had somebody to practise it with.*

For maths we have a teacher I really like. His name is Luboš Hložek and he is very bad in memorising our names, so he gave most of us a nickname. Mine is a European brown bear since I am very tall and I am sitting in the very last row of the class, which he refers to as a cave. He is a student of a pedagogical faculty, reading Czech history and literature. But our school was short of maths teachers, so they hired him. Now we are singing maths formulas and writing poems about multiples. When we are naughty, we get to write a long essay about some mathematical problems. It is very exciting, but some of my classmates are scared of him and some parents complain about his teaching methods.

Mr. Hložek was not allowed to forbid us to call him ´comrade.' The rule from the principal's office is we have to greet all teachers with 'Good morning teacher comrade,' but we always have to say this word as silently as possible. When he hears somebody's voice saying the 'comrade' word out loud, he has to go to the blackboard and perform some mathematical task and receive a

grade for it, so we are all very careful and observe silence when this word comes in. His periods are very different. We can ask him questions any time and as often as we want. We can come freely to the blackboard to write upon or to bring our exercise book if in need of explanation. We can even get into groups to work together, and he does not mind when we give hints and help each other! That especially is a great relief for me, since this is the only rule I have always been breaking at school and now in his periods—this ceased to exist! I can freely explain to my neighbour Dáša, and we can both turn sideways for help to Aleš Zejda, our class's Maths and Physics genius.

The best thing in our town is our school amateur theatre. We are putting on a show about a crazy town, called The Chronicle of Monkey Business Town,[17] where people think themselves to be the cleverest people in the world, but everything they do goes wrong somehow. They believe everybody should be equal, so they make the educated people work in the fields and the farmers lead the town. They build up a new school without proper planning, and they forget to make the doors and the windows. In order to bring light into it, they try to catch the light into canvas sacks outside the school and empty the sacks inside it. I play a part of a bull and that of an ancient pillar. At one point I get to scratch myself as a bull by myself as a pillar, knocking myself down at the end. It is very funny.

We rehearse four times a week… At the end of the year we took part in a national competition of children amateur theatres in Kaplice. We won it and we were selected to go to Almelo in Holland in spring this year! Yes! Yes! I am so incredibly happy! I am going to the West! We will go by bus through West Germany and Holland. Mum and dad think it is an excellent play and they are amazed how we could win it with this play. They see it as a parody about the communist state, especially my role of a bull and the column. But Sekora is a popular writer among the communists, perhaps they do not see it the way my parents do. To me the play is really funny.

The director of the play is my Czech language and literature teacher, Mr. Král. He knows everything about Czech literature, and at home he has so many books that they cover all the walls of his house. He is very funny during our rehearsals, making many jokes. At school he is very different. He spends most of the time sleeping on his desk, while we read our books. My parents say communists had given him hard times. At the beginning of each morning lesson, Eva Žižková, who sits in the first row, always has to go to the shop to fetch him a bottle of mineral water, which he drinks at once, and then he puts his forehead onto the table and sleeps again. Sometimes he even snores and his eyes are full of water. I don't know if other teachers and the principal know. We do not tell them.

On Dangers of the Periphery (Commentary)

Periphery of the country represented a rim of a centrifugal space. Besides priests, members of many other professions disliked by the regime were secluded there. Considered too disruptive for a town community, they were transferred to the periphery of the country where their activities were considered less harmful. There they had a chance to smuggle in their individual ideas, approaches, and pedagogical methods, which perhaps would have been unacceptable in big towns and cities. This encompassed all 'problematic' intellectuals, including late former President Havel, who during the 1970s worked as a labourer in a brewery in Trutnov, a town where my family lived prior to being transferred to Klickov. Due to this natural and forced migration, the opposite of the intended effect was created. During the 1970s, the border zones became centres of underground culture and ideology, where intellectuals met in vicarages, private houses, and flats to discuss politics, culture, philosophy, and religion (Jirous, 2008; Kriseová, 1991).

Abélès (1997) labels this as backstage politics, since the frontstage[18] was cleared of all the undesirable characters for the staged performances of political visits and other political acts. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, the undesired were not extinguished as during the Stalinist 1950s.[19] They were pushed aside to the backstage, where they created a necessary mirror and a critical environment, within which the staged performance had to develop. Two fields were thus mutually constitutive, not exclusive. That is why the effect of intellectual underground upon the communist regime was much more profound and destructive than was the dissent formed abroad.

During the 1980s, the panopticon of state surveillance (Foucault, 1995) was ever present and comprised controlling places where people moved, as well as ideas that people held. School textbooks, literature, and culture in general were censored. Public life was possible only with the approval of local communist organisations. Yet, there were multiple resistance strategies employed by those who were meant to be the objects of state/school politics, like dreaming about permeable borders while watching European Western films.[20] Similarly, observing silence when the word 'comrade' should be pronounced or employing unusual teaching methods was possible since the student-teacher Hložek's work contract was limited to the period of one year and he had no fear of losing his job.

Foreign contact was scarce. Within the border zone of the country, the oldest generation who could speak and/or understand German would occasionally tune the TV to foreign signals. However, devices were built to disturb foreign TV signals to make this unlikely. Apart from closely monitored foreign tourists, who visited mainly the cultural sites of the country, foreigners were rarely present as was the possibility to practise any foreign language, apart from Russian. It was the only compulsory language learned at school, and children were encouraged to have penfriends in the Soviet Union to write to each other and learn about each other's culture. However, this correspondence was censored and letters often arrived in open envelopes.

Linguistic isolation was accompanied by physical seclusion, felt especially at the border zones and periphery regions, like in Klickov. Crossing the border was always accompanied by a sense of fear, since gun-carrying soldiers in uniforms checked all passports and inspected each piece of luggage for anything prohibited—be it foreign books, music, films, alcohol, cigarettes, or medicine.

Natural barriers in the form of deep forests, high mountains, or rivers surrounding the borders created a sense of inaccessibility of the world behind, but at the same time gave the illusion of impermeable wilderness in which one can hide or be hidden from the eye of the communist government, which was not possible in towns and cities. However, the state, through the institution of secret police and double agents, observed closely both movement and action of all its citizens, bringing the panopticon to its perfection (Havel, 1963, 1975).

Social theorists associate socialism with organised modernity (Wagner, 1994). It is based upon conventionalisation and standardisation of action and behaviour of the masses, directed by a limited number of leaders, personified by the protagonists of the state. It values children mainly as future adults. To bring this value into life, they have to be trained, socialised, and schooled accordingly (deMause, 1995). The space within which this takes place is like a cage—a space surrounded by walls or an 'Indian'-like reservation (Holý, 2001; Verdery, 1996). An artificial semi-sealed world was created, where the microclimate rarely allowed a fresh breeze in a form of new political, cultural, or scientific ideas (ibid). Such spatial and intellectual isolation led to the production of two types of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977): one that was awarded and encouraged by the state, and the other that inspired resistance towards the regime and was valued by dissenting

individuals and groups. While compliance with rules and order was the means to receive material favours, the real wealth resided in knowledge and information, carefully protected by the state (Holý, 2001; Verdery, 1996).

However, there were occasions when the habitual balance between children and adults became disturbed. As a result, children gained direct political agency with direct possibility to become directors of a political play. Our theatre performance provided an excellent occasion for such an event. This form of resistance described in the diary entries represents a theoretical twist, most vividly embodied in the work and personage of Havel. No longer is politics theatre-like but the other way around. Theatre becomes politics itself, carefully staged with its several layers. In Klickov, politics begins with the name of the ensemble. PiDivadlo is an abbreviation of Pioneer Theatre (*Pi*onýrské *Divadlo*), despite the fact that during the years I participated, more than half of us were not members of this youth communist organisation, and as such, there was a constant threat of being dismissed and the play scratched. Nevertheless, once it won the national competition, the fact that it was a Pioneer theatre was stressed by the press without knowing and/or commenting upon the real situation.

PiDivadlo theatre politics continued with choosing the script, which later became the winning performance at the national youth theatre festival in Kaplice. As such, it gained the right to represent Czechoslovakia on the international festival in Almelo in the Netherlands. Based on the novel by Ondřej Sekora, a popular writer of children's books who joined the communist party after the Second World War, he later became a political activist. However, most of his books were published prior to his activism and reflect satirical criticism of human folly and restrictive regimes. Therefore, the communist party did not consider his books to be a direct critique of the regime. His work carried a potential of strong political satire, once updated and contextually modified. Chapters dramatised in the play very much resembled the dissent critique of the socialist regime as portrayed by others (Havel, 1963, 1975). They too highlighted the absence of a positive hero, used language as a tool for misunderstanding, discussed banalities, and overall, they depicted people in a very embarrassing manor, drawing attention to their folly and narrow-mindedness. We devoted many hours of practice during rehearsals to bring this folly and narrow-mindedness of our characters to perfection. This ignorance and/or innocence of the characters was even further underlined by the fact that we were children playing adults, whom the author portrayed as child-like in their simplicity, fulfilling the socialist ideal of a child as an object in need of adult socialisation and education.

Yet, the choice of the script and the possibility to present itself in the capitalist West was seen as an excellent opportunity by the communist establishment to spread the socialist message abroad, since the author was a communist himself and the ensemble was composed of Pioneers. On the other hand, the followers of the dissent, more concerned about the message of the play than the political adherence of the author, were both amazed and amused by the short-sightedness of the communist officials, and the director of the play was praised by them for his ability to disrupt the system from within. To my parents and other followers of the dissent in the town, our ensemble personified a small victory over the system, adding a sparkle of hope for future changes.

Seen from an adult perspective today, I believe the theatre play staged by PiDivadlo gave us child-actors unprecedented political power. Theatre became politics. Its script, symbols, and acts gained double meaning that went unexpected and/or undetected by the political establishment. The regime was caught off guard by a group of presumed Pioneer children and a drunkard teacher, whose lost existence had long been considered harmless. Years later, it really was children, or at least whom the General Secretary of the Communist Party Milouš Jakeš called children,[21] who changed the fate of socialist Czechoslovakia and opened it up for a different future.

Notes

1. The town is a part of the Czech Republic today.
2. Velvet revolution, which set off the change of a socialist regime into a democratic state, took place in November 1989.
3. Since they were in foreign language, I have always composed a draft first, to avoid mistakes.
4. During the 1980s, education was compulsory for children from age 6 (grade 1) up to 14 or 15 (grade 8). After this period, children sat entrance exams for high school (4 years), or apprenticeship (3 years).
5. Emic narrative represents a personal memory, while etic narrative describes the event from the perspective of an authority—a historian, politician, and so on. The author shows on several examples that it is the latter which changes more dramatically over the time, copying the changing ideological framework of a society.
6. Pavel was a fellow minister, a friend of my father, who visited our family often.
7. The 'unemployed' status did not exist during the communist time.

8. Other two possibilities were (A) to achieve only As (1st grade) on all school reports throughout the entire school history (such child was accepted for higher education of his/her choice without having to sit entrance exams) and (B) to pass talent exams and to be admitted into a conservatoire. In the 1980s, in this segment of schooling, talent was considered more important than political profile of students.

9. One of the most frequent child's commands in Czech is 'nežaluj!', which translates as 'do not tell on other children!'

10. Example of such behaviour can be seen in a Czech film *Cesta to hlubin študákovy duše* from 1939.

11. The other being compliance.

12. Prominent communist pop singers and actors regularly performed at foreign socialist variety shows, broadcasted over the communist bloc. The most famous being Ein Kessel Buntes from East Germany.

13. Literary character from the book of Karl May. Winnetou is a headman of Apache Indian tribe, Old Shatterhand is his brother-in-blood, coming originally from Germany. Together they attempt to keep piece between American Indians' tribes and settlers from Europe. Karl May's books were also a source of screenplays for numerous films, popular in the East-European block since 1960s.

14. Catalogues of mail selling company called Burda Moden, originally from West Germany. Used and dated catalogues were much treasured by Czech women and tailors.

15. Stepanova Ljudmila from Kiev was my penfriend during my childhood; this is an extract from a letter to her.

16. Most foreign films had Czech dabbing.

17. In original, it was called Kronika města Kocourkova by Ondřej Sekora.

18. Here meaning the central area of the country and cultural cities and sites where tourist travelled.

19. See Vejražka (2012).

20. Winnetou was filmed in Yugoslavia by a German director.

21. In his speech on Červený Hrádek, General Secretary of the Communist Party Milouš Jakeš called students who started the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 'some children.' This terminology was used in order to diminish reasonability of their action, as well as an appeal to the general and political public to take counteraction, since nobody wants to live in a country, where children rule the adults. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkVvPLXN2xo (21.1.2016).

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Uncle Ho's Good Children Award and State Power at a Socialist School in Vietnam

Violette Hoang-Phuong Ho

Small children do small tasks (Tuổi nhỏ làm việc nhỏ)
According to your strength (Tuỳ theo sức của mình)
[…]
Prove that you are worthy (Các cháu hãy xứng đáng)
Uncle Ho's children! (Cháu Bác Hồ Chí Minh!)
Ho Chi Minh (1952)

It was a humid summer night at Long Xuyên Cultural House in 1986. The air was filled with both tension and excitement when the story-telling contest at the Congress of Uncle Ho's Good Children came to an end. The highest achieving members of the Ho Chi Minh Young Pioneer Organization—the youth section of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)—were sent to the camp to take part in various competitions organized to celebrate Ho Chi Minh (Uncle Ho) and the Party. Two stories stood out. A cultural story explained how one of the first Vietnamese kings, *Hùng Vương*, created the sticky rice cakes *(bánh Chúng bánh Dày)*, both square and round, which had become a requirement on the Vietnamese altar for the traditional New Year *(Tết)*. The other story

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described a competition among three young hares to make the most beautiful broom. Mother Hare declared victory for her youngest son's handmade sweeper because, unlike his brothers who asked friends for help, the youngest hare made his broom all by himself. The event's emcee announced, "And the winning story is … 'The Most Beautiful Broom'!"

I have always attributed my victory at the story-telling contest to the moral lesson of self-reliance, which aligned beautifully with Uncle Ho's teaching of "small children do small tasks"—an optimal value for Vietnamese children to observe under socialism. What the youngest hare in the story did—namely, gathered the materials to construct the broom all by himself—exemplified what Uncle Ho wanted youth to do for our motherland (or so we were told): We should do whatever we could to (re) build our nation and contribute to the success of our country's gradual transition to socialism, with an effort commensurate with our age. For years, I strongly believed that I did exactly what Uncle Ho expected of us by completing every Pioneer Organization assignment, and that by doing so, I was worthy of being one of his Good Children.

Who was Uncle Ho in the eyes of a schoolgirl, and why did his teachings have such influence over her? How could a little girl construct her own world in a cultural context defined by Ho Chi Minh's teachings and the VCP's ideologies? What did it mean for a child to participate in the process of building a socialist nation? And how did a child's commitment to Uncle Ho's teachings reveal the state's power and national ideology in a Vietnamese socialist school setting in the mid-1980s? In this paper, I explore these questions using an autoethnographic approach, which utilizes both my memories of childhood at an elementary school in Long Xuyên, a small town in Southern Vietnam, and data gathered from interviews.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the autoethnographic method. I provide details of how I critically examined my own memory in order to collect my past narratives, followed by a description of the analytical frameworks I employed for composing the texts. Then, I discuss how Uncle Ho was perceived among elementary students and explain why Vietnamese schoolchildren felt motivated and honored to become his "good children." I argue that while many students found the process of obtaining Uncle Ho's Good Children prize meaningful and enjoyable, the reward had become a virtual site where the State governed young people's devotion and willingness to sacrifice their time, energy, and personal interests in the name of the nation.

Methods

To explore my childhood and education under socialism in Vietnam, autoethnography allows me to touch upon not only personal matters, such as beliefs, feelings, and past experiences, but also other topics, such as school activities, ideologies, and the influence of state power at a much deeper level of personal involvement (see also Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang 2010). In the process of remembering and collecting personal memories, I relied on a method defined by Chang (2008, p. 75) as "Inventorying Self," which is a technique of foraging through one's past and picking up pieces of memories related to the topic at hand. After gathering the preliminary data, I followed up with a process of organizing, evaluating, selecting, and discarding memories. At this stage, artifacts such as old photos assisted me in recalling my memories of those school years since they brought back meaningful moments.

Next, I compiled "self-reflective data." According to Chang (2008), self-reflective data refers to the information related to the research topic collected by investigating and reflecting on personal matters while paying specific attention to what was important and meaningful to the autoethnographic investigator (pp. 95–100). I also provide the social and cultural contexts, such as the Vietnamese values and norms and my association with the Youth section of the Communist Party, for a better understanding of my upbringing in socialist Vietnam. In addition, I employed Chang's (2008) technique of "discovering self through other self-narrators," which was an effective way to recapture the past. For example, reading through Trinh Do's (2004) *Saigon to San Diego, Memoir of a Boy Who Escaped from Communist Vietnam*, I found a mirror image of myself as a child searching all over to collect recyclable materials to meet my quota, in the hope of winning some of the top Pioneer Organization activity awards and earning recognition as one of Uncle Ho's "good children."

An important part of my data set came from interviews. Although for the most part autoethnography focuses on one's own life, interviewing others revitalized my memories by supplying missing information and bringing up other relevant topics (Chang, 2008, p. 106). Using the telephone and the Internet, I posed open-ended questions to five individuals who grew up in Vietnam in the same period and went through a similar educational system as me. Two of them were my old friends, and the other three were recommended to me by people from my personal network. The open-ended interviews afforded people the freedom to express themselves while remaining focused on the research topic (Bernard, 2011, p. 156).

The *autoethnographic representation* of this research takes the form of what Van Maanen (1988) describes as "impressionist tales," which provide a balanced account between the researcher's own story and the culture under investigation. Using "narratives of space and place," my approach is "to create an impression, rather than a true and certain reproduction, of an experience" (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2015, pp. 84–86). By using anecdotes to introduce meaningful events within their social and cultural context, rather than presenting them as a simple set of historical stories in chronological order, my goal is to reconstruct a lived experience. My impressionist tales, as they are presented in this chapter, aim to move readers closer to the real-life experience of a young girl's education under the Vietnamese school system in the mid-1980s and illustrate what it meant to this schoolgirl to have lived under this massive training program in Communist ideology. Important events, their relationships to one another, and their social and cultural meanings, therefore, are analyzed within this socialist context as well as the cultural norms and values of Vietnam.

Vietnamese Economy and the Socialist School System in the 1980s

The triumph over the Americans in 1975 marked the end of Vietnam's century of internal conflict and foreign occupation. Beginning its transition to socialism, the country quickly adopted the Soviet-style planned economy (Pham & Le, 2003, p. 32). The state monopolized all resources, controlled the redistribution of raw materials, set production targets, dominated the dissemination of goods, and regulated commodity prices. The Party's Central Planning Committee sketched out their projected economic growth rates and determined how to achieve these goals in a series of five-year plans. The Second Five Year Plan of 1976–1981 (the first one was carried out in North Vietnam from 1960–1965) was immediately implemented, followed by the Third Five Year Plan of 1981–1986.

The repeated failure to reach the plans' projections left the country in economic despair. In the 1980s, Vietnam was one of the poorest countries in the world (Glewwe, 2004, p. 1). In 1986, inflation hit a record high of over 700 percent; by 1987, food shortages and hyperinflation raised serious concerns among even the Communist Party leaders (Harvie & Tran, 1997, p. 48; Lê & Liu, 2006, p. 123). Hoarding of commodities, such as rice and sugar, had become the norm among many Vietnamese, despite the heavy punishment the government imposed on anyone caught doing so (Vo, 1988).

Following the Communist Party takeover in 1975, the government's closed-door policy led to the deterioration of its international relations and worsened economic conditions. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese fled the country looking for asylum elsewhere. Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 was followed by the Chinese military's reprisal a year later. These incidents, coupled with the United States' trade embargo, triggered a rapid decline in Vietnam's foreign relations and caused even more damage to its international trade (Masina, 2006, p. 55–56). As the economic crisis continued to deepen, many Vietnamese households suffered devastating conditions—lacking food, commodities, and medical supplies.

Under these socioeconomic conditions, the socialist school system continued to promote extracurricular activities designed to venerate Ho Chi Minh and glorify the VCP. Almost every school had at least one specialist, the Pioneer Organization General Manager *(Tổng Phụ Trách Đội)*, who was professionally trained to carry out Pioneer Organization's programs for children in elementary and middle school (up to Grade 9). As soon as we entered Grade 3, students were repeatedly reminded to prepare to join Pioneer Organization by the end of the year or the year after, as this organization generally accepted members between nine and fourteen years of age.

Pioneer Organization is an extension of the VCP. It is responsible for engaging elementary and middle school students in activities meant to support the Party. The unspoken privilege attached to the Party's ultimate leading role in Vietnamese politics highlights the importance of this institution and its programs. Established by Ho Chi Minh himself and the VCP in 1941, Pioneer Organization falls under the auspices of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (HCYU). Membership in Pioneer Organization prepares one for taking part in the HCYU, which can be a stepping-stone to obtaining full membership in the VCP (Lucius, 2009, pp. 31–33). Because Vietnam operates as a one-party government, Party membership also prepares one for official appointments with the state administration. Joining Pioneer Organization and actively supporting its programs, therefore, constitute a good start for anyone who wants to work for the government in the future.

Upon joining the Pioneer Organization, we were strongly urged to take part in numerous projects. Some of these were designed with the concurrent economic deadlock and food shortage in mind. Although there were certainly a number of schoolchildren who refused to join the organization, many students at my school voluntarily became its members.

At first, I loathed belonging to the organization because my father thought it was a waste of time. Before the end of Grade 3, however, I had become an active member and continually received numerous high achievement awards. By the end of Grade 4, over 80 percent of my classmates gained access, and we remained members until Grade 9.

Uncle Ho's Good Children
(*Cháu ngoan Bác Hồ*) Award

Students, especially Pioneer Organization's members, were instructed and encouraged to celebrate Uncle Ho's life in conjunction with the Communist Party in every possible way. The most effective and meaningful practice for an elementary or middle school student to celebrate was to become one of Uncle Ho's Good Children. There were several ways to win this title. The most popular ones were to study hard and achieve an average grade of "good" or to become actively involved in various Pioneer Organization activities, such as meeting the Small Plan's minimum requirement. The Small Plan was a project that required students to collect recyclable materials as a means of raising money for Pioneer Organization. Those who did not do well at school (i.e., earning the lower grades of "satisfactory") could still win the Good Children award by doing extremely well in Pioneer Organization programs. One of those was earning the honorable titles of Small Plan Valiant Soldier or Small Plan Master, which I will describe below. Pioneer Organization's municipal student officers or those selected for special or long-term projects certainly won the award regardless of their average grades.

In my elementary and middle school years (up to Grade 9), activities were exclusively organized by Pioneer Organization and focused primarily on the greatness of Uncle Ho and the glory of the Communist Party. To win the Good Children award, my classmates and I participated in almost every available activity. In addition to the Small Plan projects, Pioneer Organization also set up learning contests about Uncle Ho and the VCP, which required students to memorize and recite Ho's biography, words, poems, writings, and the Communist Party's history, important dates, and events. We also took part in singing and dancing contests, which, of course, centered on Uncle Ho and the Party. Another important activity was the ritual contest, held periodically, which required us to perform simplified versions of Vietnamese military drills. Depending on the level of involvement, one would receive Uncle Ho's Good Children award at the commune/town, district, province, or central level.

Even though the award itself was nothing but a piece of paper with the signature of Pioneer Organization's representative to certify the achievement, many of us voluntarily supported these activities. My endorsement of these programs stemmed from the sentiment that I was taking part in important national movements in which students across the entire country participated. At school, we constantly received updates, mostly on the school bulletin boards and in the form of announcements, about how the Pioneer Organizations in other schools were doing. I had the feeling that the entire nation was participating in similar events that directly connected to Uncle Ho, as if he was there to support us going through the process of (re)building Vietnam. As Uncle Ho's Good Children award was important to many of us, it is worth taking a look at who Uncle Ho was in the eyes of an elementary school child and why students were required to celebrate his life.

Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969), or President Ho, was the Vietnamese leader who led the nationalist movement that fought against the Japanese, the French Union, and the South Vietnamese Army backed by the United States. He was the first president of the Communist-ruled Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and ruled from 1945 to 1965. His influence continued to shape the Communist movement to reunite North and South Vietnam even after his death in 1969. It was felt even stronger after North Vietnam claimed victory over South Vietnam in 1975. The VCP carefully maintained an image of Ho as sacred; it has lionized him to the status of a demigod, calling him *Hồ Chủ tịch* (Chairman Ho), *Cụ Hồ* (great-grandfather Ho), *Bác Hồ* (Uncle Ho), or *Người* (His Holiness; see also Luong, 1988), proclaiming that "We are all Uncle Ho's children" or referring to him as "The old father of the Vietnamese ethnicity" (see, for example, Nhân Dân, 2014; Vũ, 2004). Students like myself mostly referred to him as Uncle Ho or Uncle Ho Chi Minh.

My impression of Uncle Ho relied extensively on the officially sanctioned image of him as a perfect individual, an idol, and a role model for Vietnamese children and youth. The Party portrayed him as the great man who had forsaken his marital privilege and devoted his life to emancipate Vietnamese people from the enslavement of the colonial French and American Empire. Ho was also presented as an acclaimed poet, a world-class politician, an acute journalist, and a great friend of many world-renowned leaders. My Vietnamese literature and contemporary history textbooks included a significant number of Ho's poems, excerpts, teachings, sayings, and anecdotes, together with instructions on how to interpret them "correctly."

One of Uncle Ho's most highlighted traits, besides his leadership, was his *hy-sinh* (see Tố Hữu, 1946, 1972) usually translated into English as "sacrifice." In turn, we had to feel gratitude since Ho had forgone his private life for the independence and reunification of Vietnam. We forever had to remain grateful to him and be loyal to the VCP. The appropriation of a kinship term, "Uncle," to refer to Ho suggests the Party's effort to establish a family connection between the late leader and the people of Vietnam. Ho assumed the role of a father figure (i.e., "Uncle") and Vietnamese people became his "children." This kinship term served as a background for the justification of Ho's *hy-sinh*, as it signified Ho's magnanimity and demand of the "children's" devotion in return for what he had done for them.

The Vietnamese concept of *hy-sinh* encompasses the interaction and socialization within and outside the family boundaries. At times, it "overlaps and intertwines with practices of filial piety" (Shohet, 2013, p. 204). In countries influenced by the teachings of Confucius, such as China, Japan, and Vietnam, filial piety emphasizes children's devotion and obedience toward their parents. Gratitude toward one's parents rests on the rationale that as most parents forego their personal interests in order to care for their offspring, children must be unquestioning and grateful and show respect for their parents. Giving life to and bringing him/her up required parents' sacrifice (Shohet, 2013, pp. 204–205). Children, therefore, owe their parents a tremendous debt and must repay it by fulfilling their responsibilities (Rydström, 2003; Yan, 2003, pp. 171–173).

In Ho's case, *hy-sinh* links directly to his legendary celibacy, which the Party attributed to his dedication to the "cause of revolution." Influenced by Chinese traditions dating back to the Han dynasty, ancestor worship had long been part of Vietnamese culture (Nguyễn, 1967, p. 94). One of the most important aspects of ancestor worship was to continue the lineage, which meant children had to get married. Sons were obliged to fulfill their duty to their fathers and ancestors by marrying and having legitimate children to maintain the family line. Failing to do so made one an impious child (Chao, 1983, p. 42; Le, 2004, p. 16; 2006, pp. 71–75). In Ho's case, never marrying meant he could not have legitimate children. This unacceptable act could upset his parents, grandparents, and even the family's ancestors.

The State juxtaposed Ho's responsibility to his ancestors with his commitment to liberate the country to emphasize how he had chosen the people of Vietnam over his family. According to the State, as the leader of

the nation foregoing his own right and responsibility (to get married) to bring happiness to Vietnamese people, he/this act commanded the highest level of reverence. Because the rationale for Ho's veneration rested primarily on his chastity, losing this aspect could entirely destroy his demigod image and put the veneration the people felt for him at risk. Therefore, the Party continually dismissed any mention of his involvement with women. Accounts of his marriage and romance, such as those noted in Duiker (2000) biography, *Ho Chi Minh—A Life* (pp. 143, 198–199, 224–225), have never been officially acknowledged in Vietnam. Students continued to receive the affirmation that Uncle Ho had no woman in his life and was only married to "the cause of revolution."

Accounts of Ho Chi Minh's life were hagiographic, which meant the state had idealized his private life and political career in order to turn him into a sacred father figure of the nation. Everything about Ho was perfect, and no one was allowed to question or challenge his impeccable public image. Ho's teachings became the ultimate guidelines not only for students' academic and extracurricular activities but also for our lives. Slogans, such as "Live, combat, work, and study following the great Uncle Ho's role model" *(Sống, chiến đấu, lao động, học tập theo gương Bác Hồ vĩ đại)*, were often displayed in our classrooms. The Party's techniques of presenting and reinforcing the sacredness of Ho's image bring to mind the technique Verdery (1991, p. 138) defines as "genealogical appropriation," where Ho Chi Minh had adopted an identity of a philosopher and a demigod. His life exemplified the ultimate way to live: denying materialism and longing for and devoting one's life to the success of socialism. His thoughts and ideologies had become so important that the Vietnamese government funded thousands of research projects and publications on these topics. This genealogical appropriation is an important strategy that is also designed to foster reverence for Uncle Ho and encourage people to support the Party.

"Small Plan" *(Kế hoạch nhỏ)*—National Versus Personal Interests

One of the most important programs was designed to engage youth in activities meant to save money for various Pioneer Organization projects. We were told that our country was still in the process of recovering from the war and transitioning to socialism, and children had to do their share. According to the official website (www.doanthanhnien.vn) of the Ho Chi Minh

Communist Youth Union (under whose direction Pioneer Organization functions), the first Small Plan project started in 1958. The money raised from this project contributed to the construction of various structures, such as the Red Scarf Hotel in Hanoi, the Pioneer Organization train, and several monuments. Pioneer Organization derived its goals and guidelines based on Uncle Ho's Five Teaching Points for Children:

1. To love Fatherland and the compatriot;
2. To study well and be hardworking;
3. To practice good solidarity and follow strict discipline;
4. To keep well (sic) hygiene;
5. To be modest, truthful, and brave.

(The Central Committee of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, 2006)

At my school, Pioneer Organization ran projects that required students to gather recyclable materials for fundraising. We were told to collect and hand in used paper (newspapers, magazines, books, cartons, etc.) found around the house. Fulfilling the Small Plan's requirements was essential to winning Uncle Ho's Good Children award, and taking part in the program meant that we were responding to Uncle's call to "save money to build the nation."

Pioneer Organization set a quota for every student. As one interviewee in my research recalls, each person was required to hand in at least 1.5 kg (3.3 lbs.) of used paper. Those who submitted more than 30 kg (66 lbs.) but less than 60 kg (132 lbs.) would receive the title of Small Plan Valiant Soldiers, and those who brought in 60 kg (132 lbs.) or more would be called Small Plan Masters. Meeting the individual minimum requirement signified that the person had taken part in this program, a good record that could be used for other titles or awards. Failing to meet the individual quota did not cost us anything, but it became harder for the student to be considered for the award of Good Children.

Stacking used paper in order to become a Valiant Soldier or Master was an easy job for me until 1986. For a couple of years before that my family ran a small business of buying recyclable materials for the town's cooperative, and this made winning the highest award a painless effort. I could easily "collect" the targeted load by taking it directly from the piles of reusable goods at home. In 1986, however, obtaining the same honor proved to be a challenge. In a decision to monopolize the trade, the cooperative

had mandated the closing of my parents' store. My attempts to locate used paper around the house ended unsatisfactorily, since the house was empty and my parents were underemployed. Determined to triumph again in Pioneer Organization's activities, I decided to buy up the balance using the allowance my mother gave me to buy breakfast.

My mother became enraged upon finding out that I skipped breakfast in order to save money to buy used paper for the Small Plan. As with many others, my family's life savings in the bank vanished when the South Vietnamese government was taken over by the North Vietnamese. My mother gave birth to me when neither of my parents had sufficient income to feed the family or raise another child. Without a stable income, my mother could not afford to buy formula or get meat through the underground market to supplement my nutritional intake. She had to use some of the water in which our rice was cooked and add a tiny spoon of sugar to it to feed me (sugar was a luxury and reserved for babies and children only). In subsequent years, the situation worsened. Food rationing only allowed our family of four two cans of condensed milk and two hundred grams (half a pound) of pork belly each month. Giving papers away meant we could not sell them for a small sum; the loss of income was significant. As my mother reasoned, spending pocket money to buy used paper meant I could not have breakfast or snacks to energize my body and mind while I was at school; the effect on my health could be serious.

While my mother was concerned about the well-being of her daughter, the honors of being Uncle Ho's Good Children was so significant to me that I could not even be bothered about my health. All I knew was to remain focused on fulfilling my quota to achieve the Master title and the Good Children award. I was told that my country was destroyed during the war because of our foreign enemies, particularly the Americans, and that the country needed everyone's help to recover and to grow. Winning these titles was not only honorable to me, it also reflected my commitment to getting my country back on track. I considered the act of skipping on food a sacrifice of personal interest for the larger cause of rebuilding my nation.

My mother was upset because she thought I had forgone our family's meager income and my health for nothing. She was not alone in her way of thinking. In his memoir, Trinh Do (2004) revealed that he and his friend invested a lot of time and energy in a similar Small Plan project because they thought they would earn the Uncle Ho's Good Children award. This award, as Do recalled, was supposed to translate into something meaningful, such

as gaining better access to high school. As Do and his friend's families had worked for the pro-American South Vietnamese government before the North Vietnamese took control of the entire country, their *Lý-lịch* was in bad shape. Lý-lịch was an autobiographical profile used by the Communist Vietnamese government after the Vietnam War to classify if a Southern Vietnamese belonged to the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, and his or her connections with the Republic of South Vietnam before the end of the Vietnam War. A person's lý-lịch sealed his or her fate. Lý-lịch determined a child's educational opportunities, an individual's access to employment, whether or not a person who was affiliated with the South Vietnam administration would be sent to reeducation camp, and if his or her possession (i.e., property, savings, etc.) would be confiscated (see also Leshkowich, 2014).

In Do and his friend's cases, the bad Lý-lịch issue promised them limited access to high school and higher education (Do, 2004, pp. 127–129). Do and his friend were disappointed when they found out that they would receive nothing other than a symbolic Good Children award for meeting their Small Plan's targets (Do, 2004, pp. 108–113). My mother's, Do's, and his friend's thoughts bring to mind Mauss (1954/2011) theory of gift exchange: when a gift is given, the giver expects to gain something in return (pp. 10–14). As these three people considered the act of meeting the Small Plan target a gift that was given to Pioneer Organization, gaining nothing in return extremely upset them.

Unlike the three of them, I did not see the act of participating in the Plan as a gift, but a forgoing of personal interest for a larger cause, that is, the rebuilding of my nation. Joining the program presented me with an opportunity to do something meaningful for my motherland, or at least that was what Pioneer Organization made it seem to be. Discussing the sacrifices made in the name of the nation, Anderson (1983/2006, p. 144) claims, "dying for one's country […] assumes a moral grandeur" and "[d]ying for the revolution also draws its grandeur from the degree to which it is felt to be something fundamentally pure." Even though my commitment to Pioneer Organization's projects was far from dying for one's country, I offer here an explanation as to why I was willing to sacrifice my personal health and well-being to secure our country's future. To do so, I look back at how the knowledge of Vietnamese history influenced my perception of what I should do for my nation.

Almost immediately following the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the newly established government demanded a replacement of all school textbooks. My parents, teachers, and many other people to

whom I spoke still remember the Communist government's order to burn all books regardless of author, genre, or subject published in South Vietnam before 1975. In the 1980s, history books published in the South were a form of contraband. Anyone found in possession of one of those books could end up in jail for having an "anti-revolutionary spirit." Lacking alternative options, I relied solely on the school textbooks printed by the Ministry of Education to learn Vietnamese history. These books provided a summary of the country's formation and focused on the recent victory of the Revolution, Ho Chi Minh, and the VCP. These books highlighted Ho's life, and the students were told to listen to his teachings and act accordingly.

According to these books, generations of Vietnamese soldiers, especially the Communist revolutionaries, had sacrificed their lives for the independence of Vietnam. Uncle Ho said, "*Hùng* kings (the first Vietnamese kings) established the country; you and I, together, have to protect it" (*Các vua Hùng đã có công dựng nước, bác cháu ta phải cùng nhau giữ lấy nước*; Đào, 2008). Listening to these words, I deeply felt the responsibility to carry on the tradition of protecting and building up our country. At that relatively young age, taking part in Pioneer Organization's projects seemed to be a more appropriate and practical way to contribute to this tradition. Even though doing so could take a toll on my physical well-being, the cost was justified, in my opinion. Beyond this jingoistic rhetoric, these activities brought happiness and made my life more meaningful. Every day, I joined other students to conquer new challenges (Pioneer Organization's activities), knowing what we did was important to the newly reunited nation. I was excited to be one of those "little soldiers," fighting to bring the country on par with the West. In short, I was dedicated to being part of this Small Plan "national movement."

Cultural Knowledge, National Awareness, and Social Control

In various discussions, the interviewees in my research and I acknowledged that despite coming from both sides of the Vietnam War—that is, the pro-American South Vietnamese, the supporters of the Communist revolution, or those in between—many of us joyfully took part in those activities and were incredibly proud of becoming Uncle Ho's Good Children. I felt connected to students in other parts of Vietnam, even with the youth in other socialist nations, because we were engaged in similar activities and

were motivated to work hard in order to contribute to the process of reconstructing our state. The belief that other Vietnamese students and I were working together toward a common goal provided tremendous motivation for my dedication to many of Pioneer Organization's programs and activities.

Why did I feel as if other students, whom I had never seen before, were doing what I was doing and for the same cause? The connection I felt to the other students began to grow primarily due to studying from the same educational literature in the form of mandatory textbooks. The spreading of our textbooks in this case paralleled Anderson's (1983/2006) concept of "imagined communities," the idea that as people read printed literature written in a vernacular language (instead of elite languages, such as Latin), that is, promulgated by a capitalist marketplace, they understand one another, and their national consciousness emerges (Anderson, 1983/2006, pp. 39–46). In my case, textbooks could be seen as a form of printed literature available at the bookstores, and our parents had to purchase them so that we could go to school. School textbooks became the only readily available source of cultural and historical knowledge to students such as myself.

Under the Vietnamese state-controlled education system, all schools used the same set of textbooks censored by a central governmental body. We also interpreted what was written in these books according to the same set of guidelines. "Patriotic" literature, such as short stories, novels, poems, and documents related to the recent Communist victory, was infused and incorporated into our textbooks. Vietnamese students were expected to interpret those literary texts for moral lessons in a manner that would motivate them to become loyal to Uncle Ho and the VCP. Textbooks in Vietnam, therefore, "created unified fields of exchange and communication" (Anderson, 1983/2006, p. 44). Within those fields, we learned about thousands, even millions, of other Vietnamese youth who also worked hard on similar programs, thus creating a sense of unity that provided tremendous motivation for me to keep doing what I was doing with Pioneer Organization projects.

In the discussion about "compliance succession" in China, Skinner and Winckler (1969) propose three models of social control based on profit motivation, enforcement, and social norms. Profit motivation makes use of capital rewards to promote compliance; enforcement utilizes compulsion to ensure submission; and social norms resort to moral values or ideological standards to secure obedience (Skinner & Winckler, 1969, pp. 410–438).

At any time, as these authors claim, an authoritative body could adopt one or more of these methods to ensure social conformity. Referring to Skinner and Winckler's third model as "symbolic-ideological strategy," Verdery (1991, pp. 85–86) noticed that this strategy relies on a structure of deliberate encouragement, which includes "outright exhortations" and attempts to subdue the subject's alertness by overwhelming the person with "certain symbols and ideological premises," upon which additional figurative rewards may be built. Verdery continues to break this symbolic-ideological strategy down to a few more sub-divisions based on their connections to personal relationships, Marxist-Leninist class division, material satisfaction, and national ideology appeal. An example of the last sub-division strategy, as Verdery suggests, can be found in 1970s and 1980s Romania, where the nationalist rhetoric of "patriotism and sacrifice for the Nation" was widely adopted (Verdery, 1991, p. 86).

This symbolic-ideological strategy brings to mind the figurative award practice embraced throughout the school system in Vietnam. As indicated previously, to encourage student participation in Pioneer Organization's major projects, titles such as Small Plan Valiant Soldier and Small Plan Master were offered to those who met the requirements. I ended up with the Master award each year of being in the Pioneer Organization. The majority of our classmates and friends, as the interviewees in this research and I recall, mostly received the Valiant Soldier or Master awards. Despite being able to obtain the same prizes year after year, this award did not lose its appeal among us, mainly because of its strong tie with the nation-building rhetoric, which made many of us incredibly proud to participate in Pioneer Organization's activities.

These titles of Valiant Soldier and Master are examples of how Pioneer Organization used the symbolic-ideological strategy to influence students. In Vietnam, Valiant Soldier is an honor mostly conferred on a war hero. By calling students Valiant Soldiers for doing exceptionally well in the Small Plan, Pioneer Organization equated students' efforts to those of soldiers. In an era when memories of the war with the Americans were still fresh, this title possessed an honorable connotation and made us feel as if we were fearless combatants for the independence of Vietnam. *Kiện tướng* (Master), on the other hand, usually referred to a high-ranked chess player. In the mid-1980s, many world-class chess masters happened to be citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The Master title, therefore, evoked the feelings of being an international champion. Receiving the Master award for the first time, I thought I would soon

become an international competitor. I felt connected to the Soviet people, whom I admired very much but only saw in magazines.

The title of Master built on the title of Valiant Soldier. After becoming a Small Plan Valiant Soldier, many students continued to exert every effort to achieve the Master title. As one title led to another, this chain of succession motivated us to work harder and take part in more projects. Discussing our involvement in those projects in the past, my interlocutors and I were amazed at our obsession with earning these symbolic awards, striving for the highest titles without ever questioning why we did it. These titles worked as "symbol[s] and ideological premise[s]" (Verdery, 1991, p. 85) that suppressed our awareness, as we were overjoyed and proud of every little accomplishment. In this case, the symbolic-ideological strategy that Verdery has described worked within a recently developed cultural framework, in which the act of collecting recyclable materials was reframed as an act of patriotism, and the person who did the act became a highly regarded individual. In a school setting, this strategy allowed the Party to tie a large number of students to its ideological orientation: to support the Party, which was tantamount to the State.

The way in which the Communist Party exerted its influence on students by appealing to their patriotic sentiment through various school projects also offers an opportunity to revisit Foucault's theory of power. Pioneer Organization's reliance on a system of encouragement to handle youth resembled Foucault's (1972/1980) idea that power is not exercised simply as a force that demands unconditional obedience, as this type of power cannot be sustained. Rather, as Foucault (1972/1980) noticed, power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (p. 119). At Vietnamese elementary and middle schools, the Party established and used a system of honor, which offered titles and awards, such as Uncle Ho's Good Children or Small Plan Valiant Soldier/ Master, to ensure students' compliance with the Party's agenda. By making them feel special as if they were participating in a national movement, this system of reward generated enthusiasm, brought dignity, and created understanding while inducing voluntary compliance among Vietnamese youth.

A Memorable Childhood and a Proud Identity

Some readers might doubt the claim that Pioneer Organization's system rests on the notion of encouragement, pointing out that those who did not join Pioneer Organization were under pressure, admonished, or even

singled out during the weekly class meetings. Non-members were also constantly pressured to join the organization. The persuasion only stopped when these non-compliant students gave in and obtained membership. While all these points are valid, I maintain that in our school setting, coercion was never encouraged and Pioneer Organization relied more on positive motivation to keep the system going. The Flag Greeting ceremony every Monday always contained an important section of panegyric, during which the highest achieving classes, in terms of Pioneer Organization activities, were praised. Those who did not do well or did not meet the requirements, however, were not publicly condemned. Ridicule was almost unknown when it came to participating in Pioneer Organization. There were students who were occasionally chastised and asked to stand in front of everyone during the ceremony as a form of admonition, but this was mostly due to other offenses, most notably fighting with other students. Although I acknowledge that I have no way of knowing whether non-compliant students were documented for further review, no one whom I knew was ever expelled or punished for missing their Small Plan quota or for not participating in Pioneer Organization's projects.

One might suspect that punishment and ridicule did not surface simply because the socialist school system did not allow any form of sanction or applied such sanction sparingly. Contrary to this belief, disciplinary measures, including corporal punishment for disobedience or failing to do homework, happened to be the norms in my elementary school. In a school setting, non-compliance with the socialist propaganda, however, did not seem to be a serious offense. Coercion was unheard of. As long as there was no verbal attack on Ho Chi Minh, the Party, or the Marxist-Leninist ideology, Pioneer Organization's system relied extensively on deliberate encouragement.

The emphasis on behaving according to Uncle Ho's teachings explained why "The Most Beautiful Broom" had overtaken the cultural story and received the top prize at the story-telling contest. Celebrating Uncle Ho and the VCP in any possible way were taken as patriotic actions, which in turn contributed to the nation's progress in its "transition to socialism." Every event, movement, or project was explained in nationalistic terms to evoke patriotism and, therefore, excite students. Once fully immersed in the Good Children spirit and imbued with the jingoistic values that the VCP had laid out, students' participation in the Party's youth programs became voluntary, making childhood under socialism both thrilling and meaningful in a "correct" way and within the framework prepared and

prescribed by the Vietnamese Communist ideology. For me, taking part in Pioneer Organization's activities created the most jubilant and memorable moments in those school years. The rewards and titles I received have become part of my identity, which I will forever value and remain proud of.

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Tito's Last Pioneers and the Politicization of Schooling in Yugoslavia

Anna Bogic

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the education system in Yugoslavia underwent major reforms that were not only the result of the transition away from socialism but also a consequence of the violent disintegration of the country into several independent states. The transition from socialist to post-socialist schooling was often accompanied by a series of attempts to erase past practices and by a swift imposition of new ways of educating youth (see Silova, 2010). In this autoethnographic account of my education experiences, I explore a number of stories from my childhood and schooling in both socialist and post-socialist Yugoslavia as a way of remembering those past practices and analyzing their transformation against the background of the war events.

Autoethnography is a retrospective account of the author's own experiences, aiming to draw conclusions about the social world around the author and to "illustrate facets of cultural experience" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010; Mascia-Lees, 2011, p. 46). Simultaneously merging the past and the present, autoethnography "like other types of narrative, is never static, but is an inward journey that leads us through time, forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling" (Hamdan, 2012, p. 588). The act of remembering is "always under the influence of the present" (Bochner, 2007, p. 198). As Arthur Bochner (2007) observes,

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"When we make our stories, we have arrived at a conclusion about the past, some small truth that we want to establish about past events" (p. 203). As part of my search for meaning and sense-making, I revisit the past, carrying the baggage of the present knowledge: knowing what happened "after," together with the critical perspectives of scholarly literature about Yugoslavia and its violent disintegration.

My selection of details and particular stories is necessarily subjective and, as such, is intended to contribute to a general understanding of the ways in which my childhood and schooling unfolded through time, from 1987 to 1995 in Novi Sad, Serbia, as socialist Yugoslavia transitioned to post-socialism. More specifically, the essay attempts to illustrate the shift in the politicization of life inside and outside the school, from socialist politicization to war-time politicization. As I contrast the everyday life, I am concerned with the actions and reactions of students to the larger political events. These events introduced new ways of politicizing children, which differed from the socialist politicization of youth prior to the fall of communism in 1989. The passage of time and the accompanying wars of the 1990s have contributed to an erasure of certain schooling practices and the introduction of new ones, which significantly impacted children's identity formation. It is my hope that through this autoethnographic account, I will be able to illustrate the extent to which overarching ideologies and macro politics shaped everyday schooling experiences and rapidly shifted the politicization of children in the early 1990s.

It is important to note that socialism in Yugoslavia (1945–1991), the so-called self-managed market socialism, differed considerably from socialism in the Soviet Union and in its geopolitical sphere of influence in Eastern Europe (Estrin, 1991; Liotta, 2001). Beginning in 1948, Yugoslavia stood outside the Soviet sphere of influence and was a co-founder of the non-aligned movement with a number of other Third World countries. Moreover, it is essential to understand how Yugoslavia's iconic leader Josip Broz Tito, who led the country from 1945 until his death in 1980, shaped Yugoslav culture. Therefore, experiences recounted in this essay will invariably differ from schooling experiences in other socialist countries.

Writing some 25 years after the events, I cannot help but view my schooling years through the prism of the fall of communism and the start of the wars. The gravity of these events necessarily cuts my narration into before and after the fall of not only communism but also life as we knew it. Although I bifurcate my narrative in this way, I highlight a number of

continuities during this period, such as the politicization of children, albeit in a different form. The late 1980s led to this ideological "precipice" and the period when the last generation of Tito's pioneers or elementary school students, including myself, entered the socialist education system. These students of the 1980s belong to the same generation insofar as they are bound by the collective experience of the same events (Mannheim, 1978 quoted in Popović, 2013, p. 46). Moreover, the last generation of Tito's pioneers is one whose identity was significantly marked by the event of becoming a pioneer, that is, the moment when their status as *citizens* and Yugoslavs is symbolically confirmed and celebrated (Popović, 2013, pp. 46–47). Therefore, I divided my narration into two sections, the period from 1987 to 1990 and then from 1991 to 1995, where the year 1991 marks the beginning of the Yugoslav disintegration. For the last generation of Tito's pioneers, who knew Yugoslavia only as schoolchildren, their Yugoslav identity is largely an identity of their childhood.

Methodologically, the process of remembering my childhood and schooling was initially guided by seemingly simple questions such as: What was my daily routine like? What kind of uniforms did we wear and why? What did we celebrate? Well into the process of writing the essay, I realized that my choice of details and stories was deeply influenced by my emotional attachment to the past and my childhood. My narration reconstructed events and recomposed images from the past that were not random but were made to stand out by my affective investment in them. Although in retrospect, as I show in the first section below, the schooling practices and rituals before the wars were also infused with socialist ideology and politics, this political socialization process seemed "normal." This was the first worldview I encountered and also the one that inevitably served as the basis for all future comparisons. This autoethnographic account is an attempt to document both the shifts and continuities of schooling practices after the fall of socialism.

Nearing the Precipice: School Days Between 1987 and 1990

Becoming a Tito's Pioneer

In early September 1987, I was seven years old when I enrolled in grade one at my local elementary school in Novi Sad, Vojvodina. There were 32 of us, school friends, *drugari i drugarice*, arriving with our parents on

the first day of school. We were given a yellow scarf with a red triangle printed on it, a yielding traffic sign, as a way to make us more visible to car drivers when crossing streets. After three months, we were told the yellow scarf would be replaced by a red one, and we would become Tito's pioneers (*pioniri*). On November 29, 1987, the Day of the Republic (*Dan republike*), we swore the oath at the induction ceremony, all dressed in our pioneer uniforms: white blouses and navy blue skirts for girls and white dress shirts and navy blue pants for boys. We swore allegiance to Tito and were excited to join the ranks. Although I did not know who Tito was, I had seen his portrait in the school hallways and classrooms. I quickly learned that Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia's iconic leader and World War II hero, had passed away in 1980, the year I was born, but his legacy lived on to symbolically link us in "brotherhood and unity."[1]

Our uniform also included *Titovka*, a blue hat with a little red star, named after Tito, and was worn proudly by seven-year-old students who sensed that this day and this celebration carried great importance. We stood in the center of the school's celebration hall (*svečana sala*) as more than 150 voices repeated the words of the oath in unison:

"Danas, kada postajem pionir,	"Today, as I become a Pioneer,
dajem časnu pionirsku reč	I give my Pioneer's word of honour
da ću marljivo učiti i raditi,	That I shall study and work diligently,
poštovati roditelje i starije,	respect parents and my seniors,
i biti veran i iskren drug, koji drži datu reč.	and be a loyal and honest comrade/friend.
Da ću voleti našu samoupravnu domovinu Socijalističku Federativnu Republiku Jugoslaviju,	That I shall love our homeland, self-managed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.
da ću razvijati bratstvo i jedinstvo	That I shall promote brotherhood and unity
i ideje za koje se borio drug Tito;	and the principles for which comrade Tito fought.
da ću ceniti sve ljude sveta	And that I shall value all peoples of the world
koji žele slobodu i mir!"	who respect freedom and peace!"[a]

[a]English translation found in the Wikipedia entry. Accessed June 30, 2016 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_of_Pioneers_of_Yugoslavia

Not surprisingly, there was nothing unrealistic about such a promise to a seven-year-old. It may have even instilled in us an early sense of values and ethics. For decades, young pioneers had been reciting their commitment to brotherhood, unity, and peace as the Union of Pioneers of Yugoslavia (*Savez pionira Jugoslavije*) was first established in 1942.

The group's members included students from grades one to seven, who through this organization would automatically become members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Popović, 2013, p. 11). It is only in hindsight, after a brutal and violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, that the oath and its ideals seem like a cruel exercise in cynicism. Still, my schooling experience remains inextricably linked to the oath, the white, blue, and red uniform, and the ceremonies dedicated to Tito.

The last generation of pioneers swore their oath on November 29, 1989, just two years later. Milica Popović (2013) calls those Yugoslavs born between 1974 and 1982 as the last generation of pioneers. The nostalgia for former Yugoslavia, or the so-called Yugonostalgia, is for this last generation of Tito's pioneers not simply a nostalgia for an old way of life, since we were too young to live the socialist life to the fullest, but more a legitimation of an identity forged in childhood and whose future never materialized (Popović, 2013, p. 77). It is this impossibility of a "pioneer" future imagined at the age of seven that has generated a tremendous amount of melancholic sadness. Milla Mineva (2014), writing on Bulgaria and communist nostalgia, offers another interpretation of nostalgia:

> What do the "nostalgic" memories of communism tell us? They are set against the background of constantly growing discontent with "the transition" and citizens' refusal to participate in politics to help formulate and build a collective future. We can understand the nostalgic narrative as a form of radical critique whose purpose is not to reconstruct the past, but to construct publicly legitimate alternatives to the present. (p. 173)

In the case of Serbia, Yugonostalgia can serve a similar purpose given the considerable discontent of the country's citizens with the so-called transition to democracy (Bonfiglioli, 2013; Petrović, 2010). Yugonostalgia is then not so much a desire to revive the past but rather a critique of the present and a platform for imagining a better future.

In the Classroom

In 1987, our school still practiced the pioneer induction ceremonies and continued, although not for long, with the communist tradition. There were five classes of approximately 30 students. With a few exceptions, the student composition in my class remained unchanged for the entire eight years. The structure of the schooling system meant that we spent every

single day of every school year together. We were together on the first day of school in 1987, and we graduated together eight years later in 1995.

As a child, I did not question the school setup or the rhythm of my schooling. I only once asked my father why half of the school's student body attended school in the morning while the other half attended in the afternoon. I was told that it was to save space. In fact, my world and friendships were restricted to students in my grade and my class, as different ages were strictly kept apart. One week, classes took place in the morning, while the following week we attended school in the afternoon and had the mornings off. My schedule alternated in this way throughout the entire eight years.[2]

In our geography class, we learned about Yugoslavia and its unique beauty, we were told, from the southernmost republic of Macedonia to Slovenia in the northwest, and including four other republics in between: Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Montenegro.[3] The patriotic pride in our country "that had it all" was popularized by a song whose lyrics we knew well—*od Vardara do Triglava*—from Vardar (a river in Macedonia) to Triglav (the highest mountain peak in Slovenia), highlighting the country's expanse. We admired our homeland's size and diversity, its mountains and seacoasts, as well as its nations and nationalities, or *narodi* and *narodnosti*. Its geographic diversity and elevated international status gave it *grandeur*: "It was the most beautiful country in the world" (Popović, 2013, p. 76; my translation).[4] We stared at the blackboard-sized maps of our country hanging in the geography classroom, studied all its rivers, towns, and valleys, and memorized the contours of its borders.

In the Serbo-Croatian class, we wrote our notes, assignments, and dictations in Cyrillic script one week and in the Latin alphabet another. We immersed in the classics of Yugoslav children's literature such as poetry by Desanka Maksimović and novels by Branko Ćopić, among many others. In Ćopić's classic *Eagles Fly Early* (*Orlovi rano lete*, 1959), we encountered a group of village children who, due to the immanent World War II, were forced to grow up prematurely in the wake of violence and fighting. Little did we know that for many children in Yugoslavia, history was to repeat itself.

Our history class spent much time on World War II and the battles between the Nazi Germans and the unbeatable partisans led by Tito. History textbooks abounded in photos of Tito and war heroes. In the late 1980s, Yugoslav historian Lydia Sklevicky showed just how little attention was paid to women and their roles in history. In her groundbreaking study

of Yugoslav history textbooks entitled *More Horses Than Women*, Sklevicky (1989) argued that the communist government had contributed to the "historical invisibility of women" and had erased the "pre-revolutionary feminist tradition" (pp. 70–71). Sklevicky (1989) revealed that history books used in the sixth grade contained 1872 images, of which only 42 depicted women. In comparison, 1483 were images of men and 342 were animals, mostly horses (p. 69). Anywhere between zero to less than two percent of named individuals in a survey of history textbooks were women, despite the fact that women formed 34 percent of all World War II partisan combatants (Sklevicky, 1989, p. 74). However, at the time, we were told that men and women were equal in socialist Yugoslavia, and my school experiences left me with no single incident that suggested otherwise.[5] It would not be until many years later as a student in Canada that I would discover Yugoslav feminist circles and the writings of the 1980s, which contested the government's claim that women's emancipation had been accomplished.[6] This largely urban and academic burgeoning feminist movement (Stojčić, 2009) critiqued socialist patriarchy, but its message could not find a place in mainstream discourses.

In the physical education class, we learned to play sports in another uniform: white, short-sleeved shirts, paired with blue shorts for boys and red shorts for girls. Our gender was effectively color-coded. The blue-white-red color theme, which was also featured in our Yugoslav flag, provided a color palette for our daily lives and practices, not only in celebrations but also in our uniforms. We learned that the blue in the flag symbolized the sky, the white stood for freedom, and the red represented the blood shed by the country's partisans during World War II. The yellow-bordered red star in the middle of the tricolor flag symbolized communism. In this way, like many other countries, socialist Yugoslavia also articulated "the myth of a homeland/fatherland/motherland, metaphysically wedded to blood, sweat, and soil" (Silova, Mead Yaqub, & Palandjian, 2014, p. 123).

We wrote dictations in our language class, solved math problems on the blackboard in front of the class, and were regularly singled out for unannounced oral exams (*usmeni*) in front of others. We dreaded these exams and often felt shamed and exposed. Standing up, we recited whatever we could remember while our comrade or *drug* sitting next to us scanned the textbook for answers, waiting for a perfect moment to whisper them. Teachers sometimes caught this trickery, but those *drugs* who failed to help were often accused of disloyalty. It was understood that we would assist each other even if that meant getting caught. Friendship, *drugarstvo*, was supposed to come before all else.

Our life inside and outside the school was punctuated by a number of taken-for-granted celebrations throughout the year, which drew heavily upon the approved communist ideology and history, or what some scholars have referred to as "civil religion" (Archer, Duda, & Stubbs, 2016,p. 4). We celebrated the Day of the Republic on November 29—a holiday marking the birth of the "socialist Yugoslavia" in 1943—with school celebrations and yearly induction ceremonies for new pioneers, dressed in our tricolored uniforms and proudly wearing our *Titovka* hats. In December and January, we enjoyed our three-week "winter break" where the highlights were January 1 and the New Year's parties with families and friends. Due to a communist refashioning of religious holidays and customs, Santa Claus brought gifts on January 1 instead of December 25, and few of us talked of Christmas.[7] On March 8, the International Women's Day, we gave our mothers red carnations and recited poems written in their honor. On May 1, Labor Day, thousands of workers across the country marched in celebration of workers' rights and sang "Long Live Labour!" (*Da nam živi živi rad!*). On May 25, Day of Youth (*Dan mladosti*), my elementary school joined in the country-wide celebration of Tito's birthday. Up until 1988, even after Tito's death in 1980, this day used to be celebrated with a symbolic national race where thousands of youth and workers ran across the country in the so-called Relay of Youth, handing a baton with a birthday pledge to Tito. While Tito was still alive, he would receive the baton and the birthday wishes from the Yugoslav youth at a grand ceremony, akin to the opening ceremony of the Olympics, held at a soccer stadium in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia. This elaborate ceremony was abolished in 1987 upon the initiative of the Slovene Youth Organization, one of the most liberal youth organizations in the former Yugoslavia (Dević, 1997, p. 133).

The fact that most people throughout Yugoslavia regularly participated in these events and continued to do so even after Tito's death contributed to the construction of an "imagined community" and the notion of shared national goals (Anderson, 1983; Yurchak, 1997). As Alexei Yurchak (1997) argues, within the Soviet context of late socialism, "whether or not one consciously believed in the officially proclaimed goals was less important than the act of participating in routine official practices, perceived as inevitable" (p. 168). However, a landslide of changes was soon to follow, exposing the fragility of such "imagined communities."

The Fall: School Days Between 1991 and 1995

The year 1989 is widely considered to be the watershed year in Eastern Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the first multi-party elections, and monumental regime changes in many socialist countries. In Yugoslavia, the late 1980s were marked by a series of economic crises and social unrest, as well as the withering of institutional networks (Archer et al., 2016; Bunce, 1999; Dević, 1997). However, the so-called transition to democracy, or rather a transition away from socialism (Watson, 2000, p. 186), a process that was well underway in Eastern Bloc countries, was stalled in Yugoslavia by a violent disintegration which began in the winter of 1991. As Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence from the Yugoslavia in 1991 and 1992, brutal conflicts engulfed the country.[8] While the military combat and fighting did not take place in Serbia, starting in 1991, my family, like most of the people living in Serbia, witnessed a growing social, economic, and political crisis. The material effects were immediate, with mass lay-offs, privatization, militarization, and a general mutation of government institutions and leadership from socialist to overtly nationalist formations (Papić, 1999). At the time, I could not comprehend these macro-level changes as such. As a 12-year-old, I saw the empty shelves in local grocery stores (particularly during the embargo and international community's economic sanctions against Serbia in the attempt to stop the war in Bosnia),[9] street demonstrations, a sense of uncertainty, hushed and tense conversations between my grandparents and my parents, and images of military combat and dead bodies on television.

As I delve into these memories now, more than 20 years after their occurrence, the rupture between the "old" system and the "new" mutations seems incredibly violent. The social upheaval was so disorienting and consuming that the entire value-system underwent an almost complete transformation, and our everyday life became inextricable from the larger political agendas of the state. When writing on post-socialist nostalgia and commenting on a form of a disavowal of socialist values both in the former Eastern Europe and Western Europe, Chiara Bonfiglioli (2011) uncovers the ways in which "once meaningful and enthusiastic declarations" during communist times now appeared "only as empty ideological slogans" (p. 124). The paradigmatic shift, seen in the almost complete abandonment of socialist ideology, can also be detected in the more recent times as rejection and ridicule (but also heartwarming nostalgia for some) of the past, highly valorized practices, such as the pioneers' oath to Tito and the blue, white, and red uniforms.[10]

However, the first signs of the impact of growing uncertainty and nationalist discourses on our everyday school life started to appear immediately after Slovenia held a referendum in December 1990 and chose to leave the Yugoslav federation. In class, we began to debate among ourselves whether Slovenia had the right to leave. Our teachers unsuccessfully pleaded with us to stop talking politics, arguing that we were too young for it. When one of our classmates announced that she was leaving Serbia with her family and moving to Slovenia, the discussion turned to her "ethnicity" and her Slovenian last name. Some students boycotted her farewell party.

Retrospectively, the changes that followed seem like a landslide of never-ending reforms that were meant to re-form our views of the world and serve as a corrective to what were now defunct modes of thinking. Our childhood innocence protected us from the harshness of the general social unrest and helped us weather the changes more easily. We simply could not comprehend the sheer historical and symbolic significance behind the new policies and events. As the country was disintegrating on the political scene and military conflicts spread from Slovenia to Croatia and then to Bosnia, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ceased to exist.

When the new school year began in September 1991, I was in grade five, and suddenly all that I had learned in previous years lost meaning. "Our" country no longer stretched from Vardar to Triglav. Slovenia and Croatia had declared independence in June of 1991, followed by Macedonia in September of the same year. As the year went by, it became increasingly difficult to talk about "our" country in history and geography classes. And in April 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina also declared independence, shifting the borders again. The remaining republics, Serbia and Montenegro, formed a "new" and much smaller Yugoslavia. The old geography maps were removed from our classrooms and the new ones hung. We studied the borders of this newly formed rump state with much less enthusiasm and patriotic pride. All the statistics about the country's demographics, administrative regions, and capital cities had to be relearned. The name of the capital city of Montenegro was no longer Titograd (literally, Tito's city) but changed back to Podgorica, as it was known before 1946 when it was renamed by the communist government to honor Tito. Schools and streets in Novi Sad and elsewhere named after Tito and other communist heroes were either reverted to pre-World War II names or assigned new ones in a brusque move to break away from communist icons and speed up the erasure of what now seemed to be unpleasant reminders of old ideologies.

In her work on post-Yugoslav societies and the politics of memory, Tanja Petrović (2012) argues that the need to change names (e.g., of institutions and geographic places) is motivated by the attempt to erase the past and to turn socialist Yugoslavia into a "historical object" which has a beginning and, importantly, an *end* (p. 106). Petrović (2012) suggests that many post-socialist European countries have participated in the so-called process of "blowing up the past" (*dizanje prošlosti u vazduh*) (Todorova, 2010a quoted in Petrović, 2012, p. 106), but that because of the wars of the 1990s, this process was particularly intense on the territories of former Yugoslavia. Constructing a new nation and creating a sense of belonging to it requires that the members of this nation share the same narratives not only of memory but also of *forgetting* (Anderson, 1983; Popović, 2013, p. 33).

The word "socialist" in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was dropped, and pioneers and oath ceremonies no longer had a place in the new rump state of Yugoslavia or elsewhere in the successor states. The politics of nationalism and militarization trickled into the schools by changing what we were studying. Our language teacher now taught "Serbian" class, and not "Serbo-Croatian." We no longer alternated between the Cyrillic letters and the Latin alphabet—our teachers mostly focusing on the Cyrillic.

One teacher was assigned the task of collecting information on our nationality. We were instructed to find out from our parents "what" we were. Maja Korać (1998) writes, quoting one of her interviewees in her study of ethno-nationalism and Yugoslavia:

> I mean no one ever gave it a thought before. We couldn't make out who was Serb, Muslim or Croat by the names […] Nobody paid any attention to that. That's the way it was until the parties [national parties] started separating […] That's when I first heard Serb, Croat and Muslim in that environment. The children started asking after school: "Mummy, what nationality are we?" (p. 92)

We all made sure to ask our parents about our nationality and duly reported it to the teacher in class in front of others. Three students, whose parents were of mixed Serbian and Hungarian nationality, declared that they were "Yugoslav," to which the teacher awkwardly replied that such a category no longer existed.[11] They now had to choose one or the other nationality.

Politics were now permanently entrenched in our everyday interactions with the teachers and among ourselves. The news was all around us, whether on television, newspapers, or endless discussions between our parents in the kitchen. We regularly worried about the skyrocketing hyperinflation that had engulfed the country's economy and made worthless whatever little pocket money we had. When the "new dinar" was introduced by the Yugoslav government (i.e., Serbia and Montenegro) in January 1994, one entire math class was consumed in the debates of how long this new currency would last. The "new dinar" (*novi dinar*) was the fifth attempt by the government to put a stop to the second highest and second longest hyperinflation in economic history (Petrović, Bogetić, & Vujošević, 1999, p. 336).

In addition to geography, history, and Serbian classes, whose content was constantly being updated by the Ministry of Education in an attempt to align with the dominant politics of the day, our language classes suffered as well. By September 1991 and grade five, we were to start learning a second language, or the so-called first foreign language. While Russian was never a compulsory subject in socialist Yugoslav schools (Medgyes, 1997, pp. 187–188) and the Soviet-Yugoslav official relations waxed and waned during the Cold War, most of my parents' generation, the so-called posleratna generacija or the "post-war" generation, learned Russian in elementary schools. In the 1980s, about half of the students in my Novi Sad elementary school studied Russian from grades five to eight.[12] By the time it was my generation's turn to learn a second language, those parents whose children were assigned Russian by the school's administration in 1991 protested against the decision. Some parents even transferred their children to a different school in their refusal to see their children study "a useless" language. There was a consensus that English was what everyone wanted to learn since it was viewed as the lingua franca of the present and the future—the language of modernity and prosperity. After much insistence on the part of the parents, the school's administration canceled all Russian classes, and the one remaining Russian teacher lost his job. From now on, all grades were to study English. It was a decisive loss for the "old" ways of life; much like the "former" Yugoslavia, Russian was now also a "former" language.

As military conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia intensified, thousands of refugees arrived in Novi Sad either to stay with family and relatives or in refugee centers. The conflicts dragged on and parents began to enroll their children in schools. In 1993, in a rare move by the school's administration, my

elementary school added another class of 30 students, many of whom were refugee children. Refugee children escaping the war zones in Croatia and Bosnia began to integrate as fast as they could. They often very quickly adapted their accents and dialects to the local Novi Sad way of speaking in an effort not to stand out and to avoid harassment by the less welcoming locals. As children, we still managed to maintain a sense of purpose and joy in our daily school activities. School remained the one constant in our rapidly changing lives, providing some sense of continuity and stability amidst growing uncertainty.

Finally, as the situation worsened, some of my school friends began to move abroad, almost exclusively to Western countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and Western Europe. Waves of emigration intensified in 1994 and 1995 from all territories of former Yugoslavia, including Serbia. An estimated 500,000 young Serbian graduates and professionals emigrated between 1991 and 1997 (Dević, 1997, p. 132). My parents followed suit, and in 1995 we left for western Canada. But not everyone felt that leaving the country was the best solution. After a two-month stay in California with his parents, my best friend declared that "the American way of life was not for him." He and his parents had found big highways and suburban houses stifling and decided to return to Serbia, determined to pull through the crisis.

Conclusion

The disintegration of the country led to a mutation of the education system, which was quick to erase former ideologies and assert new ways of interpreting the society. In contrast to my parents' generation, our youth and innocence helped protect us from the harsh impacts of dizzying changes and unrelenting instability. Although we simply could not grasp the full implications of the events, Yugoslavia's violent disintegration split our childhood into the before and after, idealizing to an extent the pre-war period. A sense of loss of stability and the increasing politicization of our everyday life on ethnic grounds—both in and outside the school—left the impression that our childhood was ending and that we were entering maturity as we engaged more deeply with the politics of ethnicity and war. The political socialization in schools of the pre-war period was quickly erased; shrouded in ambiguity, it was vilified by some, idealized by others.

As I have shown above, schooling practices in socialist and post-socialist periods were informed by particular political standpoints that gave shape and color to our lives both inside and outside the school. In the case of Yugoslavia, the transition from socialism to post-socialism was inextricably linked to the disintegration of the country, and the schooling practices became a vivid expression of the mutation of the wider political system. By exploring my memories of the school days in this period of reforms, I hope to have contributed to documenting some of the schooling practices that left an indelible mark not only on our education but also on our sense of identity. As Popović (2013) concludes, "Yugoslav identity is still alive, in memories, feelings, and political expression" even though this Yugoslav identity has since acquired vastly different meanings since it was conceived under Tito (p. 79; my translation).[14] Importantly, while the wider political events produced consequences that seeped through and influenced institutional practices, we as young students also reacted to these changes. For Tito's last pioneers, the shift in politicization processes in the early 1990s in many ways negated the lessons learned and the identity built just a few years prior in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, in both socialist and post-socialist periods, our active participation in celebrations, events, and political debates testified to our willingness to engage as citizens and young political agents. Finally, the experiences of Tito's last pioneers confirmed the far-reaching ability of political systems to shape schooling practices and childhood identities.

Notes

1. "Brotherhood and unity" ("bratstvo i jedinstvo") was a popular slogan of the Communist Party of the former Yugoslavia, which was also enshrined in the 1974 Yugoslav constitution.
2. Mixed-grade classes did not exist, although they were common in village schools, particularly before World War II when the village teacher ("seoski učitelj") was tasked with the elementary education of all the village children.
3. For an analysis of the role of schools in the building of multicultural national imaginary and the use of textbooks, see Silova et al. (2014) and Millei and Imre (2015).
4. The text was originally written in French. One of Popović's interviewees exclaims: "c'était le plus beau pays du monde" (Popović, 2013, p. 76).
5. See Woodward (1985) for an analysis of the significant gap between women's rights and women's daily reality in socialist Yugoslavia.

6. Some of these works include Božinović (1996), Papić (1989), Sklevicky (1989), and Drakulić (1984), Mladjenović (n.d.), among others.
7. Today, Santa Claus brings gifts on January 7 which is Christmas Day for Orthodox Serbians. December 25 is Christmas Day for Catholics in Serbia and elsewhere.
8. For a brief overview of the history of communist and post-communist events, see Baskin and Pickering (2011).
9. For more on the reasoning behind and the effects of the economic sanctions, see Woodward (1995).
10. When a group of high-school students from Pakrac, Croatia, dressed up as Tito's pioneers and walked through the town in February 2016, some locals reported them to the authorities. Subsequently, the students issued an apology. Accessed July 4, 2016. http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/novosti/hrvatska/clanak/id/302838/srednjoskolce-u-pakracu-prijavili-policiji-jer-su-se-maskirali-u-tita-jovanku-i-pionire; http://www.compas.com.hr/clanak/3/1942/tito-i-pioniri-proetali-pakracom.html
11. The "Yugoslav" nationality, distinguished by quotation marks from Yugoslav citizenship, was originally introduced in the 1971 census. For an interpretation of ethnic relations, demographics, and population policies in socialist Yugoslavia, see Besemeres (1980).
12. Two or three out of the five separate classes were usually assigned English, while the remaining classes would be required to learn Russian. My class was assigned English.
13. The text was originally written in French: "L'identité yougoslave reste toujours vivante, dans la mémoire, dans les sentiments et dans l'expression politique […]" (Popović, 2013, p. 79).

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Hair Bows and Uniforms: Entangled Politics in Children's Everyday Lives

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Participation in adult-initiated political processes, such as pioneer organizations or summer labor camps, was an everyday part of children's lives in socialist societies. In research, however, children and politics were mostly considered in the framework of political socialization (Connell, 1987). This perspective was shared by researchers on both sides of the Iron Curtain, who viewed children as receptacles of political norms, values, and behaviors acceptable and desirable in a political system (Kallio & Häkli, 2011; Mead & Silova, 2013; Millei, 2011; Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2010). The top-down view of political socialization positioned children as passive objects, failing to consider children's subjectivity, agency, and the politics of everyday life (Connell, 1987; Kallio, 2014).

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It was only with the emergence of the "new sociology of childhood" during the 1990s that children's role in society has been reevaluated, recognizing their active participation. Researchers reframed their understanding of children and politics and began exploring how children participate in shaping institutions, themselves, and others while accepting that children are simultaneously socialized into numerous societal institutions and roles (for example, Kallio & Häkli, 2011; Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2013). Shifting the focus away from adult-created domains of politics, researchers have turned to explore children's "mundane lives as permeated by politics in which they have their own positions and roles" (Kallio & Häkli, 2011, p. 21). Highlighting the constitutive nature of politics and positioning of children as minors, Kallio and Häkli (2011, p. 27) have suggested studying children's political lives as they gradually "take their places as full members of their communities and societies … and rehearse certain kinds of subjectivities and agencies" as political actors. From this perspective, children's political worlds are intertwined with adults' political worlds in "ordinary life" (Taylor, 1989), where children perform "banal practices" in relation to institutions, media, and their peer culture that can gain political charge (Kallio & Häkli, 2011, p. 104).

Using this perspective as a starting point, we are interested in those spaces of children's lives that fall outside of "official" political spheres. Philo and Smith (2003) differentiate between "P"olitics and "p"olitics (or macro- and micropolitics), where "P"olitics refers to political arenas created by adults in which children participate, whereas "p"olitics is a child-generated arena. Importantly, Philo and Smith (2003) separate personal politics from macropolitics. Personal politics entail the struggle to gain power over one's immediate conditions of existence. Micropolitics is not individualistic. It is based on how groups of people act together. Children's micropolitics resonate with "their own perceptions, stories, hopes and fears" (Philo & Smiths, 2003, p. 109). In this way, "the choice available at school lunches, the attempt to introduce compulsory school uniforms, or even the organisation of the school playground are, in this respect, just as "political" as what goes on in parliament" (Buckingham, 2000, p. 204). Buckingham (2000) also warns against the premature collapse of personal politics with micropolitics. Personal politics could meet the criteria of micropolitics if connected with experiences of other social groups, for example, when one's personal worries intersect with similar worries by a group of other people. In this chapter, we explore children's negotiations of their everyday lives—their personal and micropolitics—in preschools and primary schools in Hungary and three parts of the former Soviet Union (Latvia, Russia, and Ukraine).

We focus on school uniforms, and more particularly the ribbons in girls' hair called *bantiki* in Russian, *bante* in Latvian, and *masni* in Hungarian. Despite having grown up in different geographic and temporal contexts—Zsuzsa in Hungary, Iveta in Latvia, Nelli in Karelia, and Elena in Ukraine—our memories of the bows resonated with one another. We use our memories to disentangle when and how our actions of tying and wearing (or not) the bows—as a part and ritual of our becoming schoolgirls—fused with the politics of everyday life. We use the term "schoolgirl" in a broader sense to denote children in institutions, kindergartens, and primary schools. Our aim is to show how these banal objects—hair bows—as well as the discourses and practices associated with them, afforded potentialities for our political subjectivities to unfold. In addition, the focus on the bows enables us to reveal the manifold ways in which an everyday object and practice can become differently political in various geopolitical and personal settings. In what follows, we first introduce the historical contexts within which we undertake our analysis and then explain our approach of working with collective biography to explore the multiple ways in which we participated in the dynamics of everyday life and politics.

Creating Memory Stories of Our Childhoods: Context and Methodological Approach

Everyday life in different socialist societies and during various time periods was far from uniform, and we had diverse experiences of participating in schooling. The first period of state socialism (1948–1970s) in Hungary resulted in a demographic change where most women of working age were engaged in full-time wage labor, and the proportion of women at almost every level of the educational system reached that of men (Corrin, 1993). During the second period (1970s–1989), or reform socialism, the state withdrew partially from the economic realm (Lampland, 1996). This opening up of the "second-economy" and the diversification of economic and social practices, such as partial commodification (Lampland, 1996), became influential in education as well. An increasingly flexible curriculum was created, ideological practices were relaxed, and teachers gained increased autonomy (Millei & Imre, 2010).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, education institutions in Latvia, Ukraine, and Karelia were largely driven by the Soviet standardization policies and practices (often referred to as *Russification* and *Sovietization*), which were visible in strictly standardized curriculum, buildings, and uniforms. During

the Soviet period, Karelia constituted an autonomous republic of the Russian Republic (RSFSR) while Latvia and Ukraine were two of the 15 Soviet Republics. In the mid- and late-1980s, schools saw some fundamental changes as a result of Gorbachev's initiated *perestroika* (reconstruction) and *glasnost* (openness, public discussion). In Soviet Latvia, these reforms roughly coincided with the "national awakening" (*atmoda* in Latvian). Across the Soviet Union, this period brought the revival of national identities, as well as minority languages and cultures, eventually leading to the independence of Latvia and Ukraine in 1991. These changes were accompanied with the increasing questioning of the fundamental assumptions of the Soviet education system, particularly its ideological nature and a lack of child-centeredness and critical thinking (see Webber, 2000; also Janmaat & Piattoeva, 2007). During this period, schools underwent major reforms, including the loosening of the previously imposed standards and eventually revamping the school curriculum and culture. Finally, independent from the influence of the Soviet empire, the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union (including Russia, Latvia, and Ukraine) and Hungary found themselves to be a part of the new project of Western (European) democracy and market economy (Silova, 2010).

In this chapter, we look back at our personal memories of everyday childhoods through collective biography. In collective biography, memory stories and their interpretations are produced in the intersubjective spaces of participants and in the interrelations between participants' presents and pasts. Thus, we cannot and do not claim the position of the neutral observer of our lived experiences. In researching our own memories, the subject and object of our research are collapsed (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012). All four of us currently live and work in contexts vested with modern Anglo-American conceptions of the self. Thus, the "re-membering" of our memory stories is necessarily shaped by these life experiences and particular scientific worldviews we have developed through our academic training.

By engaging in this collective biography, we strive "to know differently, through … [our] own remembered past and the past of others" (Davies, 2000, p. 187 cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 33). We do not claim that the stories we produce reflect objective truths. The "truth" that emerges in these stories does not serve to validate the veracity of one's experience but functions as "a means to provide knowledge about the ways in which individuals are made social, are discursively constituted in particular fleshy moments" (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4). Claims to knowledge

emerge in the in-between spaces of memories where something surprising disrupts the usual way of thinking and poses questions to reexamine the taken-for-granted views about everyday life (Davies & Gannon, 2006). We reject notions of identity as a set of characteristics or a fundamental substance of a person. By following post-structural approaches, we understand identity not as an expression of what one is but something that one does, that is, for the analysis here, acts of negotiating everyday life. In this way, collective biography rejects a "fixed identity" and "linear developmental understanding" of persons, including their political becomings (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p. 2) and joins efforts of resisting the proposition of a "socialist self" that we as children supposedly "fashioned, inhabited and exhibited" (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2008, p. 985).

We participated in repeated collective biography workshops (Davies & Gannon, 2006, 2012), which were conducted both online and in person to share our memory stories. We refined these initial stories through recurring discussions, during which we asked each other for clarifications, and through the exploration of the affective and sensory aspects of our memories. As we connected through our memories, we also helped each other to avoid clichés and nostalgia. Sharing memory stories facilitated dialogues and the generation of more memory stories.

We analyzed our memory stories as discursive products through post-structural discourse analysis with a sensitivity to material actors that we borrowed from Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005). ANT helps to train "researcher's perceptions and perceptiveness, senses and sensitivity" (Mol, 2010, pp. 261–262). As part of girls' uniform, we understood the hair bow as an object, a mediator that has the capacity to "transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning or the elements [it is] supposed to carry (Latour, 2007 [2005], p. 39). Understanding the meanings of the bow this way "open[s] up the possibility of seeing, hearing, sensing and then analysing the social life of things—and thus of caring about, rather than neglecting them" (Mol, 2010, p. 255). Actors—human and non-human—join with other actors to form networks, acquiring meanings through associations and relations. In our analysis, we aimed to answer the following questions: How did we negotiate our everyday lives in preschool related to the bows, and how could we understand those actions as political? How did we make sense of the bows and available discourses (ideological, mundane, or other)? By revealing an entanglement of discursive and material body work, memory stories open ways to generate understandings and analyses of macrosocial processes.

The "P"/"p"olitics of School Uniforms and Bows

Although the bow appeared differently in our memories, it was a part of our everyday lives. Girls either wore bows or not; but when they did not wear them, they often felt their absence, so bows shaped their experiences:

In preschool *she was expected to wear bows in her hair. She never had long hair and rarely wore big puffy bows. On special occasions, all girls were expected to wear white bows, and she vaguely remembers longing—if only fleetingly—for bows just like the other girls.*

Remembering the bow is not easy. The first thought that comes to her mind concerns school pictures: a group photo in school uniform with a ponytail and a big bow, or another picture on the first day of school in grade one. She is dressed in a funny red, furry coat with her hair braided and two big bows woven in the braids. There is one more picture taken on that first day of school, but this time by a professional photographer (see photo in Fig. 1). *In this picture, she sits next to a globe, with colorful autumn leaves spread over the desk and a primer in her hands. The two braids were her usual hairstyle because it was the only one her mother could manage on a busy morning before leaving for work. On regular*

Fig. 1   A girl with a white apron and bows
Source: From Nelli Piattoeva's family archives

days, the braids would be kept together with a simple invisible elastic band, but on special occasions, a white bow would replace or supplement the band. She never wore black or brown bows reserved for regular school days. But she always wore the white bows for celebrations and official school photos.

The emergence of hair bows as an official part of a Soviet school uniform dates back to the end of the 1940s, reflecting an attempt by the Soviet education authorities to encourage a "gender-determined dress" in Soviet Russia (Kelly, 2007, p. 379). Initially, bows were small, modest ribbons woven in girls' hair—white ribbons used for special occasions and dark (usually brown or black ribbons) used in everyday school life. However, as the Soviet economy grew after World War II, so did hair bows. They quickly developed from small silk ribbons carefully woven into girls' hair to huge puffy gauze bows placed on top of their heads (see photo in Fig. 3). Commonly found across the Soviet republics (although less so in the socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe), these bows became a symbol of the idealized Soviet childhood, projecting the

Figs. 2 and 3 A girl photographed twice on the same picture day—with and without a bow
Source: From Iveta Silova's family archives

images of national prosperity, progress, and happiness. When America's youngest goodwill ambassador, a ten-year old Samantha Smith, visited the Soviet Union in the early 1980s at the invitation of Yuri Andropov, hair bows were used by the Soviet media to distinguish a Soviet child from an American one. As one of the Soviet reporters covering Samantha Smith's trip to the USSR recalls, "big white bows turned out to be Samantha's soft spot. She has never worn bows like this in the US. Soviet pioneer girls were seriously competing for and standing in lines for several days to get an opportunity to tie Samantha's bows. Some never had a chance …." (Noviye Izvestiia, 2013).

Hair bows were present everywhere: "model girls in posters, magazine photographs, and paintings always had their *bantiki*" (Kelly, 2007, p. 379). They also appeared in children's books, poems, movies, and even on wall murals inside school and preschool buildings (see photo in Fig. 1 as example: a book cover with a girl wearing the bow). Beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, in countries such as Hungary, the popularity of bows was less pronounced. Bows were mostly part of celebratory events, communist celebrations, and school events, such as receiving end-of-year certificates (Géczy, 2010). Bows appeared as part of uniforms for *kis dobos* ("small drummer" in grades one to four) and *úttörő* ("path breaker" or "pioneer" starting from grade five) and were usually displayed in long hair. Bows were tied from white ribbons and were connected to socialist ideology (Géczy, 2010). Géczy (2010) examined photos of children during the socialist era in Hungary and found that schoolgirls mostly appeared with short hair, as the memory story below demonstrates, and without bows in most pictures from the 1970s. The disappearance of bows as part of Hungarian uniforms happened at the same time as clothing in general became more simple to accommodate changing behavioral standards (Valuch, 2002) and during a shift toward liberalization in many spheres of life.

The bows in girls' hair were a part of the school uniform in most contexts, thus serving as a mechanism of political socialization. While school uniforms promoted egalitarianism, they also helped to normalize, unify, and discipline the bodies and conducts of children, making children "docile" for schooling (Kamler, 1994; Meadmore & Symes, 1997). By wearing the uniform (including bows), children took up the subject position of a "pupil" defined in a standard of norms (Kamler, 1994). The ritual of tying the bow or losing the possibility of wearing the bow came also with physical pain and strong emotions:

She had short hair only when she was very little. Around the age of four, her hair started getting longer. At first, when the family had to take a train from home to the kindergarten, *her mother would brush her hair and tie it up with bows on the train. The girl screamed bloody murder because it hurt so badly. Other people on the train got involved several times, telling her mother how to hold her hair differently when tying it or that the girl was a poorly behaved child for not tolerating pain quietly. The pain was so bad that later in school the girl learned to brush her own hair and instead of sticking the bows on top of her head to tie up a ponytail, she would braid it into a pigtail. That was so much easier and the bows just hung in the back.*

Her mother, who worked full-time and was a university trained professional in Hungary, always put her daughter's pigtails up high (twintails) with white ribbons secured so tightly that it pulled on her hair. It was done quickly during those hustling and bustling morning moments when all of them were getting ready for their days. The girl developed a rash because of the constant pulling, and the nurse gave her mother the advice to either cut the hair short or to let it out for a few days for the skin to get better. The mother did not like the second option. The girl was begging all afternoon not to have her hair cut. They arrived early at the mother's hairdresser to get a haircut. While waiting for the haircut, the girl looked at all the fashionable short haircuts in magazines and the ladies with short hair at the salon. She still wanted long hair and ponytails with bows, so that she would look like the other girls in the kindergarten.

While producing "good" subjects, such as desiring to wear the bow and look like the others, regimes of practices also produce "rebels," silences, or minor "internal displacements and mutations" in the discursive regime (Yurchak, 2005), such as attempts to develop alternative ways of wearing the bow that was less painful but perhaps fitting less within the officially sanctioned norms. As Foucault (1977) suggests, "disciplinary power is not only negative or repressive, it is also productive, as it produces a certain "reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (p. 194). Children, in relation to school uniforms in general and bows in particular, then act with/in and against normalizing discourses that offer ways of becoming "good schoolgirls" or otherwise. Schoolgirls might subject themselves to these normalizing discourses, resist them, or act with/in them but in ways that alter the discursive frame.

Longing, pain, frustration, and shame accompanied the experiences of putting on and wearing the bow. Ahmed (2015) considers emotion or how "we feel our way" as a kind of "world making" or cultural politics. Being subjects to the cultural politics of a bow, our bodies and worlds materialized in line with the ideology that prescribed us wearing the bow.

Emotions played a significant role in our politicization, but as all regimes of practices, they also created openings to act the "bowed subject" in other ways: to reinterpret the bow, to wear it or go without it, or even to have short hair.

"What Would You Have Without a Bow? Just the Head!": *Bows and Appearances*

As Dussel (2005) explains, "the preoccupation with appearances stems from long ago," marking divisions, identifying spaces of belonging, and defining "the inside/outside limits of the schools" (p. 180). Tying the bow is guided by a particular knowledge about how it should look, constituting a "regime of appearance" that made individuals subject to particular knowledges and associated practices through a "reciprocal bond" (Foucault, 1994, p. 315). Appearance is also tied to morality, because "clothes do inform others about the moral condition of a person, her sensibility and education, and that is why appearances have to be so closely monitored" (Dussel, 2005, p. 185). With the act of wearing the bow, we embodied a tidy and orderly appearance and also the moral subject position of a "good," "proper," "socialist girl":

> *Bows were a part of the school attire, similar to aprons, collars, and cuffs that had to be sewn onto the dresses, but not necessarily a part of a dress for other social occasions. Playing with friends after school required no bows; family celebrations, similarly, did not require one to wear bows. But even for family celebrations or school parties, loose hair, especially hair longer than shoulder-length not constrained by bows, pins, or pigtails, was rarely allowed—one had to request parents' permission to wear hair down. As the girl's grandmother once asked: 'What would you have without a bow? Just the head'.*

If we wore the dark bow that went along with the dark apron and stockings—a uniform intended for regular school days—getting dirty during lessons, recess, or meals would be permissible, because the dirty spots would not be that visible on the dark uniform. In dark uniform, we could thus be more childlike and fallible because we did not need to perform the roles of perfect socialist schoolchildren. These variations in the color of particular pieces of the uniform—apron, bows, and stockings—were very informative. They were manifestations of the rules of behavior associated with different physical and temporal spaces through a dress code condensed in a single piece or color of clothing.

We recognized these differences in appearance and subjected ourselves to the norms expected in various social situations. In this way, we became involved in the reproduction of official representations. The bow was an ornament to carry symbolic meanings which we learned to perform in practice. As Yurchak (1997) explains, "whether or not one consciously believed in the officially proclaimed goals was less important than the act of participating in routine official practices, perceived as inevitable" (p. 168). This is what Yurchak termed as *pretense misrecognition*. By wearing the bow and other uniform items of different color, we thus learned to navigate social situations that allowed for more or less freedom and flexibility. When needed, together with carers and teachers, we aligned ourselves with how socialist schoolchildren should look and act even though we did not believe in or could not identify with the official ideology behind it:

> *For the official school pictures, a girl had to wear three white items: white bow(s), white apron, and white stockings. If one of the items was missing, this girl would either have to stand in the back row or someone else from another class would lend her the missing item(s). Teachers did not get upset when this happened, but simply tried to calmly deal with the situation.*
>
> *One day, there was a picture session at preschool. The girl's parents were not present at the time when the pictures were taken because they were working. The preschool nurse was assisting the teacher with preparing children for the pictures and, when she looked at the girl, she sympathetically exclaimed, "Poor little girl! You don't even have a puffy bow! I will make you look as beautiful as all the other girls. I will make a big bow just for you!" She took off her big gauze scarf and miraculously turned it into a big purple bow. The girl was so happy inside, but also so shocked to suddenly find a big puffy bow towering on top of her head. She did not know what to think, but she went with the flow.*

In our Soviet school experiences, when official school photographs were taken, such as at the beginning of someone's schooling (see photo in Fig. 1) or when important guests visited the schools and teachers would give exemplary lessons (Rus. *pokazatel'nye uroki*), schoolgirls were dressed in their perfect white aprons and white bows to participate in the official rituals that simulated surface support to the system. Behind this façade, however, we believed in these symbols, signs, and representations in our own ways. The prototypical dresses were mirrored in exemplary behavior—as no mistakes could be made, spotless white aprons and stockings obliged us to behave properly, to watch every step. The teacher and the photographer acted as the guards of perfect appearances—they would

mold, and if necessary, even hide the rule-breakers by placing them behind their perfectly dressed classmates or instantaneously creating a bow for them. However, we all understood that these expectations were not requirements for our everyday lives.

Bows and the Rituals of Transition Between Spaces

So far, we have argued that the bow subjected us to particular forms, norms, and practices of school appearance and order. Putting on the bow was a ritual that marked regular transitions between spaces, signaling to its owner that different rules of conduct would apply from the moment the bow was put on. It was as if we were theater actors who prepared for roles by putting on a costume and a mask that went with it. We resembled and felt like "a normal subject, who saw the truth behind the mask, had no other choice but to pretend that the mask was the actual true face" (Yurchak, 1997, p. 180):

> When she looks at the family photographs taken outside of school, she sees a smiling girl with two braids, wearing the clothes brought by a family member from another socialist country, and having no resemblance to the photos taken in school. She has no recollection of any moment when her mom would tie in the bows, and no recollection of any feelings or bodily sensations associated with bows. All that she sees in front of her eyes are the school pictures of her that don't look like her. She remembers feeling uncomfortable looking at these pictures as a child—as if she was not looking at the real her in the pictures.

Feeling as not real was part of a double pretense, as the socialist state itself was a pretense and we ourselves pretended to be socialist citizens. As the story about the gauze bow continues: *That day, the photographer took two pictures of the girl—one as expected by her parents* (see photo in Fig. 2) *and one as recommended by the preschool* (see photo in Fig. 3). Perhaps the official photo day required only one photo with the bow, but two pictures were taken that day. The possibility of two photos, with and without the bow, occurred as a displacement in the discursive regime. In this in-between space, the possibility of a child generated politics emerged.

Perhaps because of the feelings of awkwardness and confusion washing over her when she sees her first picture with the big gauze bow taken in preschool, the girl remembers that she could not recognize the face—her

"real" self—looking at her school photograph when the pictures arrived. It was the uncomfortable feeling of estrangement that the incompatibility of these parallel spaces made real and yet not fully understandable to her. The girl felt uncomfortable about her ideological mask put on for this occasion. Even though that feeling did not lead to immediate actions that would explicitly resist the pretense character of the regime and the practices associated with it, the awkward feeling placed these (more or less ideological) discourses and spaces under her observation and question. Knowing, observing, and acting with/in and against these discourses of everyday life and the cultural politics of emotions associated with those, we argue, marks the mundane politics of childhood during the period of socialism.

The story about the gauze bow continues with a marked politics on the parents' part after they saw that two pictures of their daughter were taken that day:

> *The girl realized later that her parents were not particularly fond of big puffy bows. "Bows are for the Russian kids," her Oma (grandmother) would say. And she was from a linguistically and ethnically mixed Latvian/Russian family. When her parents received the pictures a few weeks later, they were shocked. Her dad was particularly unhappy, threatening to go to the preschool and face the director with a complaint. The girl remembers begging him not to do it and saying, "It's ok, Daddy … it's just a bow. I look like all the other girls now … Please don't say anything to the preschool director!" The scandalous nature of the bow incident remained deep in her heart, leaving a feeling of guilt and bewilderment … as well as a picture proof of how confused she looked wearing the big puffy bow on top of her head in the official photograph.*

Here, the bow marked a feeling of national belonging for the girl's parents. For us children, appearances were just what they were—only appearances. And that is how we learned to relate to them. Just as adults pretended to follow the ideology on the surface, be present physically but not emotionally or cognitively, we too knew that it sufficed to look as expected, without embodying the ideals through and through. This behavior implied neither active resistance nor subversion, but rather active ignorance, or perhaps the creative reinterpretation of situations. Just as a grandma remarked on a question about the role of bows—"They just were there." Through meticulous attention to appearances we learned, perhaps unintentionally, the shrewd reality of the (late) socialist era—things had to

"look right" and that sufficed. Instead of adherence to the official party line, we learned to interpret representations instead of making them our own. This ambiguous relationship with the system is well captured in Yurchak's (1997) notion of "pretense misrecognition," as we noted before. These kinds of political acts were not laden with the ridicule of or resistance to power, but rather with *a lack of interest in it* (Yurchak, 1997, pp. 162–163, our emphasis). In this manner, political pretense and ignorance were learned as part of our mundane schooling. While politics is commonly associated with the existence of interests in agendas related to groups, here "the lack of interest" and the discomfort that was associated with the reiterative practices of being different kinds of schoolgirls in various spaces created opportunities for childhood politics in mundane, day-to-day life.

Conclusion

We applied the concept of mundane politics to the everyday spaces of childhood and schooling in socialist societies. Through our memory stories, we explored how children understand and generate political spaces in their everyday lives that link with the official or mundane politics of other groups. From a Foucauldian perspective, action is always already read, that is, constituted by operative discourses, acting with/in or against them. By tying, attaching, and wearing the bow—or not—we read and acted with/in and against the operative discourses, some of which were explicitly ideological while others were banal. With our actions and understandings about the bow, we have interpreted official representations and ideologies in our own ways and on our own terms. With our mundane acts, we silently joined others in showing no interest in the official ideology, and/or pretended to misrecognize it, or were casted by others in small oppositional acts to official expectations. We learned to read spaces and discursive formations attached to schools, classrooms, assembly halls, hairdressers, or homes that govern action, thought, and feeling that were politically charged with official ideology or gained their charge through people's everyday participation in it. Within these spaces, learning is a "process of exploring the operative rules and mores, the texture and limits of available discourses and subject positions, and of finding a place within/against these, of becoming a subject and becoming a person, again and again, in the process (Davies et al., 2001)" (Millei & Petersen, 2015, p. 26).

Yurchak ([2005](#)) similarly explains that agency should be understood not in terms of open resistance to the official political regime, but rather through inconsequential and often invisible acts that introduce "minute internal displacements and mutations into the discursive regime in which they are articulated":

> [These acts] do not have to contradict the political and ethical parameters of the system and, importantly, may even allow one to preserve the possibilities, promises, positive ideals, and ethical values of the system while avoiding the negative and oppressive constraints within which these are articulated. (p. 28)

According to Yurchak ([2005](#)), the "non-official" was not only something that allowed spaces for resistance against the dominant political ideology but also maintained the system as such. In a similar manner, actions against stated ideology manifested in a form of outward resistance against official politics and included actions that were differently political, such as those of humor or pretense. Within these complicated political arenas, we understood ourselves as children or schooled subjects, and subjected ourselves to the operating discourses. Through the "selving-work," we undertook ourselves to become particular kinds of socialist schoolgirls (Davies et al., [2001](#); Kofoed, [2008](#)). Different spaces afforded us with shifting reiterations, (in)actions, and feelings that made us explore operative discourses and subject positions. They also produced opportunities for us to act politically, joining the collective struggle to gain power over immediate conditions of existence. This is how the bow afforded opportunities for us to act politically, created bridges between the everyday spaces of childhood and politics, and generated spaces for children's "p"olitics.

Through our memory stories, we aimed to problematize the concepts of "socialist" and "post-socialist" education as simply repressive and to complicate our understanding of politics by introducing children's politics. Therefore, we see in the geographical area and concept of (post)socialism tremendous potential for further analysis of politics because of the complicated political maneuvering that this system required us as children to engage in. Our memory stories do not only talk about the past. Rather, they become fertile grounds for our contemporary understanding of politics, political agency, and subject formation that needs further investigation. Our memories of childhoods supply a rich resource and complicate simple understandings of what it meant to be a child in schools during the Cold War.

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Interrupted Trajectory: The Experiences of Disability and Homeschooling in Post-Soviet Russia

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School years represent a trajectory of educational, personal, and social development for any child. This trajectory is influenced by a variety of factors, but there are expectations as to when a child will start and finish school and what milestones will be reached by a certain grade. In addition to learning trajectory, school years are associated with the time to undergo socialization that consists of peer and teacher interactions. What happens to that trajectory when it is interrupted by a student's disability? How does the reality of disability shape and how is it shaped by the context of school life? How does disability transform the dynamics of schooling, and how do the societal discourses around disability get internalized and impact the practices of schooling?

Through the concept of transition, I will interrogate the complexities of the post-socialist school experiences of a teenager set against and within Russia's transition period. I compare transition—a phase adolescents go through—to the framework of geopolitical and socioeconomic transition in the countries of Eastern Europe and Russia following the collapse of the USSR. Transition imparts a sense of linear and smooth development from

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one stage to another. It also suggests that the changes underlying it are neoliberal in nature (Markovich, 2006) and that any signs of the socialist past can be easily erased and forgotten (see Silova, 2010 for a critique). However, Burawoy and Verdery (1999) suggest that transition is much less certain than it is perceived to be. They argue that transition as it is applied to post-socialist spaces and times represents complex relations of socialist and post-socialist life, emphasizing unintended consequences and the way the past enters the present not as a legacy but as a novel adaptation. To a large extent, transition is a concept that is ironically manifested in rather abrupt measures of the neoliberal reforms that suggest its complex and problematic nature. Contrary to the implied metaphorical meaning of transition as an unproblematic replacement of one ideology (socialist) by another (capitalist/neoliberal), its manifestation was nothing short of multiplicity of coexisting viewpoints and anxieties about location, globalization, ideology, and nation (Koobak & Marling, 2014).

Similar to the ambivalent nature of the macro-level transition is the transformational aspect of moving into adolescence with a recently acquired disability. To ground the macro- and the micro-level experiences within the same conceptual framework is not to say that the processes that characterized Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union can be used as a metaphor for discussing personal experiences, nor is it an attempt to resort to disability as a metaphorical means to discuss what is known to be as transition. Rather, through my personal experiences of illness and disability, I will interrogate their impact on schooling and identity against the backdrop of a country that was undergoing drastic socioeconomic and political transformations. By interweaving my experiences of schooling with a disability, I interrogate how personal experiences caused by an illness create a sense of discontinuity in the subject's identity (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002) and how the post-socialist context plays an important role in the construction of these experiences.

School has certainly become an indispensable part of my experience of disability. Changes in my health occurred while I was in school, and I went through adjustments that my impairment required in the context of being a student. Even though my school experiences were different from the conventional trajectory, school played a pivotal role in my identity formation. My school was located on the outskirts of Omsk, a city with a population over one million people. During the Soviet period, the city was well known for its military industry. Like many cities in Russia in the 1990s, Omsk experienced years of socioeconomic instability exacerbated by the

political conflicts between the provincial and the municipal authorities (Melvin, 1998). The city was very different from the place where I was born—a relatively small town in Uzbekistan with hot summers and very mild winters. My family moved to Russia to reunite with most of my father's relatives in the wave of the Russian emigration from Central Asia and other former Soviet republics in 1992. As Tatars, though, we were rather strongly aligned with the Russians rather than the local ethnic identity of Uzbeks, and my family was habitually included in the Russian-speaking category (Kolstø, 2011). The reasons for this are manifold and require a separate discussion.[1]

My experience in school as a new immigrant to Russia and the only non-Slavic eight-year-old child highlights the complexities of the transitory migration processes that transcended the notion of "returning home" and going back to my ethnic roots. Over time, as I realized there were other Tatars living in Omsk, I developed a sense of belonging. My otherness was drawn to my attention at the very beginning of my new school experience by someone who asked me why I had such a strange name. I did not know how to respond because I had grown up in a Soviet household where my national identity was never at the forefront, and I found that I could not communicate what it meant to be a Tatar. By the time I was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma at the age of 12 and sent to the children's department of the city's oncology hospital, my disability became the defining aspect of my identity formation. After months of misdiagnoses and referrals, the diagnosis felt like a relief. This is not to say that my family and I were not devastated to hear the news, rather we silently accepted the reality that finally explained what caused so much physical pain. I remember sitting with my mother on the bench in front of the hospital on the day I was diagnosed and crying quietly, confused about the present and terrified of the future. I was admitted into the hospital the day I was diagnosed. Looking back at that day, I remember feeling as if I ended up in a different world—children with clean-shaven heads, skinny bodies, pale faces. I was confused because I could not associate myself with what I saw. It was a world invisible to most of the people not only because the hospital was on the outskirts of the city but also because in the midst of the economic and political upheavals in Russia in 1996, childhood cancer was an outsider to the dominant discourses of political democratization and economic liberalization.

This paper is a personal account of school experiences in Russia from the perspective of a student with a disability. I start by introducing auto-ethnography as a method of a critical self-study contextualized against the

social (Chang, 2016) and explore its importance in research around disability. I then move into a discussion of the education system for children with disabilities in Russia, which provides an important background for understanding the lived experience of disability and homeschooling. What follows is a discussion of the issues around access and its negotiation through engagement with the theoretical constructs of disability studies, such as overcoming, staring, and internalizing ableism. Finally, I unpack the relational nature of disability through the discussion of the role of teachers and peers. This paper seeks to expand our understanding of disability in post-Soviet Russia and explore its liminal and complex nature.

DISABILITY AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is referred to as an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). More specifically, I ground my writing in a personal narrative with a purpose to understand the self or some aspect of life as it intersects with a cultural context (Ellis et al., 2011). The studies of self, autoethnographies of illness, and disability autobiographies occupy a special place in disability studies. Couser (2009, pp. 6–7) suggests that the rise of disability memoirs is related to the history of the disability movement as well as the "endeavor to destigmatize various anomalous bodily conditions. Disabled people counter their historical objectification (or even abjection) by occupying the subject position." They create a space for the narrators to reclaim their experiences and provide an alternative account of self, an account that is not dominated by the medical professionals, whose voices were historically viewed as more authoritative and legitimate. The voices of people with disabilities have become a source of empirical knowledge for social science and humanities (Mintz, 2007). These voices represent a diverse range of experiences that suggest a complexity of the disability experiences. Since disabled people do not share a single condition, they cannot be—nor should they be—represented as a monolithic community (Couser, 2005). Autoethnography uncovers the potential of self-representations of disability by shifting the authority and the voice to the individual with a lived experience.

Disability in self-study is not meant to overshadow the complexity of individual life. In fact, Richards (2008) notes that people who are ill or disabled can succumb to a way of writing that simplifies their experience and objectifies them. It can be argued that contrary to that, disability provides a

perspective that enriches the account by illuminating the dynamics of the political within the personal and vice versa. Through the personal, the political has been expressed first in feminist research and later in research around race, ethnicity, and disability (Collins, 2002; Morris, 1992).

My research stands at the intersection of autoethnographic illness narrative and sociological understanding of the concept of "transition" as it applies to schooling and disability. Autoethnographic writing can help provide a thick and textured description of a state of being and interrogate assumptions about that state of being. In illness and disability autoethnographies (Birk, 2013; Defenbaugh, 2008; Liggins, Kearns, & Adams, 2013; Linton, 2006; Wendell, 1996), the story is particularly intimate, and the telling of it can render the writer vulnerable. The importance of vulnerability serves a goal of exploring the social and political in the personal. By sharing emotional and often-painful stories, the researcher recognizes the sociocultural meanings behind these experiences. In addition, it is not only the self that is at the forefront of these ethnographies but rather the self in relation with the broader contexts.

I engage with the categories of ableism, difference, exclusion, and inclusion to foreground my own experience of being a part of the education system as a student with a disability in post-Soviet Russia. None of these categories are static—they acquire meaning through stories and experiences and through interplay with other factors. Disability is experienced in and through these relationships and connections (Kafer, 2013). For example, exclusion can be defined as a dynamic and complex social process that entails the negation of fundamental economic, social, political, and educational rights, among others (Morina Díez, 2010). It is this multifaceted and multilayered nature of disability and disability experiences that require a relational approach to examining them. The following description of the context of schooling and disability in post-Soviet Russia contributes to a more nuanced understanding of my experience as it intertwines with the history of social developments in Russia in the 1990s.

EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN POST-SOCIALIST RUSSIA

The education system for children with disabilities in Russia is heavily influenced by the structures and practices that developed during Soviet rule. Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov (2007) identify several phases in the development of assistance to people with disabilities in Russian history:

acknowledgment of the necessity of social care and discovery of learning capabilities of deaf and blind children (eighteenth century); individual teaching and first special education settings (early nineteenth century); acknowledgment of the educational rights of the so-called "abnormal" children and the establishment of special education institutions (late nineteenth century). During Soviet rule, the state was responsible for special education. Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky played a major role in the development of special education in the Soviet Union. He argued that development of a "defective" child is conditioned by (a) the feeling of low social value of oneself, and (b) the requirement of social adjustment to the conditions of the environment. He concluded that a disabled child has special needs which must be met. In the 1920s, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the "deficient child," and the discipline of "*defektologiia*," or defectology, was established. A wide network of special residential schools was created in the 1950–1960s. The social relations inside the school represent a compound dichotomy between close and familial relations and strong social control, lack of privacy, and deficient parental involvement in children's education (Korkunov, Nigayev, Reynolds, & Lerner, 1998).

The underlying principle of defectology was that children with disabilities are capable of full psychological and intellectual development through manipulation of their sensory systems. It was believed that, with adequate training, any child could become a valuable and active participant in society. Sandomirskaja (2008) examined *surdotiflopedagogika,* which sought to compensate for the loss of speech, hearing, and sight and was used as a technology for the manufacturing of socially useful human beings. The construction of the deaf-blind language was related not only to the academic discourse of sociolinguists but also to the Soviet official doctrine in general. In an effort to construct a holistic new individual, deaf-blindness was treated as an experiment. The medicalized approach to educating children with disabilities and the centralization of medical and educational services brought cost effectiveness for the state. This system was notable for the high degree of differentiation, categorization, and stratification (Phillips, 2009).

A positivist approach to education of children with disabilities was a technique of normalization. The idea was not to change the environment per se to make it accessible for children, but to compensate for children's "defects" by engaging their unimpaired sense organs to make up for the "defect." Children did not live in their communities but were separated from their families in order to be treated by the specialists. They were

considered as special citizens, who would become a living demonstration and a symbol of the Soviet glory. The right to become such a symbol was applied selectively and channeled through the category of the "educable" rather than the "uneducable." The latter category mostly included children with intellectual disabilities. Submission to normality permeated all spheres of life during Stalinist Russia, and otherness was positioned in opposition to the ideal and conceptualized as almost-the-same or as not-yet-the-same. Citizenship was contingent on the achievement of this sameness.

The transition from socialism to market economy worsened the conditions of the special education system due to a significant decrease in the public funding for boarding schools (*shkoly-internaty*) and the process of decentralization that transferred responsibilities from the central to the regional authorities (Kulagina, 2014). The situation was further aggravated by the growing lack of specialists entering special education after graduation due to the unattractive salary and alternative possibilities of employment in the private sector (Thomson, 2002). These factors distorted the structure and ideology of defectology that survived through the transition period in the environment of retrenchment of public funds and a wave of education reforms. First, similar to the Soviet practice of differentiation, the categorization of children according to the clinical and pathological understanding of learning differences persisted (Thomson, 2002). Second, children with significant disabilities could hardly be accommodated. The division into "educable" and "uneducable" children continued running along diagnostic lines. Severe disabilities that combine motor and learning were viewed as "too" disabled and were not responded to adequately (UNICEF, 2005). Once deemed "uneducable," children were placed in institutions rather than special schools, with little chance to get any education.

The law that marks the formal recognition of people with disabilities as a group at the national level was the 1995 Federal Law "On social protection of people with disabilities in the Russian Federation" (State Duma, 1995). The legislation was a watershed in that it guaranteed the right to education to all children with disabilities. Yet, the law did not discuss whether such education would be provided in segregated or inclusive settings. Even though the officials and administrators supported inclusion in principle, they insisted on the need for boarding schools for children with more significant disabilities (State Duma, 1995). Inclusion, then, became a selective practice, rather than a universal principle. The extent to which defectology was ingrained in the education system and the massive organizational structure of the Soviet differentiated system can

explain the reluctance to move towards inclusion. Thus, the system of special (correctional) schools for children with disabilities remained in place after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[2]

Rather than being disrupted by the social turbulence of the early 1990s, it appeared that schools were acting as a set of microsystems in which long-term continuity and stability of educational practice offered a degree of respite from external pressures at the macro level (Elliott & Tudge, 2007). The idea of inclusive education, which can be defined as a commitment to educate each child irrespective of the disability in the school and classroom with their peers, has become the focus of advocacy organizations by the early 2000s and mid-2000s (Oreshkina, 2009). Although inclusion is an essential part of the current debates on education for children with disabilities in Russia, I will not focus on the institutional aspects of the reforms. Instead, I am interested in less visible, negotiated, and lived aspects of inclusion.

Homeschooling

The right to be homeschooled was stipulated in the 1995 law "On social protection of people with disabilities in the Russian Federation" (State Duma, 1995). The law guarantees that if it is not possible to provide education to children with disabilities within regular schools, the option of homeschooling will be offered, followed by the formal request from the parents. I view homeschooling as a state of in-betweenness that carried characteristics of both inclusion and exclusion, belonging and separation.

After being discharged from the hospital, there were no doubts about whether homeschooling would be the option best suited for my condition. There was no discussion about it because I could not have even imagined myself outside a home setting as home was my refuge, my tower, the place where I could escape my own disability. Homeschooling was as much about education as it was about my sense of self at the time. Looking back, the fact that I treated home as a safe space where I would not have to encounter the physical (stairs) and the psychological (stares) barriers made this option so close to my heart. This way, I could postpone facing the world; I could press the "stop" button. Homeschooling provided me with a much-needed hiding place.

Children educated at home are formally registered with the school, but instead of students attending the school, the teachers visit students at home on a weekly basis. It is mostly intended for children with physical

disabilities who are less likely to require a differentiated approach in teaching or expertise of a special educator.

Most of the students with motor impairments who are officially recognized as disabled by the medical-social commissions are guaranteed the right to home-based schooling. Compared to mainstream school, the student-staff ratio seems to open more possibilities for individualized teacher-student interactions. However, a limited number of hours allocated per student often results in low academic expectations. Social interactions are limited to contacts among the disabled children and their teachers; friendships with non-disabled peers are very rare (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Romanov, 2007). In the meantime, homeschooling represents an element of the general education system in the context of reduced funding for special education on the one hand and insufficient resources for inclusive education on the other.

Negotiating Access

Homeschooling was not as much my only recourse, a mechanism that I depended on as the school system could not accommodate my condition, but it was also my right, paradoxically, subjecting me to a more secluded lifestyle as a teenager. It created a space for a much-needed process of reconciling with a new me and with the idea that things will be different. Constantly worrying how visible my prosthetic was, making sure to wear clothes that would hide what I thought was my very visible difference, and feeling terrified of being exposed to the gaze of my classmates made my decision to receive instruction at home easier. For a recent amputee, navigation of inaccessible environments, such as my school, was certainly also a major reason for opting for homeschooling. Attending school presented quite real challenges due to the risk of falling down the icy marble stairs during winter or being knocked down by the elementary-school children who usually occupied the same building with the students of older ages.

Access to the seemingly mundane aspects of life, such as washrooms, is rarely questioned in the context of the wider exclusionary practices, mostly because of the very private nature of the need. Following the feminist idea of the artificial nature of the divide between the "private" and the "public," disability advocates bring embodiment into the realm of the public debate (Garland-Thomson, 2005).

In her article, Titchkosky (2008) considers access as an invitation to discuss how public spaces negotiate difference in society. She argues that

for most people, the taken-for-granted washrooms are essential for gaining an understanding of how everyday embodied experiences are managed by discourses of competition for scarce resources, hetero-normative expectations, colonizing powers, and neoliberal demands. All too common for schools at the time were the extremely inaccessible squat toilets, a vestige of the Soviet past. In the environment of limited budgets, when teachers' pay was delayed for several months and when schools had to rely on parental monetary and physical support for classrooms' maintenance and basic renovation, there was no discussion of how the school could be made accessible. After years of providing education to children with disabilities in specialized or home settings, the need to address some of the infrastructural barriers that were indispensable for moving toward a more inclusive system was not on the radar. Exclusion can be discussed on a systemic level, but according to Titchkosky (2008), such discussions can often be referred to as "the say-able," or sensible justifications of exclusion, such as *"When restrooms were built, they were not built with people with disabilities in mind."* As much as this explanation might seem reasonable, it does not justify the actuality of me not being able to attend school for this reason. When I started selectively attending some classes toward my graduation requirements, my presence at school and interaction with peers were conditioned by issues of accessibility and the say-able justifications of exclusion.

The solution to participate in the exclusionary spaces of school was negotiated through a tacit agreement with the teachers that I would not stay in school for the whole day. It was certainly a patchy approach to the systemic problem of invisibility and exclusion of people with disabilities in Russia. Such an individualized solution to the problem was certainly a privilege. It hinged on the understanding of the school's administration and teachers, my type of impairment that can be minimized through the use of prosthetic device, and my status of being a "good," straight "A" student. In other words, my ability to pass, that is, hide my impairment and blend in, compared to people with other mobility impairment, as well as my ability to "overcome" my disability (i.e., compensate for the perceived lack associated with disability), can be attributed to my access to education.

Overcoming Disability

Disability studies has extensively explored the concept of overcoming disability, of being a "supercrip"—a stereotype of a disabled person who garners media attention for accomplishing some feat considered too difficult

for disabled people no matter how mundane or banal it may be (Kafer, 2013). Looking back, I recognize the messages that circulated around me and my disability were part of the same rhetoric. I became convinced that my overcoming will emanate from my academic achievement. I came to be seen as a girl who overcame her disability. One of the critiques that suggests the broad sociopolitical ramifications of this approach to disability is provided by Simi Linton (1998), who points out that if we place the onus on individuals with disabilities to work harder to "compensate" for their disabilities or to "overcome" their condition or the barriers in the environment, we have no need for civil rights legislation. The Soviet literary tradition provides examples of overcoming as well. After my surgery, I was regularly reminded of the story of Alexei Meresyev, immortalized in the novel *A Story About a Real Man*. It was based on a true story of the Soviet fighter pilot, whose plane was shot down during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945). He survived but lost his legs. He is described as someone who overcame his disability—learning to walk again to return to piloting (Iarskaia-Smirnova & Romanov, 2013). The story was meant to reassure me and suggest that being a double amputee was a much worse plight leaving me with no choice but to overcome.

Similarly, the discourses around the post-Soviet "transition" were built around the notions of "overcoming" and neoliberal transformation (Collier, 2011). In her analysis of post-socialist Czechoslovakia, Kolářová (2014) unpacks how dependence upon ideologies of cure and recuperation were not only closely attached to the discourses around disability but also around visions of the social, or rather post-socialist, world. The ideas of abnormality, constraint, and failure of the planned economy are juxtaposed to the ideas of development, normality, and future of the market economy.

When I came to North America for the first time at the age of 16, I came across inspirational speakers who highlighted the experiences of individuals who overcame adversities and achieved remarkable goals. Disability was certainly one such adversity. I wonder how my story of overcoming disability was perceived among my Russian teachers and classmates. I regret not asking. Would this "inspirational" story be applied to me? During the graduation ceremony that I attended, I remember one of my classmates approaching me and saying how much he respected me. We barely knew each other.

Because I did not see a multitude of avenues for myself to fit in, studying seemed to be the only realm where I could exist. All the social aspects of schooling were not really available to me. My school was known for its

math-oriented classrooms. As a rule, students who enrolled in these classes did well in the other subjects as well. One hour a week was certainly not enough to bring my math skills to the advanced level, and this severely limited my opportunities to get into technical or business universities. In other words, I satisfied the minimum requirement that allowed me to remain an "A" student, but I was not encouraged to explore my potential. Suggesting a diverse theory of justice for disability, Silvers (2009) argues that by providing only equality of opportunity (i.e., a basic level of education) instead of equality of outcome (future capabilities and accomplishments), we might overlook diversity and talent. I learned about the myths of disability only when I took my first disability studies course at the University of Maine. However, without seeing any other way to make sense of my life at 15 or 16 years old, I followed what was expected and preferred in society.

Passing in the Context of Internalized Ableism

As much as it was easy to overcome disability at home, it became an insurmountable task once I was outside. The phenomenon of "staring," so eloquently captured by Garland-Thomson (2006), finds a special meaning in the context of my experience. Unpacking the multiple layers of staring, Garland-Thomson argues that it registers attraction at the same time as it witnesses confusion. Staring is the materialization in the human bodies of a search for narratives that impose coherence on what appears to be randomness in our experience of the world. We stare at that which perplexes us in an intense effort to make sense of what is at once unfamiliar yet recognizable. Any visual sign of impairment provokes such stare. The nondisabled gaze is driven by curiosity perceived as a right to intrude, inquire, and appropriate impairment as a public spectacle. To stare is to "enfreak" (Garland-Thomson, 1997) and to assert power over. "Curiosity" is an invasion of personal space and may manifest itself in direct personal questions unthinkable in "normal" discourse. Yet disabled people tolerate these ableist interjections.

Staring accompanied my adjustment to life as an amputee outside the hospital. Most of the time, I was aware of the stare but was not willing to engage, and I preferred to look down. In addition to feeling immense anxiety, insecurity, and increased sense of self-consciousness around my own impairment, all I wanted to do was to avoid attracting attention. Lack of positive role models who looked like me and who I could identify with

intensified the feeling of being different and conditioned me to hide my disability. Staring instilled in me a fear of being exposed as an amputee, as someone who failed to hide behind the prosthetic with its jerky movements and a mechanism that could make me lose my balance and fall. Many amputees are concerned with passing to retain a sense of sameness and hide what is missing through prosthetization (Crawford, 2014). It took me several years to start reclaiming that stare and replace my discomfort with being stared at with the starer's discomfort of being stared back. Trying to pass as able bodied was my goal, an identical replication of my prosthetic to my real leg—a source of joy. The years of school life and spending a lot of time at home made the goal not to be noticed one of the major ones. I clung to my mother's elbow for support to maintain a shaky balance as I made painful and clumsy steps in public. More importantly, I also clung to her with the hope to salvage a sense of normalcy. This physical support from my mother gave me the protection that I did not believe I had from the outside world.

Years of trying to hide what I found difficult to talk about and ultimately accept was rooted in internalized ableism. Campbell (2008) contends that within ableism, the existence of disability is tolerated rather than celebrated as a part of human diversity. Internalized ableism utilizes a two-prong strategy—the distancing of the disabled people from each other and the emulation by the disabled people of the ableist norms. Internalized ableism can mean that the disabled subject is caught "between a rock and a hard place," that is, in order to attain the benefit of the "disabled identity," one must constantly participate in the processes of disability disavowal, aspiring towards normativity, a state of near-ablebodiedness, or at the very least to effect a state of "passing." Passing occurs when there is a perceived danger in disclosure. It represents a form of self-protection that nevertheless usually disables, and sometimes destroys, the self that it is meant to safeguard.

Caring Space Through Interactions with the Teachers

Caring as it relates to both the physical work of providing support as well as the environment where individual needs are recognized as valid is central to families that have children with disabilities. Care-less spaces that are symptomatic of a lack of care within an educational environment can have a significantly negative impact upon identity formation of a child

transitioning through momentous milestones (Lithari & Rogers, 2016). The caring practices are not necessarily created within a formal framework of the school system. The relational nature of my homeschooling and the way I learned to see myself through the connections with the teachers created the space for nurturing and caring practices. These practices consisted of friendly conversations before or after the lesson, reassurances and stories of teachers' lives outside of school, and the realization that my schooling transcended what was possible within a traditional classroom.

My teachers were the conduits of news from me and to me. They were crucial in the post-treatment stage of my rehabilitation when I needed to redefine myself. In the absence of the actual rehabilitation that left me with no tools to adjust to my new life and no knowledge about the way to address the psychological repercussions of my amputation, my family and school were the defining external factors that witnessed all the challenges I experienced after my illness.

What home education secured was not only a refuge from the traditional school environment that I thought would be unfriendly for someone like me but it also guaranteed companionship and a closer connection to the lives of teachers. Our one-hour long class would usually be followed by an informal conversation about the teachers' families and children. The settings of the home were conducive to sharing and blurring the boundaries between the teacher and the student. I remember that when my new history teacher came to my house for the first time, she ambushed me with a stream of questions that seemed rather personal. I was taken aback and burst into tears after she left. I was not ready for the personal conversations that touched upon the topic that was still very sensitive.

Throughout the years following my illness, I never had a chance to actually articulate what the experience of disability has been like for me, and every time I was asked these questions, I would get very emotional, as if I heard about my own disability for the first time. The lack of similar experiences provided me with no baseline on how to cope and address my insecurities. The concepts of rehabilitation or peer support were non-existent. The year I got sick—1996—was characterized by high unemployment and poverty. The government financing of the prosthetic and mobility aids (traditionally covered by the state) was secondary. My family was left to deal with the repercussions of not only cancer and its treatment but also with the emotional pain of coming to terms with a child who needed to rebuild her identity, who had to face physical consequences of learning to use a fairly outdated prosthetic device, who had no peer support to rely on, and who struggled to make sense of everything that happened.

My last years of school were mostly focused on what university and major I intended to select, what testing requirements it would involve, and what I could ultimately do with my degree. At least three of my teachers insisted on me becoming a doctor. They certainly had high expectations of me and insisted that the medical field was associated with respect, intellectual rigor, and stability. They invoked the examples of their own children, people they knew who followed that path, and they argued that my disability was not a hindrance for me. "They used to call her Dr. Limp," said one of my teachers, who knew a female amputee who became a doctor. Such encouragement suggested my teachers' active interest in my future and their confidence that my disability was in any way a hindrance to pursuing one of the most challenging fields.

Interaction with Peers

One of the fondest memories I have from my time in the hospital is the letters I received from my classmates. A teacher had allocated part of her lesson to writing letters to me. I kept them for several years. I wonder how hard it was for them to write these letters. Did they struggle? Were they selective with their words? What had the teachers told them about what happened to me? When I read them, I remember stories about school life and wishes of good health. In the months that followed my discharge from the hospital, several of my classmates visited me at home. I was not fitted for my prosthesis; I was bald, and I was terrified to face them as I was. It was awkward for everyone, yet, it was through this moment of relationality that I tried making sense of myself and my new body. I was still trying to understand how to build relationship with a disability. I did not know how to talk about it and whether I should do it in the first place. It was an uncharted territory with too many unknowns.

As part of the effort to create specialized classrooms, the classmates I started my school years with were reassigned to other groups. I wonder if I could have nurtured the connections with the classmates that already knew my story instead of facing the task of nurturing new relationships. I was assigned to a different class, which did not seem to matter, considering I mostly stayed at home. In the years that followed, I attended some classes, such as chemistry and biology, that often involved lab-based activities. I was mostly accompanied by my mom, who helped me navigate the slippery marble stairs during winter and the hectic environment of the school that was filled with children of different ages. I did not thrive during those moments. I was desperate to go back to the safety of my home.

I had a couple of friends who would visit me on a regular basis; however, the experiences of navigating the socialization aspects of adolescence were challenging.

When I was 16, my English teacher wanted me to participate in what she thought was a city-wide competition for students to test their knowledge of English. That competition turned out to be the first round of the regional selection for a US initiative meant to promote communication and educational exchange between students of the former Soviet republics and the United States. That trip was the beginning of a different chapter in my life because living so far from my family for a year meant a real test in terms of contextualizing my disability and looking at myself through the eyes of other people from a different culture.

After I returned from the trip, I had to repeat a year in school with all of my classmates graduating. I was placed with the peers a year younger than me, but because I attended school almost every day to prepare for final exams, I managed to make meaningful connections. One particular episode stands out to me. I joined my classmates to celebrate an International Women's Day, an official holiday in Russia marked on March 8, by getting together in the school canteen with our English teacher for tea. I remember feeling relaxed and accepted then. When it was time to go home, I did not have to walk back alone and put myself in danger of walking on icy roads. I remember walking with a group of my classmates; they were gently holding me at my left elbow making sure I did not slip. What is memorable about that moment is how much we laughed during this walk because my classmates were having a hard time keeping stable on the ice, while I managed to keep my balance. The details of the conversations are vague, but the laughs that accompanied that walk transformed what might seem like an act of help with an underlying charity motive into something that friends do; something that is not conditional, something that just happens. I was regretting then that it was my last year of school.

Conclusion

To analyze the experience of disability through the prism of homeschooling is not to suggest that such experience is universal. The overview of the education system for children with disabilities discussed earlier in the article conveys the complexity of the system that is built around diagnostic and medicalized approaches to education. This personal narrative is an attempt to add more nuances to our understanding of disability and

schooling. By examining the role of homeschooling, I hope to contribute to a more complex understanding of disability that is as personal (my struggle of coming to terms with it) as it is relational and political. Without diminishing the weaknesses of the system that, ultimately, does not put inclusion as its goal, homeschooling created a safe space and a temporary solution, or a patch, in the otherwise-challenging environment that involved many anxieties about disability.

Disability serves not only as a lens for exploring the lived and embodied experience of growing up but it is also a way to understand the post-socialist context in general. Disability as a topic has been largely neglected in research on Russia (Rasell & Iarskaia-Smirnova, 2013), especially within a realm of intersectional research that explores categories of age, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. By interrogating the analogies between the inter-ruptions that are the nature of growing up as a child with a disability and the context of the tumultuous changes of the post-socialist transition, I foreground the importance of subjectivities in enriching the understand-ing of post-socialist Russia and challenge the perception of the linear development that followed the collapse of the USSR. The memories of disability in the context of post-socialist schooling and school memories in the context of disability emphasize the ambivalent nature of the schooling experiences and the entanglements that shake up the assumed monolithic nature of the post-socialist education system.

Notes

1. For more on the history of Tatars in Russia, the complexities of migration from the former republics, please see Rorlich (1999), Brubaker (1995), and Radnitz (2006).
2. In Russia, eight types of special schools exist: blind, visually impaired, deaf, hearing impaired, motor problems, speech problems, development delay, and mental disabilities (UNICEF, 2005). Children with milder disabilities (usually musculoskeletal disabilities) were a part of a general education sys-tem; however, there is not enough research on how schools in the Soviet Union and Russia accommodated these children. It is part of the unknown history of Russian education. I do not know how different my experience would have been if I had to go back to school as a disabled student in the USSR. It would depend on whether I had access to prosthetic or other assis-tive devices, whether I had a family to take care of me, and if the school wanted to take me back.

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Teaching It Straight: Sexuality Education Across Post-State-Socialist Contexts

Ela Przybylo and Polina Ivleva

Looking at the timeframe of the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, this chapter examines the links between post-state-socialism (Grabowska, 2012) and sex education from a diasporic Central and Eastern European perspective. Research on sex education in post-state-socialist countries has been done through the lens of public health concerns around "risky" behaviors and the prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and teenage pregnancies (Regushevskaya, Dubikaytis, Nikula, Kuznetsova, & Hemminki, 2009; Shapiro, 2001). Although these concerns are legitimate and important, such framing leaves out the multitudinal ways in which education and sex education are involved in what we describe in this piece as "teaching it straight"—the continued insistence on (and frequent failure of) straightening students into heteronormative life paths and desires. While the importance of sex education as an inherently political practice has been well established, few scholars have focused their attention on how post-state-socialist sex education is shaped by ideas around religion, patriotism, and nationalism in transnational and diasporic contexts (see Chervyakov & Kon, 2000; Lukovitskya & Buchanan, 2012; Snarskaya,

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2009). In the spirit of transnational queer studies, and as we will explore throughout, we understand concepts such as "nationhood" broadly, struggling against the straightening expectation that to be of a place or of a family, is to be a carrier of a certain heteronormatively bound, reproductive, and optimistic futurity that nonetheless always keeps the fires of the past—of traditions, language, patriarchal histories—alight. In our work, we draw on Benedict Anderson's (2006) conceptualization of nation as an "imagined community" forged through shared myths, performances, and representations. Our analysis is also informed by feminist critiques of belonging and exclusions constructed through gendered and racialized nationalisms (McClintock, 1993; Yuval-Davis, 1993).

Drawing on two autoethnographic accounts of sexual silences in a municipal secondary school in Yekaterinburg, Russia and a Polish diasporic immersion school in Alberta, Canada,[1] we will consider how "teaching it straight"—especially along the lines of heterosexuality and childhood desexualization—plays out. Our chapter opens with an exploration of how we envision the operation of "teaching it straight" in post-state-socialist contexts and our autoethnographic methodology of "telling it slantwise." Next, we provide a brief chronological overview of the history of sex education in Russian and diasporic Polish contexts. Through the entry point of our own experiences, we comprise two narratives about how despite an ongoing silence around questions of sex and sexuality, we were patriated into regulatory systems of a specific sexual subjecthood bound to gendered, racialized, and classed discourses that romanticized innocence and virginity. Each of our autoethnographic tellings discusses the multiple and complex ways in which sex education has become a battleground for competing discourses in the contexts of post-state-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. This chapter provides a reconstructed and remembered account of sexual education in two post-socialist contexts. Through doing this, we not only provide insight into the experiences of undergoing sexual education in the post-socialist schooling systems but we also queer the parameters of storytelling, through the process of "telling it slantwise." Developing our own queer and feminist approach to "dialogued collaborative autoethnography" (Martinez & Andreatta, 2015, p. 224), we reflect on what it means to be straightened in diasporic and transnational post-state-socialist contexts.

Teaching It Straight, Telling It Slantwise: Notes on Method

Sex education at the two sites we examine—Yekaterinburg, Russia and a diasporic Polish community in Alberta, Canada—has been organized primarily with an inclination toward "teaching it straight." "Teaching it straight" is, of course, not particular to Eastern European or diasporic contexts but is characteristic of many paradigms of sex education, as has been documented in Western sites including in North America (Fields, 2008; Kendall, 2013; Trudell, 1993). "Teaching it straight," we suggest, is an approach to teaching sex education that relies on several primary axes. First and most obviously, "teaching it straight" relies on a heterosexual presumption, an insistence on heterosexuality as *the* natural, primary, and legitimate form of sexuality and sexual practice. "Teaching it straight" also relies on a straightening out—a making straight. This making straight involves multiple processes including, literally, attempting to make students straight (not gay, not lesbian, not bisexual, not queer). More broadly, it also involves putting students on a "straight path," or in Polish, an ethics of "wyjść na prostą drogę" (literally translated as "to come out on a straight path"). This includes editing queerness out of behavior, fantasy, or life course in a broad temporal and spatial sense. Most queerly and literally "wyjść na prostą" ("to come out on the straight") or "wyjść na prostą drogę" ("to come out on a straight path") is used specifically as well in regard to homosexuality to mark a committed rejection of homosexuality in oneself, to ask forgiveness for these sins, and to engage in the long journey of repenting and recalibrating life so as to be on the straight (and narrow) path.

Queer theorist, Sara Ahmed (2006), talks about "straightening devices" as those life interferences that act as a corrective to queer, or "slantwise," desires (p. 72). Thus, "to be 'in line' is to direct one's desires toward marriage and reproduction; to direct one's desires toward the reproduction of the family line" (p. 74). And more broadly, to be "na prostej drodze" ("on the straight path")—that is to be literally on a straight path—is to be on the path that one is expected to be on. Crucially, when it comes to sex education, that "straight path" involves a distinct invocation of an idea of childhood that insists on categorically dividing childhood from adolescence and from adulthood. Childhood surfaces in this straightened path as a domain that must be protected from sexuality and corruption so that childhood innocence may be retained (Kincaid, 1998; Stockton, 2009).

Adolescence, on the other hand, emerges as a life moment during which sexuality is excessive and must be *contained* so that it does not sully the straight-life prospects and futures of those in question (Pascoe, 2007, p. 26). Thus, childhood is effectively desexualized—that is, forcibly protected from the sphere of what is imagined to be sexual—while adolescence, rendered frightfully hypersexual, is disciplined—straightened—into particular shapes, forms, and anticipated futures. Also, while childhood is desexualized, a certain *sexual presumption* still dominates as an insistence that everyone will be sexual when they arrive into adulthood, editing out asexual possibilities (Przybylo, n.d.). "Teaching it straight" involves the grouping of students into particular patterns—racial, classed, gendered—so that they emerge on the "straight" path—the path set aside for them.

In this piece, we undertake a collective autoethnography that struggles against teaching or telling it straight. Indeed, we would like to identify our autoethnographic approach as, after Ahmed, "telling it slantwise." If teaching or telling something straight means sticking to the rules set aside before our arrival, "telling it slantwise" means looking backward with dissonance, disbelief, and oppositionality. To be slantwise, for Ahmed, is to refuse (or be incapable of) treading on well-worn paths set aside for us by the repetition of bodies on particular paths—"in following the direction, I arrive, as if by magic" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 16). To travel these paths slantwise is to take a route unexpected, arriving somewhere other than anticipated. "Telling it slantwise" also signals a looking backward that is queer and that queers the diasporic longing for a fixed home. Stuart Hall (2003), writing on diaspora, argues that it is characterized by "an endless desire to return to 'lost origins,' to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning" (p. 245). Queer theorist Gayatri Gopinath (2005) responds to this diasporic impulse, saying that the *queer* diasporic body and *queer* diasporic desire handle ideas of home and memory differently, "as a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles" (p. 4). For us, to look backward is to think about the straightness and slantness of our diasporic lives. Within the context of conservative schooling that ignored histories and realities of gendered power relations in Russia, Polina consistently sought out information on women's rights and developed a strong interest in gender justice, eventually moving to Canada to conduct feminist research on women and media. Ela, born in Poland and raised in a diasporic Polish community in Alberta, Canada, continues to feel queerly misaligned with both Canadian and Polish cultures and languages, such that queerness becomes not so

much a sexual orientation but a bodily one. In turning backward, we feel alighted with Gopinath's *queer* diasporic orientation—being caught between and constituted through the sometimes-competing demands of feminism, queerness, whitesettler identity in Canada, diasporic post-state-socialist legacies, familial obligations, pressures of language proficiency, and particular generational lineages.

Our method for writing this autoethnography is engaged with a type of inquiry that has been termed collaborative autoethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2010; Martinez & Andreatta, 2015) or duoethnography (Denzin, 2014; Farquhar & Fitzpatrick, 2016). Citing Norman Denzin's (2014) statement that duoethnographers "perform new writing practices" (p. 28) and challenge the boundaries between biography and history, Alejandra Martines and Maria Marta Andreatta (2015) draw attention to the creative possibilities of collaborative inquiry. While Martinez and Andreatta, developing their collaborative autoethnography, first write their personal histories and then engage each other with questions, our piece develops a reverse approach: we first asked each other questions and then responded through our autoethnographic remembrances. That is, we each assigned questions to the other so as to generate particular knowledge about each other's life histories that is beyond the immediate reach of our several-year friendship. In our discussions, we focused on both generating data to explore our experiences with sexuality, education, and sex education, but we also used this project as a means of attending to our friendship. Our questions to each other varied but focused on kinships, spatialities, temporalities, possibilities, and impossibilities around how we remember ourselves as feeling and who we remember ourselves as being.

This chapter is not intended as a comparative analysis since our years in school were shaped through vastly dissimilar social, economic, religious, and ideological conditions. We write, similar to Martines and Andreatta, from a place of friendship and collaboration, which we see in itself as an oppositional act against schooling systems that prize and reward individualism. Academia, as Kelly J. Baker (2016) recently wrote, is not a space of kindness but rather one of competition, one-upping, "hostile questions and comments […], microaggressions, petty rivalries, sabotage and back-biting, racism, misogyny, ableism." (para.3) For us to write collaboratively is to write as friends, to strive to oppose harmful academic patterns of authorial glorification, and to celebrate our friendship. Our approach is one that portrays "knowledge in transition" and as "not fixed but fluid" (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012). Thus, we write with a recognition of the

partiality and particularity of our accounts yet, in the tradition of feminist engagement, we strive to bring our experiences in dialogue with social, historical, and political contexts and we believe that "autoethnographic work inevitably implicates others" (Chang et al., 2010, p. 130). Since the subject of this chapter is considered sensitive, we strategically excluded many details that could identify "involuntary participants" (Chang et al., 2010, p. 33) of our narratives. Also, because we are drawing on each of our bilingual personal histories, we integrate both Polish and Russian words and phrases into our discussion, accounting for what feminist and queer scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has depicted as the "wild tongue" of bilingual diasporic identity.

Polina's Story: "Silences" as Moments of Learning

Before sketching my memories of post-state-socialist schooling, I provide a brief overview of the historical trajectory of sexual education in Russia. The purpose of this overview is to counteract the discourses that imagine post-state-socialist countries as "lagging behind" in the transitioning toward liberal democracy, market economy models, and, by extension, Western ideals of sexual and gendered citizenship. While post-state-socialist countries are framed as slowly "arriving at" Western feminisms, they are neglected in the transnational feminist discourse that positions them to be "in the process of democratization and Europeanization and thus uncritically positioned vis-a-vis the first world" (Suchland, 2011, p. 839). Rather than attempting to present sexual education in Russia as the unfolding of sexual literacy, I draw attention to the contradictory history of public discourses around sex and sexuality. This context is significant for my story as it shows that contemporary silences around sex education, including the ones I experienced in school, are enmeshed with the long history of sexual regulation serving the interests of nation-building. I argue that, although there is no systematic sex education in Russian schools, learning still happens indirectly through workings of evaded and hidden curricula that silence non-normative subjectivities while encouraging the formation of heteronormative futures. Evaded and hidden curricula dovetail with official discourses on Russian nationalism that promote normative, reproductively bound family forms, while pathologizing same-sex relations as detrimental to parenthood and the institution of family (Stella & Nartova, 2015).

In July 1986, Russian and American TV stations broadcasted a space bridge, or "telemost" (телемост), held between American women in Boston and Soviet women in Leningrad. When an American audience-member asked whether Soviet media was saturated with sexualized content in the way US media was, a woman from Leningrad, Lyudmila Ivanova, made a statement that subsequently became a catchphrase: "There is no sex in the Soviet Union" (the ending "on television" was not heard in audience's laughter). Until this day, her statement is used to mock and pity the Soviet public for its presumed sexual ignorance and deprivation, imagined in opposition to the progressive, sexually liberated Western modernity. Admittedly, there was neither sex education nor commercial representations of sex in the Soviet media; contraception was unreliable and difficult to access; sexually transmitted infections were surrounded by a host of stigmatizing myths. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the discourses surrounding sexuality were static and flat. After decades of an oppressive Stalinist regime of silence around sexuality, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by some debates among Soviet sociologists around sex education, although a few local sex education experiments were met with opposition by a general public concerned with protecting the "innocence" of youth (Healy, 2014; Kincaid, 1998). At the same time, underground erotic cultures were present in the Soviet Union. Outside of the official discourse, young people of the 1960s and 1970s learned about sexuality through friendship networks, medical sexology textbooks, suggestive countercultural songs, and foreign classic literature such as the works of Zola and de Maupassant (Healy, 2014).

Public discussions around sex education were renewed during perestroika and glasnost of the late 1980s. The closest attempt at establishing a formal sex education was a course called "Ethics and psychology of family life," which mostly focused on family values and romantic love (Shapiro, 2001). The fall of the Soviet regime, along with the subsequent liberalization of markets, dramatically altered the dynamics of social life, and sex education debates of the 1990s were couched in terms of crisis and urgency. Tumultuous economic conditions led to a sharp rise in sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and cases of sexual violence, making public health the key concern of policymakers. Another matter of interest in sex education debates was shaping, directing, and otherwise normalizing adolescent morality in the context of changing sexual norms driven by a sudden availability of pornographic media, sex shops, strip clubs, and previously suppressed information

about "non-traditional" sexual practices. In response to these material and ideological challenges, the Russian Ministry of Education attempted to introduce systematic sex education in secondary schools (Shapiro, 2001). One of the major projects, drafted by Russian experts in consultation with their foreign colleagues from UNESCO and the Netherlands Institute for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, was intended to teach adolescents about reproductive physiology, pregnancy, abortion, safer sex, and "tolerance" of sexual minorities (Shapiro, 2001). Generally, those members of the Russian public who agree that sex education is necessary, tend to think that neither teachers nor parents are presently prepared to deliver this kind of information, so they see medical professionals to be the most suitable for the task (Lukovitskya & Buchanan, 2012). This approach falls within the health pragmatism framework, promising a positive economic and social impact of sex education in the forms of risk management for the benefit of nation-building (Fields, 2008). Yet, despite the ideological promise of the pragmatist framework to encourage responsibilization of young people, the Ministry eventually abandoned the initiative due to intense pressures from religious and conservative groups who accused the project's authors of corrupting minors and imposing Western values alien to the Russian culture (Shapiro, 2001).

As a student at a municipal secondary school in Yekaterinburg, Russia between the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, I did not have a comprehensive school-based sex education, although fragments of sexual learning were experienced indirectly through discursive and material schooling practices. For instance, during the senior-school years, students had to go through a mandatory health examination carried out by a number of medical specialists, including an ophthalmologist, a neurologist, and a gynecologist. While the public generally welcomed this initiative as a preventative and diagnostic measure, the gynecological exam was commonly met with suspicion and anxiety by girls and their parents alike. Some especially conservative parents were concerned that virginal girls would be "traumatized" by a supposedly "unnecessary" and "humiliating" medical exam, thereby constructing girlhood as desexualized and girls themselves as in danger of moral corruption through acquiring knowledge of their own bodies. Girls had their worries too: usually not because they were struggling to protect their assumed "innocence," but largely because they had to navigate the schooling and medical systems' refusal to accept them as legitimate and agentic sexual subjects. Many girls did not exactly know what to expect

during a visit to "that kind" of a doctor. Some were not sure whether to disclose their sexual history to a doctor since it was rumored that virgins received a quicker and less invasive exam; others were worried—and often with good reason—that medical confidentiality would be compromised and the details of their sexual health would become known to peers, teachers, and parents.

I remember that after the completing the examinations, the doctor gathered all the girls from our class in her small office and gave us a brief talk. The talk did not cover contraception, STIs, or safer sex practices, a type of knowledge routinely ignored or dismissed in the official public health discourse on the grounds of encouraging "hedonistic attitudes towards sex" (Stella & Nartova, 2015, p. 25) that contravene the reproductive imperative backed by the state. Instead, the doctor said that she was pleased that most girls in our class were virgins. As a figure of authority, she discursively constructed female sexual experience as a site of shame, positioning sexually active girls as outside the boundaries of "normal" adolescence.

Sexuality education is, of course, not limited to women's reproductive health, but encompasses questions of desires, pleasures and risks, consent and sexual violence, and gender politics more broadly. Classes on Russian and foreign literature were, perhaps, prime educational spaces that could potentially develop individual agency through critical discussions of power dynamics in romantic love. Yet, when the issues related to sexuality surfaced in the assigned texts, they were discussed through euphemisms[2] or, most often, evaded by a teacher. When it came to learning about the physiological dimensions of human sexuality, the avoidance of discussing sexuality was clear as well. For example, our biology teacher, who was demanding and meticulous about checking homework, never tested our knowledge of a chapter on human reproductive anatomy that was assigned for an independent study.

These silences fall under the "evaded curriculum" (American Association of University Women, 1992), a term referring to a routine dismissal of knowledges and lived experiences that do not align with the normative expectations around schooling. Evaded curriculum is comprised of "matters central to the lives of students and teachers but touched upon only briefly, if at all, in most schools. These matters include the functioning of bodies, the expression and valuing of feelings, and the dynamics of power" (AAUW, 1992, p. 131). The dominant discourses construct sexual knowledge as extraneous to childhood, yet educational documents represent children "as heteronormative subjects with heterosexual futures, even

when sexual knowledge is absent in the curricula" (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 2), and "hidden curriculum" becomes a way to promote dominant values outside a formal sex education system (Kendall, 2013).

My following account of experiencing the working of the "hidden curriculum" concerns the heteronormative policing of embodied same-sex affection. Through reconstructing a fleeting episode from my high-school years, I show that, although sex education was absent in the official curriculum, sexual learning was enabled through the "hidden curriculum" that disciplined the body in the attempt to mold heteronormative subjectivities. During my years of schooling, friendship practices of adolescent girls were commonly infused with affective physicality including hugs, touching or braiding each other's hair, and walking arm in arm. While school culture was rife with asexual erotics of intimate friendships (Przybylo n.d.), the physicality of friendship was not as prevalent among boys who tended to adhere, at least in public, to the norms of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While physical closeness might have been a marker of friendship among girls, it was not always interpreted as such by adults. My friend and I once got in trouble for a platonic hug that perhaps lasted a bit longer than it should. A school official passing by was clearly disgusted and enraged by what seemed to her like homoerotic affection. Her authoritative disruption of our intimate affect coded our touch as inappropriately sexual, and my friend and I were assumed to be bearers of deviant, abject desire. Although no sanctions followed this incident, it left me in disbelief and strengthened my distrust of school authority figures. Even though the social space of the school was infused by physical affection of dating couples, regulatory practices emerged once the assumption of heteronormativity was called into question.

ELA'S STORY: POLISHNESS, RELIGIOSITY, AND THE GROOMING OF NOSTALGIC (HETERO)POLES

Unlike Polina, who emigrated from Russia as a young adult, I emigrated from Poland as a young child and completed all my primary school education in Alberta, Canada in a diasporic Polish community. My elementary education experience, on which I draw below, was in a Polish bilingual school, where instruction took place in both Polish and English. My family, like many others, was part of the "Solidarity Wave" of emigration from the People's Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa: PRL) in the 1980s.[3] The context, especially in the early 1980s, was one of

political strife in Poland, with Martial Law declared in 1981 after the infamous protests at the stockyards ("stocznia") in Gdańsk and the formation of the underground solidarity movement that sought to terminate Soviet occupation of Poland and end state-socialism—ultimately leading to the fall of state-socialism in 1989 (Penn, 2005). Emigration from Poland in this era can be understood as a "political tool of opposition" (Burrell, 2009, p. 2). While it was not impossible to leave the country, the movement of people to and from Poland was not sanctioned and was highly controlled by the authorities. In this context, to leave Poland required traveling through a third country, such as West Germany, Austria, or Italy, often as a refugee. This wave of immigration saw movement to countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia. Of course immigration to Canada was not easy, and even while Canada changed its criteria for classes of refugees in the late 1970s, it was nonetheless involved in forms of "border imperialism" (Walia, 2013) that required strict medical testing, language competency exams, a complex interview process, age and heteronormative family regulations, proof of savings, and a government or private "sponsor" in order to be considered for entry into the country (Mlynarz, 2008, pp. 65–66).

Upon arrival in Alberta, the school I attended was a mostly horizontal building, which consisted of a cafeteria, two gymnasiums, a school yard, a library, an office area for the administrative staff, a computer lab, gender-segregated washrooms, and classrooms distributed throughout the building. Positioned in a low-income area of the city, the school offered a segregated education system: the English program for students—many of them racialized—living in the vicinity of the school, and a Polish immersion program which supplied mostly white students by school buses from many areas of the city. The bipartite school had two separate names (after two distinct male Catholic figures) to reflect these two schools housed in one building. Part of a Catholic network of schools, the Polish immersion program came into existence in the mid-1980s. During the years I attended the school, elementary- and junior-high-level instruction was provided in Polish, with high-school-level Polish immersion introduced years later at another location.

I want to emphasize the school's very peculiar connection to Polishness, language, and religiosity. Because the school came into being in the 1980s, during the so-called "Solidarity Wave" of emigration from Poland, of which my family and I were a part, the school managed to retain an ossified relationship to Polishness, to the homeland of Poland, and to the Polish

language. For instance, the school still maintains a characteristically 80s' Polish attachment to Catholic religion as an emblem of anti-Soviet and pro-Solidarity Polishness. Figures of the Polish pope (John Paul II) and the mother Mary are visible throughout the school, both having particularly strong resonance with a Polish Catholicism and the pro-Polish independence push of the 1970s and 1980s. Mary, in particular, plays an iconic role for Polishness. Steeped in misogynist expectations of women's bodies, Mary speaks to the dual expectation of virginity and motherhood prescribed onto women's sexualities in service of the Polish nation ("Matka Polka," i.e., woman-as-mother-as-Poland), (Zaborowska & Pas, 2011, p. 23). This Catholic symbology was oftentimes combined with and embedded within Polish insignia and iconography, such as the Polish white and red flag, or the Polish coat of arms—an eagle with a crown overtop (the crown acting as a comment against Soviet occupation of Poland).

Somehow, to be Catholic in this context is to be truly Polish, or traditionally Polish, and this means to be Catholically Polish. Notably, this form of neo-Right, Catholic-infused Polishness is presently rising in Poland, as was starkly and frightfully demonstrated by recent attempts in 2016 to complete the criminalization of abortion through the proposition to introduce legislation that would make abortion punishable for pregnant women and doctors by up to five years in jail (*BBC News*, 2016; Tait, 2016). This was fought against vociferously by huge crowds in 2016 through the #czarnyprotest or "Black Protest," that encouraged women to protest the increased criminalization of abortion through refusing to go to work. At the Polish Albertan school I attended, the way in which Polishness was invoked, inhabited, and inducted into children was also with a strong nostalgia of the Poland left behind (both temporally and spatially)—a mythical Poland of 1980s Solidarity activism. This manifests also at the level of language and a manner of speaking, with a more traditional and outdated Polish language taught at the time I attended, one that was out of pace with the Polish spoken in Poland. In other words, the Polish language, Polishness-as-Catholicism, and a "traditional" Polish orientation, were all attended to at the school, marking a particular relationship to a homeland left behind decades ago, and the willful preservation of Polishness-as-memory among new generations.

Of course, the school is not alone in this diasporic entanglement of nationalism, nostalgic longing for a place left behind, and religiosity. Nostalgic Polishness was exercised through Polish folk dancing troupes, Polish grocery stores, a Polish scouts program ("harcerstwo"), Polish

clubs, Polish courses at the university, and Polish Catholic Churches. Upon first arriving in the city, the church was a central place of building Polish social networks and navigating the Canadian context across age levels: for myself as a child, my sisters as adolescents, and my parents as middle-aged adults. The church figured so dominantly in our lives as an extension and expression of Polishness—rendering my family more religious than they were previously in Poland—that my sister's English as a Second Language journals from those first years read as follows: "we go to church, then we go to school, then we clean the house." A performance of good daughterhood notwithstanding, our circuit of Polish nestling and Canadian-context adaptation revolved around religiosity and Polishness—the one making the other possible—so much so that the Polish priest frequently appeared as a bachelor-cum-uncle in our family photos. This web of Polish community meant that for a good portion of my childhood and adolescence, I interacted with mostly Polish people and had mostly Polish friends. It has also meant that despite being raised in Canada, I continue to have a Polish accent, Polish identity, language, and an attachment to the particular Polish culture I was raised with.

As we mentioned, already at the elementary-school level, a complex—part intentional, part unintentional—regimen of "teaching it straight" was underway. In the context of my school, "teaching it straight" revolved around particular debts to Polishness and the specific religiosity this seemed to enfold. While few of my teachers were religious fanatics, the Polishness-as-Catholicism regimen served as the backbone of many of the school's daily unfoldings, rituals, and educational experiences. Sex education during my elementary years consisted of several classes at the grade five level, during which boys and girls were educated in separate classrooms about the events of the reproductive system. In the girls' classroom, the focus remained on what to expect from our bodies as we were developing into the early stages of puberty, menstruation, and hormonally driven maturation. Searching through my memories, there is nothing distinguishing or revelatory about this experience. Indeed, upon talking to a friend of mine who sat with me in that very same classroom, she recalls nothing of this sex education moment. In Poland, the "silence" around sex education in schools at the time was arguably even more profound. After state-socialism in Poland in the 1990s, sex education was replaced with the explicitly straightening and religiously motivated "Preparation for Life in a Family" courses, which relied on abstinence training and no-sex except procreative sex education (Mishtal & Dannefer, 2010, p. 233).

Historically speaking, as state-socialism fell in 1989, women's access to abortions, available under state-socialism, was rescinded and criminalized in 1993 under a nationalistic Catholic government, inducting also restrictions on contraception (all contraception with the exception of the rhythm method being forbidden by the Vatican, the ruling seat of Catholicism, as sinful) (Mishtal & Dannefer, 2010, p. 233).

Yet, rather than focusing on the predominant silence around sexuality and sex, and the near-total absence of sex education, I find it more fascinating to think about the broader "heterosexualizing process" (Renold, 2000) and heteronormativity (Rich, 1980; Walford, 2000; Walters & Hayes, 1998; Wood, 1984) that took place through a serious indoctrination into gendered norms and their entanglements with Polishness. The division between girl-play and boy-play in my cohort was near total. Sociologist C. J. Pascoe (2007), in her study of homophobia and sexism in a California high school, elaborates on the ways in which boys held the positions of social prestige in the school, developing masculinity through a "fag discourse" deeply hostile to effeminacy, and deeply reliant on a sexist enactment of heterosexuality. I remember a similar social order within my own elementary school: coolness was a currency dealt mostly by the boys. The boys seemed to form a central core structure, a brotherhood, sometimes extending invitations for certain girls to join. Aptitude in sports, and in particular soccer—a sport that has a fan- and practice-based following among the Polish—was a contributing factor to who was understood as cool.

Teachers actively partook in the disciplining of gender and the shaping of a Polish gendered mythology. Polish nationalistic, Catholic, and occasionally post-pagan rituals were key organizing features of the school, and a form of bringing all the classes together with teachers and parents to share in Polish traditions and language. As children, we were encouraged to sing Polish songs, including the national anthem, to recite traditional poetry in Polish (such as Adam Mickiewicz's "Litwo, Ojczyzno Moja" from *Pan Tadeusz*; trans. "Lithuania,[4] My Homeland," from *Sir Thaddeus*), and to be on display as Polish children in front of the school community. In recent years, I visited the school for one of these ceremonies to support one of the children in my family as she was seemingly reliving the memories of my own childhood. The occasion was "dożynki," a Polish post-pagan ceremony akin to Thanksgiving in the United States and Canada. I was most drawn to a song the grade one class performed in Polish, with active singing and gesturing. The song, sung in several verses, described an older man (i.e.,

"dziad") returning from work in the fields and demanding that his elderly wife (i.e., "baba") bake him some bread. After several verses, each reprimanding the woman for not baking the bread correctly, the "dziad" or elderly man proceeds to beat his wife to great laughter from the audience of teachers, other children, and parents. This misogynistic and violent enactment of gender roles signified to the audience a Polish joke of sorts, invoking fantasies of Polish rurality (life on the farm or "na wsi"), poverty, and the presumable inevitability of hitting your wife once in a while if she does not know how to bake. On this occasion, an "informal sexuality curriculum" (Trudell, 1993)—if one that seems fairly explicit—was taught. On the one hand, sex or sexuality was not invoked, but on the other it was conveyed through the particular dynamic of husband and wife, a relationship implicitly sexual, if desexualized in old age. A particular relationship of power was rendered in which several things unfolded: at its simplest, the man works in the field, the woman works in the house; the man provides the final voice of authority on even the most feminized of activities such as baking, demonstrating his extent of control over her life; the woman exists to make the man's life, even the poor old lecherous man's life, better; the woman exists in her role as "wife" to the man, a relationship thoroughly defined by a particular heterosexual and sexual presumption as well as by an imbalance of power. Further, the woman and man are presented as occupying separate spheres, existing in conflict rather than, ironically, in solidarity: the "dziad" and "baba" are not friends, not comrades; they are the abettors of each other's misery; the "dziad" has the right to express his dissatisfaction with life by beating his wife. Aging and rural poverty, it seems, are lightened by having a wife to cook for you and to beat on. All these assumptions, and likely many more were smuggled in, and *could* be smuggled in under the auspices of Polish humor, entertainment, and light-hearted fun. After all, everyone laughed! I think the enactment of this horrid display of misogyny was made possible due to a referencing of Polish humor and Polish symbolism, a shared sense of Polish origins and traditions, and perhaps even a disappointment in the straightening forces of the educational system. I am not saying that misogyny is more prevalent in Polish, or Polish-Canadian contexts, than say in other Canadian contexts, but rather that everything about the song's Polish referencing made it a site of light misogynist play, rather than a perceivably real encouragement of gendered violence.

My elementary schooling was also characterized by explicit homophobia, peppered by the derisive use of terms such as "gaylord," which were in operation in ways similar to what Pascoe (2007) identifies as the

"fag discourse," or a disciplining of masculinity that relies on depreciating effeminacy. Sexual imagery, while smuggled out of the classroom by teachers, was smuggled in by students on heterosexual terms, so that "pencil sharpeners" ("strugawki" or "temperówki") and "pencils" ("ołówki") became in grade three, an oblique reference to the thing that happens between boy parts and girl parts during sex, the detailed economy of which was not fleshed out. Yet, as Polina mentions in her account, it is impossible for children to not be homosocial, homoerotic, whether on sexual or asexual terms. For instance, along with my "best friend" at the time (whom I met in grade two and with whom I am still in touch), I began in grade five and six to hold heated competitions around our "ownership" of another girl in our class. During sleepovers, at the playground nearby the school, and throughout class time, there was a simultaneous attraction and repulsion to the body next to mine that manifested at one point in a series of non-love love letters I authored, which declared: "Dear, I am not lesbian (even if you think I am lesbian), but I love you." In the end, neither my best friend nor I won the competition over the girl in question as she enrolled in a different junior high school than we did. What is interesting, however, is that schooling offered a ground for intimate same-sex affectations, the language for non-straight desires, and the conviction that these desires were uncouth or undesirable in themselves. I learned that I could love a girl, but I should not be a "lesbian."

After Remembering

The attachment to normative sexuality has intensified in recent years in both Poland and Russia, as evinced by the clawing back of women's reproductive autonomy and the rights of LGBT people in Russia, as well as Poland's renewed interest in the total criminalizing of abortion. In many ways, such claw backs are imagined as preserving the nationhood of each respective country, "reinforcing the symbolic and moral distance between 'European' sexual democracy and […] national traditions and values" (Stella & Nartova, 2015, p. 32). Our own collaborative autoethnographic piecework looks at our remembrances of childhood memories of navigating sexuality in contexts of sexual silence and straightening without being able to commit to an "it gets better" narrative proudly touted in North American US and Canadian contexts. Writing autoethnographically, diasporically, and queerly, we write with "contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles" (Gopinath, 2005, p. 4).

Refracted through the prism of subsequent adult experiences, our distant memories of childhood are fragmented, frail, and inventive, undoubtedly fueled by imagination and reconstructed through feminist and queer understandings of sexuality, the self, and diaspora. As we discuss throughout, we have chosen to coauthor despite the differences in our narratives, as a way to draw attention to the many ways "nationhood" signifies and is implemented, especially in relation to sexual education. In providing a story of Polish nationhood based in Alberta, Canada, for instance, we reflect on the ways in which educational diasporas navigate the affects and commitments of patriotism and nationalism, forging imagined communities of Polishness geographically separate from, though also in dialogue with, those of "Poland" proper. In this way, our accounts suggest that ideas of "West" and "East" are themselves overinvested with unrealistic boundaries (Said, 1978).

Reconstructing our memories of the everyday, our "ordinary affects" (Stewart, 2007, p. 1) of inhabiting the school space, we draw on the examples from our childhood and adolescent years to reveal continuities between dissimilar contexts sharing legacies of their post-state-socialist pasts. Our experiences point to the absence of formal, school-based sex education and the presence of sexual and gendered learning enacted through evaded and hidden curricula. Whether in Russia or in a diasporic Polish community in Canada, educational institutions are deeply suspicious of formal sex education; their suspicions are animated by the concerns around safeguarding childhood innocence, maintaining a heterosexual presumption, reinforcing gender normativity, and editing out transgender, gender queer, and non-binary gender possibilities. At the same time, as our accounts flesh out, even within an overt insistence on heterosexuality, students, children, and adolescents are presented with possibilities for homoerotic, homosocial, homosexual and homo-asexual intimacies.

As researchers and educators, we are disconcerted by the observation that despite the complexities of gendered discourses in post-socialist landscapes, theorizations of post-socialism are most often missing from curricula on transnational feminisms, as if Eastern and Central Europe, to borrow from Redi Koobak and Raili Marling (2014), is almost "a non-place or non-region" (p. 339). In recent years, punk performances of the Russian band Pussy Riot, street protests organized by the Ukrainian "sextremist" collective Femen, as well as the #czarnyprotest or "Black Protest" against the criminalization of abortion in Poland have been attracting some attention and critique from scholars across Europe and North America. Yet outside of

these representational media landscapes, the field of transnational feminist studies has little to say about gender and sexualities in the "second world." As Magdalena Grabowska (2012) has explored, transnational feminist dialogues primarily feature explorations of power flows between the global North and global South and between the First and Third World, leaving the so-called Second World, including former Soviet-colonized countries, out of the dialogue. Driven by this shared sense of peripherality, we collaboratively used a methodology of "telling it slantwise" to recreate our memories of sex education, attending to the specificities of gender regimes in diasporic and post-state-socialist contexts. While we caution readers against generalizing from our accounts, we hope that the perspectives offered in this chapter invite new ways of addressing sexuality education within post-state-socialist contexts. Specifically, we invite feminist and queer storytellers and researchers to pay increased attention to Eastern and Central Europe.

NOTES

1. The school and city will remain unnamed out of consideration for the community.
2. An example would be a teacher using an outdated and degrading term "fallen woman" when referring to Sonia, a prostitute, from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* novel.
3. For the other waves of immigration, see Baker, 1989; Burrell, 2009; Drozdzewski, 2007; Mlynarz, 2008.
4. At the time Adam Mickiewicz published the national epic poem in 1834, Lithuania and Poland were linked nationalities under Poland-Lithuania. The story is set in 1811–1812, a time when Poland was under the partitions, and its territory was occupied by Russia, Prussia, and Austria so that it "disappeared off the map." To recite this poem is thus an exercise in Polish émigré nostalgia: a longing for a homeland stolen.

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Erasure and Renewal in (Post)Socialist China: My Mother's Long Journey

Jinting Wu

In 2016, during a phone call, Mother told me excitedly about the 50th anniversary of her graduation and the upcoming class reunion. "50 years!" she exclaimed. "Many of us already passed on, and it is time." Half a century ago, in 1966, Mother ended her last school day as China plunged into the decade-long Cultural Revolution. Secondary-school graduates of the classes of 1966, 1967, and 1968 were euphemistically termed *laosanjie* (老三届)—cohorts of youth whose education was ruined by a decade of vexed politics and ideological turmoil. "Ma, that is great. Can you tell me more?" I ventured to request interviews of some sort, to which Mother chuckled, "Well, sure, before I am too old to remember. But you've heard me all along."

Across oceans and time zones and over numerous calls, Mother and I conversed about an era both bright and faded, about her young life engulfed forcibly by political whirlwinds, about the displaced past, present, and future of a changing socialist country. Born in 1949, the year when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded, Mother is part of the "liberated" (*jiefang*) generation.[1] As the collective memory goes, the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong lifted the country from feudal

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oppression and ushered in a new age of independence and autonomy. I, on the other hand, belong to the post-1980s generation[2] and came of age when China's economy was gradually lifted from a shambles, and when the ideological color codes slowly lost meanings under Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Together, our lives span four phases of China's socialist era (Chen & Chen, 2016): PRC's founding years (1949–1966), the decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), early reform period interrupted by the Tiananmen Square Protests in 1989 (1976–1989), and the deepening of market reform and reassertion of political authority (1989 to present). Mainly focusing on the second phase (1966–1976) and the fourth phase (1989 onward), this chapter explores memories of youth and the absent presence of schooling during Mother's long journey in China's Cultural Revolution and the present market reform.

Through autoethnographic accounts of memories and lived experiences, this chapter suggests that we often experience, understand, and imagine the hegemonic framework of socialist ideology flexibly. As well, post-socialist conditions are mediated by the continual assertion of political authority alongside people's creative agency. Can China be described as post-socialist? While I will further discuss the ambiguity and idiosyncrasy of Chinese post-socialism later, suffice it to say now, that in striving to understand memories of youth and schooling in socialist transitions, we necessarily deal with multiple epochs: presocialist, socialist, and postsocialist. These epochs, however, are only convenient intellectual demarcations and often intertwine and coexist in a society. As China's (post)socialist conditions entail competing and complementary epochs, we are necessarily dealing with dramas, voices, and interpretations that sometimes resonate and sometimes defy our own understanding. Remembering helps Mother construct a connection between the past and the present, and understanding her narratives offers me other versions of the past that may not be possible through my own lenses. Mother's narratives intertwine with mine, and our shifting social positions shed light on the class structure, ideological politics, gender dynamics, and social inequality of China, forever tethering on the edge of old and new. Mother's colloquial, unadorned style of speech drives my imagination to reconstruct the stories from their multiple tellings. The dual movements of our accounts reveal efforts to render the familiar strange and the strange familiar in order to search for meanings that sustained and continue to sustain our individual and collective lives.

Locating Memories and Interpreting Meanings

This autoethnography draws from memory studies, ethnography, and oral history—the genres of reporting that use evocative and grounded experience to shed light on cultural phenomena and social forms and challenge hegemonic bodies of discourse. While ethnographers have traditionally studied cultures different from their own in out-of-the-way places, the idea for what constitutes the "field" has expanded in recent decades to incorporate new forms of personal narratives, folklores, memories, and biographic accounts (Narayan, 2012; Reed-Dahanay, 1997) that take place in the familiar, mundane, nearby. In addition, autoethnography foregrounds the subjectivity, emotionality, and fluidity in human experience and allows us to explore the innumerable ways of interpreting both lived and remembered life events. Although this chapter is about my mother, the "auto-" nevertheless designates a space of bond and intimacy, where Mother's narrative voice intertwines with mine in reflexively and interactively producing personal and social accounts, and where the self-other, insider-outsider, participant-observer distinctions collapse in shared domains of meaning-making.

Meanwhile, memory charts an "unofficial" history and provides microscale sense-making to illuminate social, political, and educational experiences. The resurgence of memory study in academia is contested, at times celebrated as an authentic conduit of lived experience and other times condemned for being empirically problematic and adulterating verifiable history (Pickering & Keightley, 2006). Yet memory study as a mode of investigation does open up a capacious epistemological space, where multiple modes of representation and codes of remembering are performed, juxtaposed, and reconciled. If the role of memory is in the "crafting" of a collective past, there are multiple collectivities that carry with them resemblances, dissimilarities, and contradictions to offer multiple interpretations of shared events (Misztal, 2003).

In this chapter, memory studies, ethnography, and oral history converge through narrative and interpretive details to provide an agent-centered view toward history—while we remain attentive to the ways in which agential views are circumscribed by existing political and social templates—and open up possibilities for a different kind of past and present. I derive narratives from three sources: ongoing conversations between Mother and our immediate and extended family members that I observed throughout the years, more focused oral testimonials shared by Mother

since 2016, and physical artifacts and memorabilia. The continual and intimate nature of "data collection" as part of our kinship relation, and the intertwining of Mother's and my own memories, propel me to question the self-other distinction and the canonical ways of doing research. The ways I "interpreted" the "data" were colored by my multiple roles as a daughter, a researcher, a coparticipant, and one crossing cultural, linguistic, and epistemological divides between China and the West. At times, I wrestled with my intellectual persona and kinship bond in finding an appropriate voice and analytical angle. At times, the realist genre of social-science reportage fused with creative non-fictional writing to offer an evocative textual representation alongside abstract analyses.

Revisiting the past through listening again and again to family conversations and oral testimonials, looking at old photographs, and rekindling memories, I come to see Mother's dilemmas and the eccentricities of an era in a different light. Where I would expect melancholy, there was relief; where I anticipated great displeasure, hope surfaced; what I would have read as painful, Mother saw as nostalgic. There is no single story about China as theories of Western politicians would have predicted. In Western academic literature on China, the Cultural Revolution is largely interpreted as rupture and erasure (Walder, 2009; White, 1989). That is, an era of erroneous political decision-making, wasted human lives, and what Agamben (2005) calls "the state of exception," when political violence and ideological paranoia were justified in supposed time of crisis to allow the government to transcend the rules of laws and exercise totalitarianism. However, there are other voices—albeit minor ones—that do not contradict the dominant narrative yet offer multilayered hues to the visions of the past via particular historical consciousness informed by biographical accounts. Etched on the same cultural and political template are themes of erasure and ruin as well as signs of reparation and renewal.

Scholars of education have characterized formal schooling as a political project of the state to order social life, foster particular ideals of citizenship, and advance the modernization agenda (Bloch, 2004; Coe, 2005; Kaplan, 2006). As a means of political socialization and national integration, schooling reflects and fulfills the pedagogical role of the state and is the crucial nexus connecting state power and local meaning-making. The state, however, does not limit its pedagogical influence in the space of formal schooling. As we demonstrate, the Chinese state's shifting modalities of power forcefully claimed allegiance of its population through a wide range of ideological apparatuses, which I will elaborate later in the chapter, such as revolutionary dances and dramas, the Red Guards' Movement, the

"Down to the Countryside" campaign, big-character posters, and various other forms of class struggles. Even in the absence of schooling, these apparatuses worked pedagogically to socialize the youth into a communist utopia and constituted the condition of possibility of being and becoming worthy socialist citizens. And yet, as cultural theorist Homi Bhabha (1990) contends, there is a fundamental ambivalence that the nation must regenerate itself in and through a double-writing: the population as objects of the nation's pedagogical authority and as "performative subjects," who embody, conform to, and in so doing also open up agentic possibility in the national dictum. This circularity and indeterminacy—even in the most violent dramas of Chinese history—captures the copresence of an ideological nation-state and lived realities.

Folklorist Kirin Narayan (2007) writes that "stories are wonderfully portable, carrying weighty histories, places, and people with no excess luggage fees" (p. 4). As I listened to these sometimes weighty, sometimes amusing stories that threaded through Mother's adolescence and adulthood and that also intertwined with mine, new insights began to emerge. These insights shed light on the fraught relations between the party-state and its youth, between education and political socialization, between public values and authoritarian limits that continue to tug the social fabric of today's China. In the past decade or so, I have moved between China, the United States, and Europe for schooling and work. These stories travel with me, reshaped by and gaining new meanings from the places, people, and lenses I have encountered on my own journey. Listening carefully to Mother's narratives challenges my own assumptions filtered through my Western education and highlights (post)socialism's multiple shades and hues.

Surviving 1966: "Educated" Under the Red Flag

One of Mother's proud childhood memories is that she got to write down "poor and lower-middle peasant (*pinxia zhongnong* 贫下中农)" on official forms asking for class categorization. Since peasants formed the overwhelming majority of the country, and galvanizing their support was crucial in Communist success, peasants were given preferential status, and the countryside was turned into a moral high ground of the revolutionary fervor. The peasant status of Mother's family appeared favorably in a political order where wealth and knowledge was accused of being "bourgeois" and "intellectually elitist" while poverty and radicalism was given ideological legitimacy. "Our family was red. And that was a thing of pride." Growing up, brother and I had always been told that one's class status

("red" or otherwise) was hereditary. Here class has little to do with one's material wealth but designates one's ideological categories under the communist rule.[3]

1966 was an eventful year. In spring, my maternal grandpa passed away in a work accident. In May, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution began in earnest and swept the country into violent class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Walder, 2009). In June, Mother graduated from secondary school; she had just turned 17. Little did she know that her school days were forever finished. In July, Mao called for massive rallies in Tiananmen Square to personally greet hundreds of thousands of Red Guards from all over the country. He derailed the capitalist remnants in the Party and called on the nation's youth to revive the Communist spirit and restore his own authority. Mother was selected as one of the Red Guard representatives of her town (*fujing daibiao* 赴京代表) and was sent to Beijing to meet Chairman Mao. Selected from the preferred backgrounds of "Five Red Categories," Red Guards (*hong wei bing* 红卫兵) were party-backed student rebel groups organized to preserve the fledgling Communist state and to promote its Cultural Revolution.

Although still mourning the passing of her father, Mother was elated to be chosen as a Red Guard representative and sent to Beijing. To this day, she narrated this episode with noticeable emotion: "Your grandma heard the news first, and we were beyond ourselves. I was not supposed to wear red during mourning, but for my trip to Beijing, we broke the ritual, and your grandma made me a red coat." It was a high honor, also an order to be accepted without question. In Chinese cultural cosmology, the color red symbolizes joy and celebration, which is to be avoided during grief and mourning. Politically, red also signals one's ideological purity and devotion to the Communist leadership. When entangled in the maddening political movements on a mass scale, personal lives—and tragedies—were diminished in significance.

In the 1960s, China was still much insulated, and even domestic mobility was strictly controlled by the state. Venturing out of one's local residence required official approval, and a state-sponsored trip to Beijing was only to be dreamed of for a 17-year-old from a provincial town. "I was so young at that time," Mom stated, as if prefacing her own elation at the turn of events, "it made me forget about my sorrow for a moment. I was chosen after many rounds of anonymous votes. A great honor." Grieving the passing of her father, Mother nevertheless became morally enlivened by the call of the nation:

> Before we left for Beijing, we were gathered in a big, public celebration. Just like sending off soldiers to the front lines, there were processions with drums and gongs. Very festive (*renao* 热闹). We were accompanied all the way to the station, where we boarded the bus to Nanping [the prefectural capital]. We stayed in a government guesthouse, and early next morning we took the train and headed to Beijing.

To properly contextualize the emotions Mother felt on this trip, we need to understand the sweeping political changes in China at the dawn of the Cultural Revolution. In fall 1966, Mao had ordered all schools to be closed. Classes were suspended. Youth were mobilized. The country was engulfed in a state of frenzy (Pepper, 1996; Unger, 1982). One's self-worth was thoroughly sanitized in a political climate where individual expressions were strictly prohibited, and life's only reward was one's manifest loyalty to the Communist Cause. "Bad" ideological elements were investigated and subjected to public humiliation, torture, detention, and imprisonment. While many lives were distressed and ruined, to have an "uncontaminated" political record with a "red" background was a privilege and a green light to many things. (Chan, Rosen, & Unger, 1980). And if one felt the privilege was earned for a worthy cause, which many (including Mother) did at that time, the sentiment of gratitude was real, as was the willingness to sacrifice and endure hardship. Describing the arduous trip to Beijing, Mother continued:

> We spent three days and two nights on the train, sitting on hard seats, eating dry food we had brought along. We were nervous for making such a long trip on our own and didn't dare to move around or get off the train to stretch ourselves during the stops. Due to long sitting, our legs were swollen up like gourds. When we finally reached Beijing, it was dawn. A coach was there waiting for us, and the driver kindly passed by Tiananmen Square for us to see. We were so thrilled and forgot about our tiredness. We were dropped off at the Peking Petroleum University. There were so many Red Guards from all over, and not enough space in the dorms. So we were put up in the classrooms and slept on the floor.

As I listened, I imagined scores of youngsters sleeping in rows like prison convicts on the hard surface with straw mattresses and no bedding, their clothing and whatever items they brought on the trip scattering on the floor. Despite the exhausting journey, they were giggling, talking, and shouting in different dialects. Emotions surged high. The atmosphere

smelt of everybody's lives mixed together, vibrant of youthful anxiety and exhilaration. Amidst the chaos were pocket-size "Little Red Books" (Quotations of Chairman Mao with a red plastic cover《毛主席语录》) that were placed in one's chest bags (*yuludai* 语录袋). Staying in such a crowded condition must have been intensely uncomfortable, yet Mother reiterated that they were overtaken by joy: "Discomfort? I don't remember. How many people got to go to Beijing?! We were so lucky!" In the fraught relations between the party-state and its youth, many adolescents like Mother lived a particular kind of political awakening. Instilled with youthful enchantment and idealism, they adapted quickly as good student Red Guards. For Mother, her political engagement provided a turning point in her private struggle with her father's death and an outlet for her public activism, which continues to this day.

And in hindsight, Red Guards were protected, and the trip, entirely state-sponsored, was at least not frightening. Since September 1966, more and more young people traveled from across the country to the nation's capital to learn from the Beijing Red Guards' movement. They enjoyed free rides on public transportation, free food, free accommodations, and free entries to parks and scenic spots. The condition was that they must recite Mao's sayings every time they used the public service. "Was it difficult to memorize the passages?" I asked. "Not at all. We did it all the time in school. You recite one passage when you get on the bus, and again when you get off the bus. Just like that." Mother replied matter-of-factly. On that trip, each person received two thumb-size aluminum badges (*xiangzhang* 像章) of Chairman Mao, a Red Guard armband (*xiuzhang* 袖章), a chest bag for holding the Little Red Book, and a certificate. For decades, Mother managed to save these memorabilia during our family's many moves, regarding them with great commemorative and sentimental value.

> On the National Day [October 1], we got up at around two or three o'clock in the morning. It took us hours to walk to Tiananmen Square. There were so many students, all lined up like a sea. We could only inch forward step by step. By the time we reached the Square, we were arranged into groups by province. Because our province was a revolutionary front line (*qianxian* 前线), we got stationed near the rostrum. So we were lucky we could see where Chairman Mao stood. Others at the back were craning their necks.

In my mind, I pictured the early-morning Tiananmen Square bursting with activities. A sea of youngsters was shouting deafening slogans and waving their Little Red Books, hysterical yet disciplined, in anxious wait to

catch a glimpse of Mao. A black-and-white photo showing rows of students dressed up in old army uniforms with Red Guard armbands, Little Red Books in hands, and posing in front of Chairman Mao's portrait on the Tiananmen Square was a family treasure (Fig. 1). Mother had it laminated and covered in many layers of wax paper before sealing it in an envelope. "You will never find a picture like this anymore," she said with pride and nostalgia every time she showed the photo at family reunions. This was before the age of digital cameras and smartphones, and the photo is irreproducible. Mother never fails to mention how envious her classmates were that she was selected as a representative to travel to Beijing to see Chairman Mao. The picture was taken after one of the gargantuan rallies that gathered over a million young participants from around the country in fall 1966. Mother was in the center of the front row, wearing a cotton jacket dotted with red flowers—the red jacket she would not have worn during mourning.

Despite years of wear and tear, the photo still vaguely shows the expressions on faces—a mixture of excitement, innocence, hope, uncertainty. In those days, the prestige of being received and greeted by Mao himself was

Fig. 1   Mother with student Red Guards on Tiananmen Square (1966)
Source: Family archives

like a pilgrimage. Alongside the depiction of Red Guards as violent mobs stirred up to wreak havoc (Chang, 2003, pp. 282–296; Walder, 2009), Mother's narratives paint an image of the hubbub of youthful sociality, romantic enthusiasm, and even a flame of hope. The harsh reality of life and the regime's hypocrisy only became visible in hindsight, years later.

When asked what was the main activity of their trip to Beijing, Mother answered unequivocally: "To see Chairman Mao and to study how others write big-character posters (*dazibao* 大字报)." Big-character posters were adopted as an instrument of mass mobilization during the Maoist era to disseminate political opinions (Li, 2009). At the peak of ideological radicalism and political purges, large-size characters painted by brush were mounted on walls as a ubiquitous means of political protest, attack, and accusation. Seeing permanent class conflicts and political campaigns as necessary for social progress, Mao published his first *dazibao* titled "Bombard the Headquarters" (*pao dao siling bu*. 炮打司令部), where he insinuated against his opponents in the party, who tried to quench the escalating chaos with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. With Mao's encouragement, the country's vast number of youth who had no schools to attend took up the task of writing big-character posters, especially targeting the bourgeois anti-revolutionaries. Big-character posters provided a cheap yet effective platform for the party leadership to promote mass persecution and class struggle, resulting in innumerable deaths and political turmoil across the country (Dittmer & Chen, 1981). For millions of youth who were deprived of the opportunity of formal education, *dazibao* became a de facto pedagogical tool to "teach" them who were the comrades and who were the enemies, whom to love and whom to hate. An essential goal of the state-organized trip to Beijing was for young Red Guards to learn how to write *dazibao* by copying contents from existing posters found on college campuses all over the nation's capital. The contents of the posters were curricula par excellence for the pedagogical state to impart political education and shape the young minds. Because of Mother's good skill at calligraphy, she remembered being asked by her seniors to copy many posters while in Beijing:

> The content? Oh, it was all political stuff. To attack those in power (*dang quan pai* 当权派), bad elements, class enemies, you know. For instance, some of our teachers were labeled "rightist" and some "leftist" and they were constantly denounced in public (*pidou* 批斗). Most of these posters were put up in schools and that's why we were taken to many universities in Beijing to study them. Huge and beautiful campuses.

The university campuses that Mother intensely admired were turned from a site of knowledge production to a site of colonization of the minds. Yet not everything was politicized. Underneath the political justification, the trip was also privately felt as a coveted opportunity to visit the country's capital. This was one of the only occasions that many ever went on a trip outside their provincial town. In a mild tone of regret, Mother complained that she was too obedient when older students asked her to copy *dazibao* and therefore didn't have much time for sightseeing. I also wondered whether the trip, the posters, and other radical fanfare gave concrete forms to the otherwise abstract concepts of patriotism, communism, and amidst all of it, the paramount leader Mao himself. Drawn and drowned into the endless swirl of political forces of their time, youth growing up "under the red flag" were deprived of an education, yet in every sense "educated" by a powerful assertion of a pedagogical state: their curricula, as lived political texts (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995), were the seeds of the Communist moral high ground and Mao's personal deification.

Despite being a bright student, Mother did not have a chance to study in a university as her schooling abruptly ended. After returning from her much-touted trip to Beijing, Mother found herself thrown into the heat of mass campaigns and political sloganeering in her hometown. Friends and colleagues left and right were wildly condemned and called ugly names. Giant posters written in overwhelming black ink covered classrooms, school walls, and playgrounds, and used violent language to expose and denounce capitalist-roaders. Political socialization filled the void left by the absence of formal schooling and turned deserted schools into fertile pedagogical grounds accompanied by the brute force of an authoritarian state. Students ill-treating teachers, family members scapegoating one another, workmates concocting accusations—the situation was one of confusion and a horrific "state of exception" (Agamben, 2005) that gave one no alternative. Mother was far from radical, nor was she particularly attuned to politics or thirsty for militant class struggle. Yet not participating in the tide would be seen as a loss of faith and betrayal of the party. As Jung Chang (2003, pp. 191–203) argues poignantly in her moving family memoir, much of the Chinese population was genuinely grateful to Mao and the party; even if they had a grain of doubt about the regime, they endured it quietly, believing in hardship as necessary for something brighter to come. In this sense, Mother was a perfect socialist child, both due to her family's humble background and her own dutiful response to the call of her nation.

Romance and Revolution

It was autumn 1972. Leaves started to fall, adorning the streets and sidewalks with crunchy dins of footsteps. At this moment in time, China was still steeped in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. The ideological fervor of Communism had colored many lives, and my Mother's was no exception. In this provincial town, news traveled fast and everyone knew that Mother was about to get married to an army officer whom she had not yet met. The marriage was entirely arranged by my maternal grandmother. "At that time, it was fashionable to marry soldiers as they had good class backgrounds. Your Ah Po (grandma) had a friend who knew of your father. He did well in the army. It was decided just like that." As with most women of her generation, Mother did not defy what was expected of her. In the Maoist era, falling in love was not necessary for marriage, because marriage was considered a respectable social responsibility for both men and women of age. Material stringency also made conjugal union a necessity. My maternal grandma was a fiercely independent, self-educated lady, who broke out of her socially bounded womanhood to become the first female judge in town. She climbed up the bureaucratic ladder and became a known figure in her social circle. Like her own mother, Mother also has an independent spirit, and yet she was also a filial daughter and trusted her mother, and ultimately the party, in life's decisions. At this time, Mao had called on the country's youth to love the army and build a strong physique to defend the motherland. As it turned out, in addition to her future husband being an army officer, Mother's wedding had more than a military tinge to it.

"My heart sank. My Goodness! What images they put up on the walls!" I could feel the heaviness in my heart when Mother described her shock at the mural décor upon entering her bedroom. "I saw bruised men and women on the battleground. Their clothes were torn, their hair frizzled, and their faces stained with blood. Then there were images of Chairman Mao." *Weren't weddings supposed to be a time of joy and celebration?* Mother wondered. And yet, revolutionary fervor had found its way into the most intimate space, in quite a gory way. "I couldn't recognize where I was for a moment." As Mother goes on, I listen with wide-eyed perplexity. "The whole place felt like a blur, and I remember feeling sad when I saw the room. Who put up images like that for a wedding?" Speaking from the position of a romantic heroine on her wedding night, Mother narrates a drab scene in her inner chamber, a drabness nonetheless dressed up in the

magnificence of an ideological utopia. In keeping with the Communist puritanism and an austere lifestyle, romantic love was a taboo subject and regarded as the product of bourgeois ideology. Devoid of any vivid expression of intimacy, the wedding chamber looked more suited to an atmosphere of class struggle than the warm hearth of a budding household.

Nevertheless, there is a stark beauty to Mother's stories. As with many family tales, this episode was shared in bits and pieces over meals, bedtime chats, and family gatherings. Every time it was told, there were subtle differences in the narration, sometimes with laughter and humor, sometimes with serious irony, and sometimes with weeping and sorrow. Occasionally, Mother would "speak bitterness" about her loss and turbulent youth, and how her generation was hit by waves of social experiments one after another, such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the Down to the Countryside Movement, the One-Child Policy, the Reform and Opening-Up Policy, to name a few. These state policies and dramatic political events had a lasting impact on the life events of Mother's generation. Yet for the most part, Mother considered herself lucky compared to hundreds of thousands of men and women who were labeled as "black" and "counterrevolutionaries," sacked from their jobs, rejected as political outcasts, and sent to labor camps. In a society where one's lot was determined by the accident of birth, her family's "class-line" had helped her escape the ruins that many of her contemporaries suffered for decades to come.

Mobilizing Through Art and Labor

Since primary school, Mother had participated in school performances. During the Cultural Revolution, besides writing big-character posters, she rehearsed and danced in organized theater troupes as a versatile student Red Guard. In the 1950s and 1960s, revolutionary operas became part of the political instrument to educate the masses on class struggles and party propaganda. Revolutionary operas were a particular genre popularized by Mao's last wife, Jiang Qing, who directed eight model operas (*yangbanxi* 样板戏) to aid political mobilization during the Cultural Revolution. Combining and modifying elements from the Peking Opera and Russian Ballet, revolutionary operas disseminated political content, such as glorifying the People's Liberation Army, pledging loyalty to Mao, telling of the struggles against political enemies, and bringing heroic peasants, soldiers, and workers onto the stage (Mittler, 2010). The pedagogical function of

such political arts cannot be underestimated. Given that most Chinese had little to no literacy, operas had a broader reach than printed media and were performed in formal and informal gatherings.

Mother's talent was put to use, which added merit to her already favorable class background. Perhaps, I wondered, her involvement in the revolutionary arts also provided some solace in an otherwise monotonous and terror-ridden era. Like many of her fellows, Red Guardship became Mother's full-time occupation and replaced their adolescence and schooling with upheavals and ideological hyperbole. In the idealism of high Communist values, slogans like "Rebellion against authority," "Down with capitalist-roaders," and "Destroy the old world and build a new one," appealed to youth with the promise of a better world. In Mother's recollection, very few Red Guards she knew were directly involved in cruel acts as many learned to swim with the tide in order not to raise objections or be classified as "sympathizers with class enemies." What seems a violent and disruptive time was also a bright chapter with a moral sense of goodness that sustained many like Mother in the uncertainty of ideological ferment.

Meanwhile, like hundreds of thousands of sent-down youth, Mother was soon assigned to a remote village to take up backbreaking farm labor. While exile and hard labor was a form of imperial punishment throughout China's feudal dynasties, Mao believed that physical toil could reform thought and was necessary for preparing correctly motivated young citizens. In January 1969, at the age of 19, Mother was among the first dispatch of her town to be sent down to the countryside to receive "reeducation by peasants." A ceremony was held in the local cinema, where students were applauded and each received an anthology of Mao, a palm-bark rain cape (*zongyi* 棕衣), a hoe, and a firewood chopper (tools for farm work). The countryside became my Mother's "school" without schools. Her education was to plough the field, plant the seedlings, gather the harvest, and endure hardship. Her cohort of sent-down youth slept many to a room in a discarded warehouse, made their own meals, collected firewood, washed in the river, and worked under organized communes and production brigades. Often, they had to get up before dawn to plough the field, work in the wet paddies with bare feet, and leave with swollen and bloody limbs after being bitten by bugs and insects. Mother developed a skin infection that troubles her to this day.

Amidst the discomfort and strain of laboring in mountain humidity, Mother continued her dance in the countryside as it was the only officially sanctioned form of collective leisure.

> Villagers liked us a lot. Every day we hardly had time to cook dinner. After we returned from the field, they already arrived and waited for dance lessons. They liked us because we were hardworking and didn't make trouble. Once, our production brigade and our dance team were praised in a news report.

In stylized Red Guard postures and movements, young dancers like Mother embodied revolutionary heroism, class struggle, loyalty to Mao, and eulogy to workers, peasants, and soldiers (see Fig. 2). The ideological and artistic became fused into a mass campaign of the pedagogical state to indoctrinate but also to orient life in those humorless years. Later, Mother moved back to town and was assigned a job at the tea plantation. She often said, "Your uncle and I had choices because of your grandpa's good class background. In those days, we were afraid of politics, so we thought being a worker would be a safe option." Opportunities to return to urban areas after being sent down to the countryside were far and few in between (Zhou & Hou, 1999, p. 16), and once again, Mother's family class background helped her secure the access. Mother became a worker (*gongren* 工人), and with dedication, she excelled in her duties. Later, she attended the local Party School and became a cadre in her factory. The responsibilities as a cadre involved managerial matters in the office, which was less strenuous than physical labor in the tea workshops and allowed Mother to attend to her other miscellaneous interests and duties. In her spare time, she continued to be involved in performing arts, choreographing and staging dances in factory workshops, schools, and government administrative organs (see Fig. 3). Used extensively as a pedagogical tool for political mobilization, revolutionary dances also provided solace and room for creativity in fixed ideological horizons, brightening Mother's world, and making the instability all around more bearable.

> In spare time, we choreographed dances and designed props from cheap, available materials. Once we tried to imitate the Tibetan dances and borrowed hospital doctors' coats to make our dresses. No internet yet so we had to rely on imagination. Our team was well known in town. Each time we performed, the next day, many would recognize us and shoot us friendly looks.

In the Maoist era (1949–1976), with the collective ethics of "serving the people," state pedagogies took on radically different meanings. The nation's political leadership sought to instill a Communist ethos through

Fig. 2   Dancers in stylized revolutionary postures (1973)
Source: Family archives

mass unlearning of social privilege, educating youth by physical labor more than books and staging racial ideological campaigns by popular mobilization. Much of Mother's adolescence was spent as a student dancer, as a Red Guard, followed by a stint as a school graduate "sent down" to live and work in the countryside. Through both dance performance and agricultural labor, women in Mother's generation embodied a particular form of femininity. On the one hand, female bodies became tightly linked to the political restructuring that challenged the traditional gender norms and hierarchy. Women were no longer confined within the

Fig. 3 "Fresh tea dedicated to Chairman Mao" (1973)
Source: Family archives

domestic sphere or merely engaged in affective labor of nurture, care, and reproduction. Party leader Mao Zedong derailed the physical constraints on women (such as foot binding) and advocated for making female bodies physically fit for factory and farm labor (Schram, 1992, p. 353). The dichotomies between masculinity and femininity were considered an obstacle for the advancement of the new socialist China that had just embarked on a mass-scale industrial and ideological revolution. As women acquired physical dispositions traditionally assigned to men, they responded to Mao's calling that "women can hold up half the sky." And yet, while the radical gender equality certainly altered women's physical dispositions and self-representations, it also gave rise to a new gender regime that effectively wiped out individuality and subsumed the diverse realm of the private into state-imposed ideological uniformity. The pedagogical state did not only shape the thoughts and conducts of the population through violent means of class struggle but also through discursively altering social norms to bring about disciplinary effects on every individual in society (Foucault, 1980).

Post-socialism in Reform China: Depoliticization, Ambiguity, Multiplicity

Post-socialism is hardly a nomenclature in the burgeoning scholarship on China today. Initially it was used by Western academics and journalists to describe the era after the fall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states in Central and Eastern Europe. More recently, it has been deployed to indicate the post-Mao transformation in China marked by radical economic restructuring, social reforms, and concomitant political-ideological repositioning (Zhang, 2008). However, the term is fraught with ambiguities. Temporally, "post" indicates a demarcation of contemporary China from its ideologically charged Communist reign. This reflects the nation's collective looking forward yet does not make the legacy of socialism/Communism entirely irrelevant. On the contrary, the Chinese state continues an official claim to socialism, especially in global debates over thorny diplomatic matters, to highlight Chinese characteristics and the unique historical constraints the country faces.

Some scholars have preferred the term "late socialism" instead, indicating the difficulty to pinpoint stages or epochs in China's developmental trajectory and the diehard legacies of the socialist regime (Zhang, 2001, p. 208). In other words, post-socialism is not a teleological prediction or radical departure from the past. The "post" provides a lens to think about the simultaneous existence of ruptures and continuities and speaks to the fragmented nature of Chinese society in the new millennium. Cultural theorist Zhang Xudong describes Chinese post-socialism in the global context of postmodernity as "an economic reality, a state of politics, an intellectual discourse, and, above all, as an emergent culture or form of life" (2008, p. 14). Zhang argues that the post-socialist tendencies continue to reflect the socialist elements that proceeded them. The continual strong presence of the state and its mediation of market forces has become a central feature of contemporary China. The state's visible hand and the market's invisible hand simultaneously govern the lives of the people such that some claim China has embraced capitalism with socialist undertone (Liu, 2011, p. 38).

However, the sentiment toward the state is one of great ambiguity. With widespread materialism, corruption, and conflicts between policies and local interests, many people have lost confidence in the state. Nevertheless, the official discourse continues to play up language from the collective era—such as equality, selflessness, service to the people—even though in

the Chinese context of "doing politics with words" (Schoenhals, 1992), such utopian ideals are little more than rhetoric. Meanwhile, middle-aged and elderly generations often lament the bygone socialist era, the alienating individualism, and the erasure of moral integrity in the ebbs and flows of market economy. With 64% of China's rich heading overseas in search of education, opportunity, and clean air, Western media paints a "Great Chinese Exodus" (Browne, 2014). And yet, popular nationalism, on the rise since the 1990s, has featured patriotic outbursts of varying scales to defend China against Western slights (Zhou, 2005). Therefore, scholars have argued for the term "flexible postsocialism" (Zhang, 2010, p. 17) to help think about the multiple ways in which the Chinese state refashions itself in all aspects of economic, social, and cultural life, and how citizens are cast into new kinds of subjects, who express mixed sentiments of pride, disappointment, and hope for China's future and its government.

For Mother, the state continues its present absence in her retirement life. Her involvement in the political arts continues and morphs into a personal pastime. Now she volunteers as a community organizer of dance lessons in public plazas. Rising at daybreak for morning calisthenics in the local park, even in the coldest winter months, both my parents have dedicated their retirement to healthy and active living. As Farquhar (2009) describes, it is a common phenomenon today that middle-aged and elderly Chinese gather in public parks and pavements, dancing to and singing revolutionary songs for physical fitness and private enjoyment. This form of public life serves a pedagogical role, as a continuation of the "culture of the masses" from the Maoist era, and it is a reminder of a collective mobilization—no longer for a Communist utopia but for a better material life here and now. Mother's words reveal a simple pleasure and the practical conviviality: "I'm glad I still have some value in retirement. Serving people in the neighborhood makes me happy. My days will be dull if I don't spend time teaching dances." Mother is in her best element when on stage. During the busy season of rehearsals, she travels to a nearby village to give lessons every evening, when villagers are free from their day's work in the field. On several occasions, I tagged along to the rehearsals and witnessed Mother patiently coaching her audience, many of whom barely knew how to synchronize their hands and feet with music. Outbursts of laughter filled the evening air, interlaced with the rhythmic beats flowing out of a boom box or portable amplifiers connected to an iPad. They practiced in an outdoor community space, often attracting passers-by to stop for a moment and cheer on. "I'm called Teacher Huang," Mother giggled

with a broad grin, "never imagined I could become a teacher after retirement." Mother regarded her efforts and sacrifice as amply rewarded by the joy she saw in her village dance team.

> We really started from zero (*cong ling kaishi* 从零开始). At the beginning, it took several evenings to teach each dance step. I literally had to hold their hands (*shou ba shou* 手把手). I spent a lot of time and had to be very patient, but it all paid off.

Now the team is not only well known in town but also sought after by town officials to perform for various celebratory occasions. Mother sees her role as more than a choreographer. "Village women used to get into petty quarrels, now they get along well with each other. They laugh and enjoy themselves. Their health improves and personal relationship also improves." If the ideological state replaced the school in exercising pedagogical order in her youth, now in her retirement, Mother embodies a pedagogical role herself in imparting an artistic form of leisure that is largely devoid of political content and yet nevertheless permeated by the absent presence of the state. Mother's artistic habitus is inseparable from her political habitus cultivated in an intense ideological era, and her sense of morality and service to people (sentiments prevalent in the Maoist era) continue to be fused in the collective neighborhood life. For Mother, leisure life in the neighborhood is a welcomed respite from the chores and duties at home, and it marks her public service and the extension of herself in a collective engagement. Through dance and through teaching dance, the artistic, the athletic, the national, and the pedagogical become fused.

Physical exercise and calisthenics may be a purely private pursuit in the West, but they carry specific meanings in China. In the rhetoric of strengthening the physique and building a great sports nation, the Chinese state has always been keen on promoting physical fitness for nation-building and modernization (Brownell, 1995). As Beijing prepared to host the 2008 Olympics, public parks sprang up across the country to facilitate the outdoor life of citizens. Mass exercise is also a means by which the state promotes stability and urges the population to care for their own health and fitness. Has the state politics vanished, I wonder, in the life-nurturing activities of folk dance, choral singing, and other forms of group exercise? What does Mother's role as a volunteer-dance teacher tell us about the "depoliticized" post-socialist conditions? On the surface, the theme of depoliticization has thoroughly enveloped the society since the end of Maoism, transforming ideological commitment politics into individualism

and market consumerism. Nevertheless, there is a continual assertion of an informal collective—bodies organized in masses in public spaces for pursuing a good life—that becomes a lasting feature of China's post-socialist condition.

Describing the act of weaving the personal into the public, Farquhar (2009) argues that the politics of depoliticization is as much about forgetting as about remembering (p. 567). Through remembering the past, memories are read along the grains of social, political, and cultural meanings of the present, onto which imagination about the future is subsequently formed. As Keightley (2010) puts, "memories respond to the demands of current experience and future desires, and social and cultural frameworks of power and knowledge through which they are filtered" (p. 67). Leaving an era behind, middle-aged and elderly Chinese hobbyists and recreationists reappropriate revolutionary-themed songs and dances to a homegrown use. The collective participation in claiming public space is markedly different from the community activism that occurred when the Red Guards wreaked havoc across the country. Yet, it is also a gesture of belonging-in-time that invokes the past to signal a future that is as much about individual creativity and empowerment as about collective national goals (care of the self, harmony, patriotism) propagated by the state. In post-socialist, reform-era China, the pedagogical state is nonetheless palpably felt even in the supposedly private and depoliticized acts of personal calisthenics.

Erasure and Renewal: The Absent Presence of the Pedagogical State

Mother described her class reunion as a great success. "What did you all talk about?" I asked, secretly hoping that in hindsight, the cohort of 1966 would have perspicacious things to say about the warped decade that so fiercely seized their schooling and lives. A decade of erasure is worth revisiting, at least it seems to me. Instead of a direct answer, Mother produced a booklet of photos and held it close to the screen for me to see. Skype transmitted a colorful album of erstwhile students now in their mid- to late-sixties, many gray and wrinkled, engaging in leisure activities of mountain climbing, singing, and picnicking:

> For the most part, we enjoyed our time together in the outdoors. We did briefly talk about our life and work. Some people from the "five black categories" started saying things about what happened to them in the 60s. They

were shushed, because it was a thing of the past and we'd better not talk about politics. I didn't say much about the trip to Beijing, because it would have made people uncomfortable.

I pictured a round table of fellow classmates, skirting around topics and sensing what could and could not be said about their collective youth and memories. It must have felt strangely awkward that any talk depicting the past as repressive was self-censored. Perhaps the heterogeneity of personal memories was disciplined by a regime of depoliticization that discourages popular engagement with critical discussions. Still, a political *habitus* is discursively present, even in benign leisure activities of exercise and health nurturance. In post-socialist China, one's ability to effect change is no longer through violent class struggle but through specific modes of being, becoming, and desiring, and self-conscious intervention in one's own life-world. Living overseas and visiting China today, I see the imprints of an earlier time with perennial presence of state control, yet I also see the post-socialist condition as one in which the pursuit of the self's well-being is made possible in the complex interstices between the country's "revolutionary past and aggressively capitalist present" (Mishra, 2006, pp. 5-7), between a pedagogical state and a performative populace (Bhabha, 1990). Even in the era of market dominance, the state works as a powerful pedagogical node against which people make sense of knowledge, power, and social change and imagine their own place in the midst of it. For ordinary people, like Mother, who for no real fault of their own became subjects of social experiments, life is nonetheless a space of self-making, where one receives whatever comes and in acceptance, gropes to make better meanings out of it.

Notes

1. Many born in 1949 were literally named "liberation" by their parents to commemorate the nation's founding.
2. The post-1980s (*ba ling hou* 八零后) generation refers to those born in the decade of the 1980s.

3. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the "Five Red Categories" (*hong wu lei* 红五类) were adopted by the Communist Party to designate favorable social class types, namely "poor and lower-middle peasants," "workers," "revolutionary soldiers," "revolutionary cadres," and "dependents of revolutionary martyrs." On the contrary, the "Five Black Categories" (*hei wu lei* 黑五类) referred to social groups considered enemies of the Cultural Revolution, namely "landlord," "rich farmers," "counter-revolutionaries," "bad elements," and "rightists." The Red/Black class dichotomy worked to divide the country, especially its youth, into intense ideological conflicts and enmity (Chan et al., 1980, pp. 401–402).

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Towards Decolonizing Childhood and Knowledge Production

Zsuzsa Millei, Iveta Silova, and Nelli Piattoeva

Editing this book gave us a privilege to engage intimately with childhood memories shared by our contributors. It inspired us to "think with" these memories as part of our emerging intellectual project of decolonizing knowledge production in and about socialist and post-socialist societies of Eastern and Central Europe. The conceptual foundations of this project stem from our previous collaborative work (see Silova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2017), which we build on in this conclusion to further develop and exemplify decolonial strategies that can disrupt and go beyond accounts of childhood framed in binary Cold War frameworks. We also wish to contribute to the discussions taking place in childhood studies that explore the potential of using adult generated memories to gain access to children's lived experiences. Our project further explores the interrelations between memory, experience, and emergence in decolonizing knowledge production and being.

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In this concluding chapter, we provide a brief overview of multiple forms of reasoning embedded in epistemologies of modernity, socialist ideologies, and post-socialist "Westernization" projects that continue to colonize knowledge produced about children's lives. We then outline three strategies that aid us in troubling and thinking beyond the knowledge claims these epistemologies have produced. By re-reading our contributors' childhood memories through this frame, we offer some examples of how these strategies might look in research practice. We also explore how the lived experiences of various childhoods—retold in memories— could help us engage in research that moves towards decoloniality of knowledge production and being in post-socialist spaces or beyond.

Coloniality of Knowledge Production About Childhood in (Post)Socialist Societies

Reflecting on the knowledge production about childhoods in socialist and post-socialist societies, we see a simultaneous operation of colonial patterns of power, or multilayered logic of coloniality, that extend beyond postcolonial administrations, "defin[ing] culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243). In this context, decoloniality entails both "the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality," which constitutes the Western modernity project,[1] and "the prospective task" of building a world in which many alternative worlds can coexist (Mignolo, 2011, p. 54). In delinking from the colonial knowledge production about childhood in (post)socialist spaces, we consider socialist and post-socialist matrices of power within the overarching frame of Western modernity.

Gail Cannella and Radhika Viruru (2004) explain that the colonization of the non-Western world coincided with the emergence of a particular notion of the modern child and the most commonly accepted scientific bodies of knowledge about children. Therefore, the concept of the "child" itself cannot be accepted in an uncritical, ahistorical, and apolitical manner. They continue, "in the same way that geographical realities were created to serve the interests of imperial capitalist powers, we believe that "human" realities (childhood being one of them) have been fashioned in a similar manner" (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 4). As a part of the Western modernity project, childhood and child development have become historically equated to national (and economic) development, placing it on the ladder of evolutionary progress towards modernization. The construction of

modern childhood was inevitably linked to and was profoundly influenced by European colonial expansion that reinscribed the gendered and racialized privilege of the West in the model of the nation-state. As Erica Burman (2008) argues, the child functioned as "an index, a signifier of 'civilization' and modernity," while at the same time remaining "the key arena in which to instill such civilization" (p. 77). The child was thus constructed as "other"—whether an innocent, primitive, or deviant "other"— who was expected to develop into a fully human adult through the processes of socialization and properly applied psychological and pedagogical techniques. This process was closely monitored, controlled, and regulated by the modern sciences (especially developmental psychology). Focusing on mental measurement and classification of abilities among children, scientific research further reinscribed the distinctions between superiority and inferiority, reason and emotion, maturity and immaturity, while also mapping them against "Western" and "non-Western" people and their experiences.

A second layer of the colonization of childhood becomes visible in the examination of the socialist obsession with "the cult of childhood" as a social engineering project (Kelly, 2007, p. 25), whereby a spectrum of socialist "science" conceived children and childhood as a malleable tabula rasa that could be (re)fashioned through education for nation-building purposes (see, e.g., Kelly, 2007; Kirschenbaum, 2001; Leung & Ruan, 2012; Sáska, 2005; Stepanenko, 1999). For example, educational approaches ranged from Stalinist socialist pedagogy loyal to the central will and directly adjustable to political and economic processes, to the collectivist, self-directive model of Tito's Yugoslavia mirrored in pedagogy, to socialist pedagogy infused with Confucian values in the Chinese case (Leung & Ruan, 2012; Sáska, 2005). As variations of the Western Enlightenment project, Western epistemes of child-rearing were nevertheless clearly differentiated from the fashioning of "Soviet/socialist" childhoods, which was frequently conceptualized as more didactic, pervasive, and ideological. The extent that projects of childhood in the "West" have appeared to proceed less ideologically is arguably only because their particular ideological rationales are embedded in less overt and more naturalized discourses that, paradoxically, are premised on liberatory, emancipatory foundations (common to socialist sciences too) and liberal democratic ideologies (Mead & Silova, 2013; Millei, 2011). Despite the differences, however, childhoods on both sides of the Iron Curtain were carefully scripted by adults to serve the predetermined futures of either socialist or capitalist nations.

Finally, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has added a third layer to the colonization of childhood associated with the re-Westernization of childhood. This time, futures of children located in post-socialist spaces became reoriented towards the West with the goal of integrating individuals into specific subjectivities central to the era of neoliberal globalization and accompanying insecurities and consumerism (see Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Katz, 2011; Popkewitz, 2008; Rose, 1999). Similarly to children located in the South, children behind the fallen Iron Curtain were usually found to be lacking or lagging compared to their Western counterparts, implying that the only "salvation" would be found in adopting reforms that have already affected and "improved" children's lives in the modern West (Balagopalan, 2014). Equally importantly, contemporary neoliberal epistemologies commonly construct childhood in terms of producing (neoliberal) adults who are "lifelong learners," "self-maximizers," autonomous, human capitals and scientifically "rational" people required for the so-called "global knowledge economy" (Mead & Silova, 2013; Millei, 2011; Millei & Joronen, 2016; Popkewitz, 2008).

As bodies of knowledge about childhood emerge vested with the multilayered logic of coloniality through various historical periods, they carry moral, political, as well as economic meanings. They attach not only to the notions of "growing up" but also of "catching up," most recently reverberating in discourses of national development and so-called "underdevelopment" (Burman, 2016a). More importantly, however, these bodies of knowledge continue to conceal the multitude of inconsistent, contradictory, and uncertain narratives that are circulating alongside those of socialist and Western neoliberal modernity more broadly. Our book makes visible some of the concealed and diverse ways of being children and understanding childhood, socialism, and post-socialism through the interpretation of our contributors' memory stories. While acknowledging that these stories cannot break completely free of the colonial matrix of power, we see the potential of working with these memories to create alternative research imaginations. However, we do not aim to produce the "truth" about particular children's lives as amassed under the label of "socialist childhood." Rather, we find it especially helpful to focus on "the ways in which individuals are made social, how we are discursively, affectively, and materially constituted in particular moments that are inherently unstable" (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p. 6). The chosen methodologies—autobiographies, duoethnographies, and collective biography—produce data that is rich, detailed, complex, and situated to enact this careful analytical work.

Within this analytical frame, we reread memory stories in our attempt to work against the multilayered logic of coloniality only to discover it still in operation, thus reminding us that decolonizing childhood is a complex and ongoing process, which affects not only our own knowledge production as researchers but also reaches into the very coloniality of our being and emergence through research.

Delinking Childhood from the Logic of Coloniality

As a part of a broader decoloniality project, we engage in the process of "delinking" (Mignolo, 2007, 2013), which challenges the "emancipatory project" of modernity and colonial relations and sets out to decolonize knowledge and being. A decolonial episteme seeks to bring to the fore other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economies, other politics, and other ethics (Mignolo, 2007). In struggling to change the terms and not only the content of the conversation, delinking works with the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge. The geopolitics of knowledge entails acknowledging the exclusionary principle of modernity—its "provincial pretense of universality" in Quijano's terms—and shifting the geography of reason to recognize the knowledges that emerge from different historical locations of the world, though they might still be marked by complex imperial, colonial, and capitalist expansions (Mignolo, 2007, p. 462). Decolonization of knowledge thus carries the double movement of unveiling the geopolitical origin or location of knowledge together with affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied, silenced, or denigrated by the exclusive principle of modernity (Mignolo, 2007). Parallel to making invisible the location of modern or colonial knowledge, the modernity project has also casted out the "body-graphical" location of that knowledge in which only certain bodies were perceived as legitimate thinking and knowing bodies. The body-politics of knowledge implies reinstating the "color, gender and sexuality of the 'thinking body'" (p. 507). Put together, the geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge are about acknowledging the plural "spaces of experience" from which a claim is made and how that particular space plays out in the imagined "horizon of expectations" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 494).

Border thinking emerges in the "spaces of experience" marked by the colonial matrix of power. Within these spaces, "Western knowledge and subjectivity, control of land and labor, of authority, and ways of living gender and sexuality have been 'contacting' other languages, memories, principles of

knowledge and belief, forms of government and economic organization" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 497). It is the different border *thinkings* that can then produce a different "horizon of expectations"—a future horizon that is not dictated by one way of life or one political principle—whether progress, expansion, or emancipation—but as a common future enabled by the coexistence of different and non-hierarchical worldviews and exchanges of experiences rooted in local and personal histories. Delinking is not about replacing modern epistemology with another or others but taking that epistemology as a necessary target of intellectual critique (Silova et al., 2017; Tlostanova, 2012; Tlostanova, Koobak, & Thapar-Bjorkert, 2016). In other words, delinking also means overcoming "the Western agonistic principle of making theories and practices compete for dominance" (Mignolo, 2007; Tlostanova et al., 2016, p. 14) and thus enabling us to gain a global viewpoint that is more inclusive of different voices.

To delink from the multilayered logic of coloniality, we operationalize Mignolo's project of delinking as geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge in three ways. Our first strategy delinks from modernist ways of producing knowledge about childhood and children by using memories of lived experiences situated in local and personal histories. In this work, we have found Erica Burman's (2016a, 2016b) tool, "*child as method*" exceptionally helpful, as it aims to remove colonial cultural imaginaries from other ways of understanding childhood and children. Our second strategy takes as its target the coloniality of knowledge production about (post)socialist societies by multiplying and unveiling relations between concurrent spaces (that might be geographically distant). By folding out one space onto the other and thus connecting assumedly discrete times— the past and the present—in the same space, we disrupt linear time and the singularity of post-socialist trajectories envisioned by the logic of "catching up with Western liberal democracies." These tools also aid our third strategy, since moving beyond colonial cultural imaginaries opens ways to other understandings of (post)socialist societies and childhoods that were previously marginalized or silenced by modernist and (post)socialist coloniality of power. This strategy also endows researchers located within the region to produce knowledge on their terms. Thus, we add our individual and collective efforts to discussions about the coloniality of being and explore ways to reclaim our positionalities (as children and researchers) as epistemic subjects who have both the legitimacy and capacity to look at the world from our own origins and lived realities. As we explore the three delinking strategies here—while weaving in memory stories from different

chapters of the book—it is important to note that these strategies often become entangled with each other; therefore, discussing them separately is more difficult but perhaps still useful and necessary in order to reveal their unique ways of helping us in the difficult project of decolonization.

Rethinking Childhoods

In order to move beyond the limits of colonial identification on the one hand, and the postcolonial politics of resentment on the other hand, Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) developed a postcolonial analytical framework that he termed *Asia as Method* (p. xiii). *Asia as Method* identifies the problem of colonial analysis in its obsessive focus on the West, "which bounds the field by the object of its own criticism" (Chen, 2010, p. 1). Chen aims to overcome this shortcoming with a deimperialization project that is oriented on "Asia," which he understands both as a geographic region and a constructed cultural space with associated people. He argues that this reorientation of referencing is important, because "only by multiplying the objects of identification and constructing alternative frames of reference can we undo the politics of resentment, which are too often expressed in the limited form of identity politics" (Chen, 2010, p. 2). He identifies the true potential of this method as offering a new view on global history and the ability to pose a different set of questions through the critical study of experiences in Asia.

This framework has been applied across a range of educational studies (Takayama, 2016; Yelland & Saltmarsh, 2013; Zhang, Chan, & Kenway, 2015) and more recently in childhood studies by Erica Burman in a new formulation "*child as method*." The operationalization of Chen's method to childhood studies is a logical step, since the power lines of imperialist capitalist projects that created the very geographical realities of colonization also gave birth to interpretations of the progression of human life (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). As an anticolonial approach to childhood, "'child as method' helps to re-think and address the legacies of Western knowledge [not only] in constructing current globalized modes and practices" (Burman, 2016b) but also the legacies of socialist and post-socialist power matrices of coloniality. Burman follows Chen's (2010) approach through the necessary strategies of decolonization: first, decolonization carried out on the terrain of the colonized; second, "deimperialization performed by the colonizer first and then on the colonizer's relation with its former colonies;" and third, by the removal of Cold War tensions (pp. 3–4).

We propose to multiply the objects of identification about childhood by refocusing our study away from using Western universalizing frames and subjectivities. Instead, we reference understandings and experiences of children in their localities embedded in memory stories of our contributors located in various (post)socialist societies. We thus multiply cultural imaginaries of childhood both in research and everyday life. Among the three analytical strategies of Chen—decolonization, deimperialization, and de-Cold War—we agree with Erica Burman (2016b) that de-Cold War is especially helpful for an anticolonial cultural-political analysis of childhood. Chen (2010) says:

> To de-cold war at this point in history does not mean to simply rid ourselves of a cold war consciousness or to try to forget that period in history and naively look toward the future (the approach most state leaders and other politicians have called for). It means to mark out a space in which unspoken stories and histories may be told, and to recognise and map the historically constituted cultural and political effects of the cold war. (p. 120)

Learning from both Chen (2010) and Burman (2016b), we aim to create spaces for new imaginaries of childhood unobstructed by Cold War dichotomies and modernist cultural politics of childhood that maintained and reproduced particular ideological, cultural, classed, and gendered norms at the axis of geopolitical divides. To initiate dialogues across times and spaces, we re-read our contributors' diverse lived experiences, rich social practices, and their own multiple positionings. By shifting reference points in new directions—to, across, and within different social contexts of socialist and post-socialist societies—we bring our contributors' stories in conversation with each other, while avoiding the usual references to Cold War binaries and East/West dichotomies. To some extent, some authors have already started to work with "*child as method*" through duo-autoethnographies, where they have referenced one lived and experienced childhood against the other, especially in the chapters cowritten by Helga Lénárt-Cheng and Ioana Luca, Ela Przybylo and Polina Ivleva, and Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala. And while the other autoethnographies and collective biography may not have directly engaged into a dialogue with each other, our conclusion (and our book more broadly) brings them into dialogue, creating new reference points for each other, and for those researchers who will continue this decolonizing work. Readers might also be prompted to interpret our contributors in their own ways and search for connections with their own memories of childhood.

Rethinking childhood starts by disrupting scientific frames mirroring colonial power relations that continue to play a crucial role in our understanding of childhood, both as a public and as a scientific community. These frames offer a lens through which childhood and children can be understood universally, but also regulated and managed through education policy and practice. However, Cannella and Viruru (2004) encourage us "[to]stop looking at childhood as an isolated phenomenon, intelligible only through the lens of 'experts' who have studied the child through the dominant telescope of Western discourses like psychology" (p. 3). They argue that we "must start thinking about those who are younger as people who are part of a much larger and complex whole, as linked to and influencing the larger and more complex world" (p. 3; see also Burman, 1994; Millei & Petersen 2015). In their project, Cannella and Viruru's voices resonate with those belonging to the interdisciplinary field of childhood studies (see discussion in introduction to this volume). Destabilizing the binaries of being/becoming, incomplete/complete, and the assumed fundamental difference between the essence of being a child or adult (Lee, 2001), David Oswell (2012) provocatively summarizes:

> Children are not simply beings, they are more significantly doings. They are actors, authors, authorities and agents. They make a difference to the world we live in.… Children have been seen and felt to do in the life of family, the life of society, the life of politics and the life of economy. (p. 4)

This view acknowledges the powerful roles children play in institutions and everyday life, and that they do make a difference in the world by "conceiving a way to act upon it" (Blazek, 2015, p. 4). Similarly, Cindy Katz (2008) invites scholars to consider children as political actors coming of age and reveal possibilities for children's political participation.

Instead of conceptualizing politics in children's lives as repressive and exercised over children, we understand politics in broader terms following Kirsi Pauliina Kallio & Jouni Häkli's work (2011, see also its use in education research in Millei & Kallio, forthcoming). They argue that the political is a "specific dimension that can be found in all communities and societies where people lead their lives, and where people act individually and collectively in purposive ways. … [the political] refers to matters that grow particularly meaningful in people's everyday lives, be they generally politicized issues …, matters politicized in national communities … or things that gain relevance within smaller communities (e.g., which clothing is considered appropriate in an institutional childhood space)" (pp. 2–3).

Through this lens, children can reappear as political actors in memory stories and in (post)socialist societies. While political roles of children—as part of official politics such as being part of pioneer organizations, or as part of resistance as they perform in a play critiquing the socialist system, or banal activities such as wearing a hair bow—were sometimes similar to adults' performances, they were also different, perhaps because they were initiated from children's conceptions of how to act upon the world in which adult-driven politics played only but one devising role, if at all.

The explicit politicized nature of "socialist childhood" driven by adult-initiated politics comes to view in some of the memory stories, as children were enlisted to belong and contribute to the utopian projects of building communism/socialism for the betterment of society. Positioned in between the class collective and the ideological political institutions of the party or youth organizations, individual students performed banal, but important roles in relation to adult institutions, revealing how the socialist state was dependent on the children's engagement to bring forward its cause. It is striking how participation in such markedly political and ideological events and duties still carried diverse and often personal meanings. For example, Violette Ho describes how she believed wholeheartedly and with passion in the self-sacrifice of collecting waste paper so much so that she went against the interest of her family by wasting valuable and needed income generated from the collection and selling of waste paper. While this story could be interpreted as evidence of children's passive submission to the party line, to us it reveals the complexity of children's identification with and involvement in the regime, while also maintaining a parallel connection to their families and proximate communities. These stories also portray a strong will to make lives easier, more meaningful, and joyful, rather than merely following the state's dictate.

In quite the opposite manner, some children, including Anna Bogic, were unwilling to abide by the request of the post-socialist regime of rump Yugoslavia to report their ethnicity to teachers. Others, such as Irena Kašparová, participated in a subversive play performed both in Czechoslovakia and in the West, that critiqued the socialist regime. Yet again, other children participated in official socialist duties for the pleasure of spending time with friends, thus exhibiting disinterest in the ideologies that supposedly drove these activities, or adding their own meanings to activities and reshaping them to fit their own projects and interests in everyday life. Jinting Wu's mother traveled to Beijing for the mass gathering of the Red Guards and experienced private joy for the rare opportunity to visit the country's capital

while she also proudly acted on the state's call. Connecting with Jinting's story, Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala share how they have enjoyed participation in their pioneer group, where they created their own subculture with music, experimenting with cigarettes, alcohol, and alternative theater performances. Helga Lénárt-Cheng describes how the annual, compulsory trips to "construction camps" were riddled with positive, fun experiences to look forward to year after year. She comments fondly how they felt bad for their friend who grew up after the fall of the Berlin Wall, because she never had a chance to try on the Soviet gas masks and play with grenades on school field trips. Children thus experienced the adult initiated arena of political in varied ways, and at times, differently from adults, some children even depoliticized the acts intended to politically socialize them.

From early on, many authors recognized or felt the distinction between the personal and the political, or the private and the public, understanding exactly how and what could be said at home and in school (see for example chapters by Irena, Ioana, Libora, Irena, Ondrej and Branislav). In this manner, the political aspects of children's lives often emerged through the acts of negotiating everyday life and the invisible borders of the official and private domains. At times, these negotiations were marked by ideological contents, but were also often framed by other, more mundane concerns and interests. Libora's courage to challenge the gendered assumption of her teacher—that only boys rode bicycles—was not powered by a conscious will to resist the teacher's authority, but by her strong desire to ride a bicycle like any other child and to participate in an activity that promised to be fun. In Zsuzsa Millei, Nelli Piattoeva, Iveta Silova, and Elena Aydarova's chapter, we learn how an everyday object (such as a hair bow) can become unexpectedly political in different official and personal circumstances, emphasizing the role of everyday materialities in children's political actorhood.

The agency of objects appears in other stories too, such as the soft toilet paper smuggled from Germany in Irena's story, the rope that brings to Libora an epiphany about the way she has unlearned to take initiative, or the very materiality of the school environment that makes it impossible for Alfiya Battalova to stay in school for longer periods of time in the postsocialist period, where the ideal of inclusion existed but was economically impossible to realize in an inclusive physical environment. Nelli and Elena recall that the dark color of the uniform they wore on regular school days signaled when exactly they could behave "more childlike and fallible"

without the need to perform the roles of perfect socialist school children. Common to these stories is the emergence of children's political actorhood that far exceeds earlier understandings of children as apolitical or political only in adult-defined domains linked to explicit ideological prescriptions and repressive regimes. Children creatively reinterpreted and worked within and against discourses and practices that governed their lives and contributed to the displacement of powerful regimes of power, even if only minor ways.

Rethinking Time and Space

Cold War research on childhood and children often focused on the eclipsing effects of totalitarianism, serving (both now and in the past) the geopolitical aims of the Cold War. While recasting future post-socialist trajectories into linear convergence towards liberal democratic capitalist development, such approach has ignored differences, transgressions, resistances, and the everyday spaces of life. A strategy for delinking from this type of knowledge production could mean rethinking time and space as other than objective, linear, and singular. As in Chen's *Asia as Method* approach, the application of new and multiple frames prevalent in different times and spaces would help unveil the diversity and complexity of lived experiences of childhood and further exemplify the variety of (post)socialist imaginaries, conditions, and paths among different countries of Southeast/Central Europe, the former Soviet Union, and Asia.

First, however, it is important to outline our approach to time and space. Following David Harvey (1990), we see space and time as socially constructed, but we also acknowledge the ways "they operate with full force of objective fact and play a key role in processes of social reproduction" (p. 418). For example, clock time appears as objective, offering a standard that is not influenced by any person. It imposes on our actions. In a similar manner, space as a spatial unit of schooling, for example, defines fields of social action and has a large impact on the organization of social life. As Harvey (1990) continues, even "the very act of naming geographical entities implies a power over them, most particularly over the way in which places, their inhabitants and their social functions get represented" (p. 419). Consequently, by the imposition of a "name"—such as the "Orient" as Edward Said (1979) argues in *Orientalism*—the identity of variegated people can be collapsed, shaped, and manipulated. As societies change, new roles, social orders, identities, and materialities emerge

through the imposition and initiation of other times and spaces. There are also internal contestations of time and space, depending on the frame that persons mobilize, such that they redefine the "proper" qualities of a space and time. We see a good example of this in Violette Ho's chapter. Violette used the recycled paper stocked at home to make herself a valiant of her pioneer group. For her, the space of home and its resources had a value for the socialist state and for herself to become an exemplary pioneer, while for her mother, the home and those papers meant caring for the health of the family by providing nutritious food from the money earned by selling them. Her mother felt angry that Violette overruled these qualities of the home. In this example, public space and time can offset the pressing power of the home, and vice versa, and more significantly, the class, gender, religious, and political differentiation in conceptions of time and space, and the associated organization of social life, can become arenas of social conflict (Harvey, 1990).

Libora Oates-Indruchová's story paints a picture of the colonization of children's spaces with socialist ideology translated into classroom pedagogies. She describes how in this pedagogical space she learned how "not to reflect," how "not to take initiative" and do what was required of her, and how this space kept her in a "perpetual" child state, almost as if stopping time from passing over her. A similar space made Helga Lénárt-Cheng act with "automation," unaware of certain social realities. However, this seemingly monolithic space of childhood was not devoid of its internal contradictions brought about by others' views. For instance, such contradictions become visible when Libora's teacher with a rural background attempted to enforce traditional gender roles, which were in opposition to the space of gender equality constructed by the socialist state. In these complicated gendered spaces of school, Libora was nevertheless able to resist her positioning as an "unreflective" child and act on her right to participate in a sport activity assumedly set aside for only boys. For Helga, a larger social reality has opened when her father revealed his disagreement with socialist ideals that colonized school space and practices. From Ela Przybylo and Polina Ivleva's story, we learn how the hidden curriculum created a non-space for sex education in Russia, whereby children secretly discussed issues associated with teenager bodies and intimate relations in school, while this sort of knowledge had no space in the heterosexual matrix of the Soviet and post-Soviet official school curriculum. In Alfiya Battalova's memories, two notions of time contest each other in varied spaces: "time out" and "catch up." The in-between space of homeschool

gave her "time out" or refuge from a special school created for children with disabilities where a particular Soviet pedagogy aimed to speed her adjustment to "catch up" to the "normal." The home school also gave her periodic respite—"time out" from the other option—the inhospitable school environment, where a child with a physical disability suffered from climbing marble steps and from staring peers. Having "time out" allowed her to contest the socialist ideology of special education—to be able to live with her disability as other able people do—that aimed to normalize her life and serve as a symbol of "Soviet glory."

Anna Bogic reveals how the geographical change between socialist Yugoslavia (spanning between Vardar to Triglav mountains) and rump Yugoslavia (torn by the war) paralleled changes in school life after 1992. From a change in alphabet to the changes in the main principle of belonging from "drugarstvo" (friendship) to "Narodni" (nations or ethnicity), social life was intensively reshaped, identities redefined, and imagined futures quickly melted away. In an almost contrasting example, Ela Przybylo unveils a strange continuity and a connection between social life in two geographically distant locations separated by both time and space to trouble the framework of "socialist sex education" in the ossified practices of a Canadian school in Alberta that referenced pagan and Catholic Poland with its associated heterosexual norms.

Irena Kašparová's childhood unfolds in three spaces. She lived in a small town located at the periphery of Czechoslovakia, where people who did not fit the "norm" were resettled during the first years of socialism, including her family with a vicar father. During the 1970s, the same town hosted resistance centers of underground cultures and ideologies. Being at the border, the town's community was separated from the "West," where products, ideas, and information entered only through smuggling in which family members participated, creating a second space for Irena. Her third space of existence was the theater where she performed a role in a play that critiqued the socialist state. These spaces did not only partition her life but also taught her to carefully navigate them and learn—at times willfully and at other times accidentally—opposing values attached to them.

Similar contestations and folding of time and space are prevalent in the chapters in which multiple epochs of socialism meet: pre-socialist, socialist, and post-socialist. In Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala's memories, these epochs map against their childhoods: nineteenth-century industrial urban lifestyles and Christian agrarian practices are transposed on the two parts of Czecho-Slovakia and then unfold into the socialist city and country life,

creating zones associated with rural or urban social organizations of life. They further complicate these zones by exploring how socialist ceremonies, arguably being part of modernization efforts, actually mirrored rural (perhaps feudal) initiation rituals by eclipsing notions of rites of passage with the ideological developmental agendas of children upheld by the socialist state. While the state attempted to iron out these spatial and temporal differences by initiating additional rituals, such as the *Oath of Loyalty* for children in the areas where religious traditions and child-rearing practices still prevailed, it ironically made children even more acutely aware of the coexistence and mutual incompatibility of these spaces. In Jingting Wu's story of her mother, social life and orders of an earlier time period fold out to the present, creating a generational connection. Through this connection, experiences of her mother during the Cultural Revolution gain meaning for Jinting in the present post-socialist China. This connection also reveals how her mother has successfully maintained some roles and practices against a very different society of today's China. Here, we see the unfolding of the past into the present where both can no longer be separated.

Rethinking of Self and Other

The third strategy pays attention to the ways in which coloniality of knowledge production affects the various subjectivities we present about us as children and researchers, and in return how memory research also (re)shapes us as human beings and academics. As Chen (2010) convincingly argues, the project of decolonization is not only about decolonizing knowledge, but also about decolonizing "culture and mind, desire and body" (p. x). In this process, knowledge production becomes directly linked to matters of subjectivity, which means that the transformation of the existing knowledge production processes requires a simultaneous transformation of our *selves* (Chen, 2010; Zhang et al., 2015). We thus need to engage in a parallel process of delinking, moving from the geopolitics of knowledge into body-politics. As we attempted to illustrate in the sections above, decolonization of knowledge production helps us to identify multiple layers of coloniality in search for alternative epistemic frameworks and to offer new, perhaps even unexpected, interpretations that disrupt existing reference points. Then, we can begin to (re)articulate and reassemble different untold views and conceptions of the self in order to create multiple understandings and horizons of expectations of social life, our *selves*, and our collective futures.

We especially pay attention to the various normative prescriptions and positionalities—"socialist selves"—produced by socialist ideologies, Cold War, and "transition" research, as well as the literature that aimed to reinterpret "socialist subjectivities." As Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone (2008) explain, Western historians "applied distinct models of selfhood to the various dimensions of Soviet [and socialist] subjectivity and used these to explore its location and its performance in the realms of the private and public" (pp. 982–983). These models of selfhood draw on various theoretical frameworks that allow for reading and explaining everyday life by turning the volume up or down on various details. Theoretical frameworks also sensitize the researcher to pay attention to particular negotiations that the self engages in, while disregarding others. Chatterjee and Petrone (2008) demonstrate the importance of being reflective of these frames of selfhood that construct "socialist subjectivities" and shape "deeper understanding of that society and culture" (p. 967).

One notion of the "socialist self" entails the "image of a lonely, atomized and fearful" self (p. 983) who is less able to take action against imposed norms and structural power. This self lacks autonomy even in private and public spaces to resist. The figure of the teacher who blindly follows ideological prescriptions or the student who learns to not take initiative embodies this self in different memory stories. Perhaps this is the construction of selfhood that stands closest to Cold War frames. Another conception of the self, which Chatterjee and Petrone term "pragmatic self," is built on a productive notion of power, whereby the norm is internalized by the self, but the self can also emerge as a different subject by resisting this norm. In memory stories, many children performed everyday acts of resistance by simultaneously internalizing prescriptions prevalent in the socialist self (such as performing socialist rituals) but also resisting duties of pioneer organizations. At other times, they were regulated without experiencing the pressure of these norms on their bodies and thinking only to realize those later (such as a frog that is slowly being cooked in the warming water in Libora's story). Everyday acts of resistance, such as dodging or bribing, were also set against the figure of the socialist self and its normative moral prescription, such as in Irena's story in which her grandmother smuggled objects from the other side of the border. Yet in another conceptualization, the normative socialist construction of the self offered a view against which individuals fashioned and reflected on themselves, but beyond that this power relation also produced the illusion that they were acting autonomously without these normative constructions'

governing effects. This position is perhaps exemplified in the story of Jinting's mother who identified with the conception of the "first class" socialist citizen and accepted the invitation to Beijing as her choice between mourning her father at home or meeting Mao in Beijing as good socialist citizens must do. Her constrained autonomy only became clear for her when her wedding ceremony was ridden with socialist slogans that she did not like. Yet again, other researchers located the socialist self at the intersection of the individual and social realms, such as family life, redirecting attention to the self as part of the banality of everyday life. In the stories of this volume, these socialist selves appear in the parallel spaces of school, homeschool, home, and public spaces, where private issues such as sexuality are discussed or where boys try their first cigarettes.

For some contributors, the fall of the Berlin Wall was associated with the erasure of the "socialist" self. This experience is powerfully formulated in Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala's chapter. They write (p. 84) that after the fall of state socialism, "coming to terms with the socialist past was seen as a social taboo," as "all identification with socialism had been uprooted" and "any intentional consideration of the socialist past was viewed as expressing an undesirable affinity with communism." Raili Nugin and Kirsti Jõesalu (2016) explain that in the Estonian hegemonic memory policy, too, the Soviet period is "still interpreted in the framework of the discourse of rupture" as the era of "wasted" human lives (p. 204). While not denying any of the historical injustices and the monstrous losses of lives inflicted by the socialist regimes, we see many of our contributors as positioned in the middle of the politics of memory and the continuing and contradictory state-sponsored nation-building endeavors that either slander or romanticize the past. In this context, personal experiences are painfully reconciled with reductionist authoritative claims. Moreover, the socialist period encompasses only the childhood periods of the writers; thus, the experiences are "filtered through a child's eyes" (Nugin & Jõesalu, 2016, p. 203), perhaps inducing a question as to how it was possible to live a fulfilling life/childhood amidst a regime now described as "criminal," "illegal," and "wasting lives." Many authors answer this question by offering joyful or banal accounts of their childhoods. Yet others, such as Anna Bogic in an account of her childhood self, desire and long for the officially created socialist childhood experiences with their rituals and collective practices. For Anna, this childhood has never materialized due to the disintegration of the socialist bloc, triggering in her a form of mourning that accompanied the erasure of the "socialist self."

Although the erasure of the "socialist self" may at first appear as a logical step towards the decolonization of being, Chatterjee and Petrone (2008) urge us to approach this task carefully. While leaving behind a single set of identifiable characteristics of the socialist citizen, it may be nevertheless worthwhile to address "the complex subject positions that they fashioned, inhabited and exhibited" in various spaces and situations (p. 985). Chatterjee and Petrone (2008) suggest a methodology that situates a fluid socialist self "along a continuum of the domestic setting, the intimate collective, the larger socially imagined realities of class, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliations, and nationality and explore how it intersects with the discourses and practices of the state" (p. 986). They maintain that keeping in sight this fluid socialist self helps "trace the individual's range of possible actions within his or her complex and multiple subject positions" (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2008, p. 986). Thus, instead of aiming to erase the different configurations of the socialist self in order to decolonize being, delinking might be done by a transversal move from where it becomes possible to pinpoint their existence, intersectionalities, and operations. Finally, we also need to consider our researcher selves (as the observers of the socialist self) in light of our shaping as (post)socialist subjects being trained in Anglo-American theoretical traditions and working in Western academia.

One way to proceed with this task is by practicing "border thinking," that is thinking within the borders we are inhabiting—"not borders of nation-states, but borders of the modern/colonial world, epistemic and ontological borders" that mark out subjectivities (Tlostanova, 2013, pp. 136–137). Our contributors describe dwelling in the *geopolitical* borders of modern/industrialized and premodern/agrarian "zones," public and private spheres, or eastern and western sides of the Iron Curtain, both as children and as researchers. They also dwell in the *temporal* borders, where presocialist and socialist pasts cannot be easily disentangled from Western neoliberal presents and futures. Yet again, others also dwell in the *body-political* borders of disability, gender, and sexual orientation. Frequently, we inhabit these multiple borders simultaneously, which makes "border thinking" both challenging and exciting at the same time. But what unites these different spaces of "border thinking" is an opportunity to engage in the ongoing negotiations, inclusions, and exclusions, of being at the same time outside and inside, where being is "rooted in irremovable contradictions—neither here nor there or both here and there at the same time" (Tlostanova, 2013).

Importantly, "border thinking" makes visible the relational self, which no longer appears as an isolated subject but a self known through a network of social relations. Moving away from the autonomous, self-contained individual—prevalent in both Western and official socialist thought stemming from the Enlightenment project—we see instead some attempts to narrate self in relation to others. Philosophically, this underscores the basic assumption that through relations, we coarise with others since the "I" discovers only its own particularity when it is singled out by the gaze of the other, and dialogue starts (Kasulis, 1998; Levinas, 1969; see also Rappleye & Komatsu, 2017). The relational self emerges in dialogue when some contributors of this book write *together* through duoethnographies or perhaps when drawing on conversations with others to guide their memory writing. Most explicitly, the relational nature of the process of remembering—and the accompanying process of self-emergence—is discussed in Helga Lénárt-Cheng and Ioana Luca's chapter. They write about the ontological condition of "being-in-common," which disrupts all attempts to figure identity as an immanent totality, arguing that both individual and community can only be understood as "being *with*." They powerfully explain how this relation helps *expose* individuals to their own finitude by revealing their existence outside themselves. They further explain that the condition of "being *with*" carries with itself the notions of proximity and intimacy, which are at the heart of the relational self. The relational self thus emerges from dialogue, the experience of intersubjectivity, and "transcendence." As Chen (2010) suggests, these relational processes "enable mutual transcendence and make it possible to pose different historical questions, and eventually reach different understanding of world history" (p. 252).

Emerging as "I": The Researcher and Knowledge Producer

With delinking from the coloniality of being, we set out to multiply positions as children and researchers from our own origins and lived realities. We deliberately worked against an Enlightenment ideal of the self that is characterized as transparent, unified, coherent, and independent. However, as our stories assembled from fragments of memory, our imagination filled the gaps and through this process more or less coherent stories and researcher subjectivities emerged—the "I" of the research. This emerging "I" operates in the text as the gatherer of the experience, doing the

reflection, analysis, and representation (Jackson & Mazzei, 2008). In this process of research, tensions between what is included and what is left out disappear. Alecia Youngblood Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei (2008) argue that the experience reported is always already a textual representation vested with relations of power to produce meaning from this assembled experience, where experience functions as a stable source of knowledge or foundation of truth (data to be analyzed). While this researcher "I" in postcolonial projects uses experience as a strategy to "offer a way out of the closure of knowledge" production (Spivak, 1976, p. lxxvii), Jackson and Mazzei (2008) highlight the importance of critically engaging with the "I" who performs, represents, and analyzes the memories and at the same time constructs itself in the process of truth-telling.

In a similar manner, we approached our own memory segments of childhood to create stories as a way out of the closure of cultural imaginaries and subjectivities offered by Cold War knowledge production. However, in creating these stories, we have to keep vigilant to avoid closures on knowledge and being. Therefore, we need to be aware of the dangers of silencing conflicting subjectivities of the "I," the ones that could contest the very norms through which the subject comes to be related to the foundational lived experience that it builds upon. We also need to be cautious during narrative descriptions and interpretations, because singular (coherent) stories silence some aspects of memories to create plots and help meaning making. We probably fell into some of these traps while experimenting with our memories in this volume. Working against singular stories and coherent selves only becomes possible by acknowledging our frames of seeing, as well as the effects of our truth-telling and of the construction of our *selves* and the audience. We recognize that much more needs to be done in our subsequent work.

We emerge as a more or less continuous "I" as we share our stories and interpretations with the imagined readers. In remembering these lived experiences in different stages of our lives, we continuously redraft them, (re)making our *selves* across the remembered time. During this self-creating, we might exaggerate the shifts in our lives and create memory stories of self-development or enlightenment against the divided and fragmented subjects these lived experiences carry. However, we also acknowledge that sometimes this radical realization of self is possible that again can be superseded with another self. During these moments, perhaps Foucault's (1988) words might become helpful:

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end. (p. 9)

We also grow an attachment to the "I" of the emerging researcher by creating and interpreting these stories. It seems, however, that this attachment stands in the way of decolonizing projects that set out to multiply knowledge and being. Then, how to emerge as researchers from memory projects? Margaret Somerville (2007) has described the emergence of the researcher as an "irrational, messy, embodied and unfolding of the becoming self" (p. 225). She highlights the role of wonder and becoming-other, which includes "*the twin processes of coming into being and becoming-other to the self through research engagement*," that is, through reflective accounts of the self we write in our stories and our emergence as researcher selves as the gatherer and interpreter of experience (Somerville, 2007, p. 232, emphasis in original). In this way, reflective accounts of one's selves and the knowledge produced creates a liminal and relational space between personal memory and knowledge, where letting a part of the memory go—letting one's *self* go—may threaten the subjectivity of the researcher. This ontology of emergence as "becoming-other" inevitably incorporates elements of our past self-history during the processes of creating and recreating, interpreting and reinterpreting in a continuing process of becoming (Somerville, 2007). It thus also challenges the concept of linear time, the idea of "time as causation, the logic of cause and effect" (Somerville, 2007, p. 237). Temporality could instead be conceptualized "in terms of the surprise of the new, the inherent capacity of time to link, in extraordinarily complex ways, the past and present to a future that is uncontained by them and has the capacity to rewrite and transform them" as Elizabeth A. Grosz explains in *Becomings* (1999, p. 7). In this context, the binary logic of cause and effect—often reflected in the linear projections of modernity, presenting socialism and post-socialist transformations as an inevitable movement towards a singular future—becomes disrupted. Instead, liminal spaces of being and becoming reveal open-endedness, uncertainty, and unpredictability where new knowledge becomes possible.

Note

1. Coloniality represents "the darker side of Western modernity" upon which Western empires founded themselves, as well as justified their imperial expansion and intervention across the world—whether as Christianity, civilization, modernization, and development after the World War II or market democracy after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Mignolo, 2001). Because "coloniality is constitutive and not derivative of modernity," it is often written as "modernity/coloniality": "The slash (/) that divides and unites modernity with coloniality means that coloniality is constitutive of modernity: there is no modernity without coloniality" (Mignolo, 2015, p. 2). Mignolo (2007) argues that both European and socialist traditions of the European Enlightenment carry a universal emancipating claim, terming it the "myth of modernity." The concept of emancipation is based on the three revolutions of the eighteenth-century Europe that set the bourgeoisie free. The revolutions translated the idea into "the universal term of "humanity" (freedom) and set … the stage to export emancipation all over the world" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 455).

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Afterwords

Preface to Afterwords

Iveta Silova, Zsuzsa Millei, and Nelli Piattoeva

Aiming to move away from singular history writing toward multiple histories, this book brought together a group of scholars to (re)narrate histories in ways that would lead to more complex understandings of the (post)socialist pasts, presents, and futures. Committed to this outlook, we invited colleagues from different disciplines to engage with our volume in a series of afterwords rather than having *one last word* or *single voice* close the book. These authors speak from multiple perspectives, including different disciplinary and methodological backgrounds, as well as various levels of personal connections to (post)socialist histories and contexts. They discuss contributions and implications of our work for different fields, including international relations, comparative education, childhood studies, collective biography research, and decolonial studies. This ensemble of comments, reflections, and critiques offers different ways for readers to connect with our work and also points out new perspectives, complexities, and directions for future research. Together they inspire ample thoughts for what could follow afterward.

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Narratives from Bygone Times: Toward a Multiplicity of Socialist Childhoods

Marek Tesar

Examining our own pasts, and particularly childhoods, is not an easy task. For academics, to conduct a substantial reflection and analysis of the ideologies and complexities of their own childhoods, should perhaps come more easily because of our training and the nature of our profession—to think, speak, read, and write. However, perhaps this is not true at all—perhaps it is much harder to bare ourselves in front of our academic colleagues and friends, in a competitive, and sometimes very judgmental, environment. Writing ourselves is a brave step that leaves an articulated part of ourselves on paper, on a screen, in a certain sense and form, 'forever.' We cannot reclaim our private narrative once it has been published. It does not belong just to us anymore. Rereading in print what we once wrote about our own childhoods is a very bold, very courageous exercise, one that can leave a mark on our minds and bodies, perhaps in the same way as these narratives from bygone times once did, as our very own 'lived experiences.'

There is nothing equivocal in writing ourselves into our research and outputs. Perhaps 'now' we do live in times when scholars have carved out spaces where memory-infused data are accepted and welcomed, where

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voices and experiences of ourselves are data that are considered in some communities as both important and rigorous. These narratives of academics who grew up in so-called socialism were once marginalized voices that are now elevated to the public discourse. The data—the experiences, the recollections, the remembrances, the dreams of bygone times—once disclosed in public, in a sense smooth the rough edges for ourselves and others, as they are interpreted and theorized. In the end, what we are left with, are carefully edited powerful memories of everyday children's lived experiences and of ideologically driven childhoods. In recent years, multiple theorizations of these (childhood) (post)socialist experiences have been narrated and published (see, for instance, Arndt & Tesar, 2014; Aydarova, Millei, Piattoeva, & Silova, 2016; Silova, Aydarova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2016; Tesar, 2013).

For those of us who grew up in, and under, a very loose umbrella of 'socialism,' this is not an easy task. In my own experience of and research on childhoods under this particular ideological governance, which differ from other ideologically influenced childhoods, children have experienced abuse, abandonment, pain, laughter, beloved memories, and exciting subcultures (or as I referred to in my prior work, a childhood underground). There is nothing simple about these childhoods. And I purposefully use the term 'childhoods'—as there is no singularity in any of these experiences of children and youth growing up under 'socialism'. Always plural. Always childhoods. While the reader exploring this book may disagree with the narratives in some chapters, argue against, or for, different experiences of their own memory with respect to those presented here, it is certainly not possible to justify a generalization of one socialist childhood. As I've been arguing for the past ten years, when it comes to socialist narratives, we need to use the term 'childhoods' to emphasize the plurality and multiplicity of all narratives and experiences, feelings, and subjectivities that have been experienced and performed under this ideological governance (Tesar, 2014). Certainly, arguing against personal experiences, narratives, and truths is futile and dangerous; and it is time to accept the multiplicity of childhoods in socialism without needing to define 'one socialist paradigm of childhood'.

In this book, the editors have started a very brave project. From a methodological perspective, we do not often come across an edited collection where academics challenge themselves on a personal level, rediscover their roots, and attempt to theorize their early experiences. The chapters in this book reminded me of power and power relations, the

power of ideology, the power of adult and child subjects, and the power of governance. I appreciate that some narratives appeal to the reader's emotions rather than to a mechanical theorization. The academics' ability to analyze themselves and explore their ontological becomings, once shared with an audience, allows readers to see glimpses of adult and children subjects-in-the-making through these narratives. Readers come to see the vulnerability and diverse notions of vibrant life under the calm, and on-the-surface prescriptive, shell of socialism. This book is a courageous project and process of writing and editing.

Memories form an archive. They form an archive into which we, human subjects, allow ourselves to reach and to share and interpret data. What are these memories in our mind, this archive that we are willing to access and share? Where is the truth in such an examination, and where do we find ourselves in this process? What ethics are involved in such an examination when we mention people, places, and things of bygone times? For me, my first memories of socialism will always be linked with inequality, grey color, uniformity, a borderline life with barbed wire, and exciting subcultures focused on something forbidden; while at the same time these memories are linked to narratives of something exciting, amazing, of family time, beloved white winters in the mountains, summers going on forever, with green fields and peer-infused play, adventures, and exploring possibilities of a childhood underground, challenging the ideological governance of the system, as well as challenging the power structure of adults (and these two concerns were very much connected). Spending time at cottages with families and friends evokes nostalgia, memories, a rethinking of the past. They smooth the rough edges in the archive of my mind. Similarly, utilizing 'jokes' to deal with difficult positionings of children in society, then and now alike, has this effect. Dealing with the desires and envy of Western childhoods, commodities, and toys, or fear, these memories iron out the argument that all is gone and forgotten. In my memory, there is always both excitement and fear when it comes to remembering childhoods. And the methodology of writing myself into the narrative after all these years somehow perhaps makes it okay and somewhat good.

How do we process ethical concerns when exploring the archives of ourselves? They present a complex ontology of ourselves. It is more than just 'introspection,' more than pure accessing and retrieving of memories of childhoods. And this is more than just an individual concern. There is something collective and shared, not in the sense of shared similarities, but in the sense of embracing differences of otherness and accounts of

possibilities of our memories. Theorizing the archive can be powerful, but sometimes it is equally powerful to reduce our adult academic voice and let 'childhood data' speak for themselves. However, I argue, there is a need not to forget considering the ethics of such data, findings, stories, and narratives: there are ethics involved in memory-infused work, there is a truth (in both a structural and post-structural sense), and power relations are very much present in the work on socialist childhoods (Tesar, 2015). One of the ways I came to explore these narratives, archives, and ontologies of ourselves is by utilizing philosophy as a method, which is, in a nutshell, about an ethical relationship with thought (Koro-Ljungberg, Carlson, Tesar, & Anderson 2015).

Finally, why are socialist childhoods important? Why now, if ever, do we see academics writing about them? I have argued before that socialist childhoods allow us to see the logic of neoliberal childhoods (Tesar, 2014). Socialist childhoods need constant rethinking, reinvention, to burst the myth of a singularity of socialist childhoods, to see the productive otherness, to see ourselves, those who grew up under socialism, as those who are able to both witness and testify to the diversity and complexity of associated experiences of childhoods. There is not one socialist childhood, but many, entangled and embedded in complex ideological becomings. There is nothing 'purely wrong' with socialist childhoods, as this book demonstrates, but there is also nothing 'purely good' with them either. All that we as readers are left with is a productive mundane everyday in-betweenness.

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The Worlds of Childhood Memory

Robert Imre

As always, autoethnography, life-writing, memory studies, and contemporary history will prompt individuals to think about the different kinds of interconnectedness that exists in the variety of human experience. As it is such a personal account, we are drawn to examine how those personal accounts might resonate with our own 'known lives.' On many occasions, our world views are shaped by immediate circumstances, as well as by the everyday experiences in our daily practices. As a social scientist, one always needs to have a skeptical position in order to try to examine and understand the larger megaprocesses that our small individual experiences are woven into. Thinking about a 'world gone by' or a situation in which 'all that was solid melt(ed) into air' means that analyses of realized socialism can search for the similarities and differences through just such an examination of everyday experience (Verdery, 1996). And this is precisely what memory studies (in its broadest sense), and as such this volume, brings us. I have tried to summarize some of my initial thoughts on this volume, and my humble contribution is quite cursory due to space constraints, as there is much more to be said both about this rich work, as well as future endeavors along these same lines of inquiry.

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In many ways, the parallels that I allude to can be as simple as a structural comparison, laying structures side by side, then examining the constituent components, and asking where the differences lie. How similar or different are the (Young) Pioneers (or Pathbreakers, or the various names used to connote the same idea) in regard to the entire Scouting movement (that also morphs into the other similar movements such as the Girl Guides, etc.) begun by Lord Baden-Powell? And is this comparison the same as looking at the automobile engines in a Polski and a Fiat? Indeed, innumerable comparisons can be achieved with the structural approach, and we simply think of the numbers and types of carburetors, then catalogue them, and describe their particular differences and similarities as well as their particular nuances in terms of how they functioned in the variety of engines, which in some cases are dwindling in number; we can define a set of attributes and then attach experiences to those attributes. In many ways, the 'transitology' literature of the 1990s did precisely that. Examining human behavior under what was assumed to be a timelessly stable system that went into a form of instability in a 'transition,' then moved to something else, however we define it, was always populated by human beings attempting to make sense of their lives and act with some form of agency (Verdery, 1996).

Of course there is something missing in all of this, and if we wanted to take the analogy further, we might want to think about creating a catalogue of the human experiences involved in using those materials that were produced in the realized socialist world. The richness of an autoethnographic approach to 'worlds gone' means that we will not lose our human experience to the follies of the powerful, which is so often the case. Indeed, much was lost in the transitology approach that focused on the political economies and structural-functional views of the analysis of realized socialism (Griffiths & Imre, 2013). This volume gives us hope that we can develop deeper and more collective understandings of what we do and have done as human beings in terms of building the various edifices of our lives. It is also something that is fundamentally important in defining our connections with each other while teasing out the nuances of experience: will uniform-wearing Australians identify with the politics of bows? And will rock operas like *Jesus Christ Superstar* resonate with people in the same way that *István*, *a király*, might? I am quite certain that people listening to ABBA, The Scorpions, and various other cultural productions would have quite similar experiences regardless of background, socialist or otherwise (Alasuutari, 2016).

Of course this is human experience, and to a person who studies politics, some of the questions that will remain after reading this work might include something like the following:

Are we all moderns? That is to say, do we all have something in common in terms of our lives lived out in modernity, sharing similar cultural attributes regarding technology, freedom, and a post-Fordist world?

How is the location of power different now in those (post)socialist spaces and places than they were in decades past? And further, what does this tell us about the locus of power elsewhere, perhaps in the Global North or the developing world?

Is there a concrete system that is globally translatable in terms of how power is exercised in and over everyday lives that can be relevant in post-socialist contexts?

Is a conformist socialist model in any way different from a conformist capitalist/liberal democratic model of schooling, and as such, where do the paths among conservative, totalitarian, progressive, democratic, converge and diverge in our everyday lives and human experiences?

These questions, indubitably, are not the *pelagus rem* of the work. And for me, and my own discipline, as well as associated work of colleagues, this book does not seal away the experience. It is not a parchment buried in a sarcophagus, but rather a set of living memories, eminently communicable to other human beings, allowing us to revel in the colorful worlds, confronting both the horrors as well as beauty. This is indeed the capacity to enrich human experience. It is not the answering of the questions, but rather in the posing of these questions that we are developing more nuanced and inclusive understandings of our worlds past and present. Rather than demonstrating a dystopic position, a number of the chapters in the book show how dystopias must necessarily contain utopic elements, and utopias will also contain dystopic elements. The suggestion that liberal democracies are only progressive, or that realized socialism was only a dystopia, is thus done away with.

At the end of reading through the various chapters, I am left with questions of the metaphysical kind, which always tells me that something has been achieved in the writing: is history, and is metaphysics to be thought of as ontology, or as phenomenology? The big things about whether or not we are moving toward a greater collective progress, or simply piecing together random coping mechanisms, remains as an underlying theme throughout the book. I was also asked by the editors to provide something of a more personal note, and as such, I am compelled to think about my own connections to the various chapters. I cannot help but view this as

a project describing great similarities of what is technically a modern human experience. Again, this is about a personal view, so I am fully prepared to see how others may disagree, but I view all of the modern sociopolitical processes of classification and categorization in everyday life: rural/urban divides, class divisions, ethnic descriptions of difference, and performativities in institutions as children. These are universal themes that certainly would connect to children growing up in post-World War II Canada or in Hungary, two places where I have personal and intimate associations. For me, these similarities in constructing our narratives are striking, and the capacity for the myriad of examples contained in this book that translate as human experience already leaves me with a note of optimism about common human understanding.

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Decolonizing the Postsocialist Childhood Memories

Madina Tlostanova

My childhood nostalgia is not in any way connected to socialism. Rather, it refers to affects that are maximally distilled from any ideological elements. My Proustian memory avalanches take me back to the Caucasus, to its fascinating nature, and to its local people, traditions, and culture. I remember our family trips to the mountains, the taste of fruit impossible to find today, the smell of the blooming cherry plums in the old park where my father secretly showed me the gone-wild old trees from the indigenous Circassian forest gardens, the shady spacious flat with thousands of books, and me sitting under the glass coffee table and leafing through an impressionist art catalogue.

We adapt to spaces through local histories—collective and personal. Chicana feminists Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa called it a "theory in the flesh," stressing the importance of the "physical realities of our lives" which "fuse to create a politics born out of necessity" (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. 23). The authors of this fascinating volume strive to precisely recreate such a corporal and material theory-in-action born out of necessity by those whose childhood took place in socialist countries. Their mosaic of diverse postsocialist childhood memories triggered in me a lively personal response because it touched upon my own aesthesis, my

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own real-time and memory-related sensual perception—visual, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory. I share with the authors the postsocialist condition which is impossible to disembody through any subsequent layers of experiences—that very framework of the complex and contradictory socialist modernity/coloniality which continues to link us across the continents and generations.

It is encouraging that finally there emerge such works that go beyond the simplified ideological schemes and do not try to squeeze the disheveled recollections into particular theoretical models, which, in the case of socialism, are yet not too diverse and still controlled by the global North as the only legitimate knowledge producer. Even today very few postsocialist subjects are allowed to freely speak of their pasts without looking back to a set of frames created for them by someone else. The stereotypical idea of socialist schooling and childhood is either their negation in the vein of the Cold War Western notions of socialism or still Western but revisionist in nature, idealizing affirmation and blindness to some important local problems. Finally, the same Western-originated black-and-white models are often mimicked by theorists from the postsocialist countries who are well aware of their inferior status in knowledge production.

Clearly the socialist state could not control all spheres of life and subjectivity even if it wanted to. It is also clear that family and immediate social environment were far more important for children than school or any overt socialist ideological institutions. Importantly, the infamous double-think was becoming a crucial part of the socialist child's subjectivity very early on. Yet people are always able to learn to think independently even if it is dangerous to openly express their ideas. Each of the children in their respective local contexts chose their own ways of coping and their own degree of conformity and/or open or hidden protest.

I always hated school and even graduated from it one year earlier than others, so that at 16 I was already a freshman in Moscow State University. Yet, I was annoyed not even with the socialist indoctrination as such but rather with some blurred disciplining force of the system that had lost faith in its own ideology long ago and was mainly concerned with maintaining its power. And the best way to do this was to deprive us—the new generation—of critical thinking or any independent opinion. My school education was largely positivistic, which can hardly be regarded as exclusively socialist, yet it fit well with the Soviet educational system and stayed there longer than in other places.

It has become commonplace to speak of the whimsicality of our memory or even of its censorship and retroactive politicization of memories particularly if they are linked with the critical moments in individual lives or in the lives of whole societies. Our lives were broken and not necessarily mended with the collapse of the socialist world and its version of modernity/ coloniality. Memories do not tell us what happened but rather reveal the way people felt and how they perceived the events. They can be very far from reality yet psychologically true to the people who remember. And from these multiple entangled tapestries history is ultimately woven. Auto-ethnographic and collective memory works in this volume inevitably carry a justification of why people did this and that, why they believed in certain things, and why they wanted something. These strategies also act as a self-reflective moment of what they thought they were doing then and how they see it now. There is a gap between the voices from the past and voices from the present about the past. And it is for this contradictoriness and deliberate partiality of recollections that we should value this volume for its unexpected glimpses into the everyday mundane life of children under socialism. This life was not limited by pioneer scarves and waste paper and metal collection. Being voices on the past but from the present, these are also recollections of mostly postsocialist subjects living in the West who deal with the Western system of knowledge production for which we remain native informants. The book is an effort to break out of this system among other things through an additional dimension of self-reflection and self-critique rather than mere testimony or description of experience.

Thus for me the Soviet element was merely an annoying background which I needed to tolerate. Yet it never defined myself. I never wore the ribbons immortalized in this volume. Moreover, ribbons are hardly Soviet or ideological as they were copied in the USSR from the Czarist gymnasium where they got to—predictably—from the British educational system. The second-rate empire Russia was copying the naturalized Western model in all aspects and certainly in education—from curriculum to aprons and ribbons. In my experience, ribbons referred to the prescribed gender roles rather than ideology as such. Yet I still hate the color brown because it was the color of the school uniform. And I remember my joy when my mother brought me a locally made school uniform with a feminine plaited skirt and a gauze pelerine apron from Tallinn (the most Western of available places within the USSR), which, once again, mimicked the pre-Soviet gymnasium outfits. Wearing this very uniform, I announced at the Russian

literature lesson that Mikhail Lermontov's novel *The Hero of Our Time* was just a copy of the Western (French) original, though quite a good copy. The indignation of my literature teacher was not ideologically socialist but rather imperial-nationalist.

The declared diversity of postsocialist experiences, which is impossible to homogenize in any single positionality, runs through the entire volume and allows the authors to problematize their subject area—comparative education—that epistemologically is a Eurocentric discipline. According to the well-known saying, it always starts from the normativity of Western apples and the deviation of some non-Western, in this case, socialist, oranges. Connected through a shared experience of coloniality of the second-rate socialist modernity and often through our belonging to the imperial difference—and hence sharing the role of the catching up others fallen out from the narrative of "correct" (Western capitalist) modernity—the postsocialist subjects still undoubtedly differed a lot in their/our actual experiences of socialism.

There were differences connected with ethnic-national cultures, with imperial-colonial local histories, with the ways socialism was appropriated in various contexts, and even with the fact that the socialist period started, evolved, and ended in different countries at different times and went on with different speed and intensity. In spite of their approximately similar age, the authors of this volume coming from different socialist countries could be in different stages of relations with socialism—from the enthusiasm of newness in the 1980s Vietnam to the still somewhat ideologically bound systems of Eastern Europe and to the toothless apolitical pre-*perestroika* Soviet agony.

The imperial-colonial aspect of socialism could create an additional positive element in Vietnam where the anticolonial and antiimperialist overtones were prominent in the local socialist model. But this very aspect could cause the opposite hostile effect of colonization in Eastern Europe rightly considering itself to be occupied by Russia, and even more so in the ethnic-national republics-colonies of the USSR deprived of any rights.

For my own experience of an internal other of the Soviet empire, the intersection of the Soviet and colonial was much more important than any other aspects. I spent my childhood in the Northern Caucasus, which was then and still remains divided into many small and mostly powerless republics that are part of the Russian Federation. The socialist ideology in this multicultural region in the 1970–1980s—the years of my childhood and schooling—was almost exclusively ritualistic, whereas the erased and

silenced colonial element was much more crucial for the local population. I wanted to learn my real native (not Russian) language but it was practically impossible. My family was multicultural and Russian-speaking, and there were no textbooks for beginners. Moreover, everything pertaining to the local ethnic culture was seen as backward and unfashionable. I wanted to get an idea of my own ethnic group history, yet such subjects were not offered in our schools.

Finally, the progressivist and stagist and therefore Western/modern nature of socialism (or in other words the fact that the socialist modernity was a cousin of the capitalist one) was evident in its reproduction of the racist human taxonomies locating people on the scale from tradition to modernity and prescribing them different doses of communitarianism and individualism. Thus, in the Vietnamese model, it was more important to bring up an independent individualist subject. In fact, this model reproduced the American self-made man and was in its essence occidentalist (individualism was regarded as a progressive step in the development of the traditionalist communitarian society).

In the USSR, everything was the other way around. If we decided to rewrite the Vietnamese children's socialist tale of the hare and the broom in the Soviet way, it would mean that the three hares indeed should have cooperated in order to create something better together. Since Russia already had the individualist and atomizing tendencies well under way, the Soviet bosses were afraid of the spread of Western individualism and artificially supported such popular collectivism. This was truer for the Eastern European countries, which at the moment of the Soviet occupation, were long considering themselves to be part of Europe (even if not core). Having interiorized Western individualism, in the opinion of the local socialist bosses, these countries were in need of the collectivist vaccination against it.

I used to take off the abominable pioneer red scarf—*osheinik* (a dog collar) as we used to call it—immediately after leaving the school premises. And when I was an *Oktyabrenok* (from October), I did not really value the plastic red star with a small angelic looking blond and curly-headed Lenin in the center. In the late-Soviet system, belonging to pioneers or even *komsomol* (the Communist Youth Union) was no longer automatically connected with exclusion or inclusion. And our future enrollment at the university depended on grades rather than kilograms of recycled waste paper or loyalty to the regime. All the Soviet collectivist endeavors—from kindergarten to collective farm potato digging in student's years—invariably caused me to

panic and try to escape. I even persuaded my parents to take me home after only a week in the famous *Artek* pioneer camp in Crimea. It struck me not with expected ideological wind-bagging but rather with its meager conditions, prison-like rules, and its rampant and unrestrained sexuality which was probably a reaction against its official ideological image.

Similar to many socialist children, I also enrolled at the musical school and had private lessons in English and French. I avidly read books which normally would be read by university students and not schoolchildren and gave me access to alternative knowledges and to a larger world. This happened thanks to my mother who was a university professor of foreign (Western European and American) literature. When I was 12 or so, she suggested to me to choose such a profession that would allow hiding from the socialist world. She mentioned art history, ethnography, philology—to make me as free as possible under the existing conditions. My mother, similar to some authors' parents, was also hoping that the socialist paradise would not last forever. But she also attempted to prepare me for the underground existence, for an internal immigration, for my own world behind the curtained windows.

My university years in Russia only proved to me that whatever I needed from education I could get at home or on my own. And when I was 19 and first went to study in the USA as an exchange student, I was bored (most of the things we studied I already knew before and not from the Soviet university) but at the same time attentive to the differences between the American and Soviet higher education systems. The US college was not a revelation because I wanted to be an Americanist and had been preparing myself for a long time. Yet I could clearly see the gap between the fundamental education of Moscow State University, which mimicked the earlier Kantian-Humboldtian model while discouraging students from having their own opinion and the lack of any systematic background in higher education in the USA which nevertheless was good at developing rhetorical skills and encouraging students to be independent and never fear the teacher. I saw that there should be a balance between these approaches, and in the 16 years of my own professorship in the post-Soviet Russia, I attempted to do just that. But the rapid expansion of the business corporation university model erased everything good from the Soviet system and also from the previous Western one and turned the present higher education system in many postsocialist countries into yet another colonial

caricature of the Western (this time neoliberal) university minus the democratic traditions, academic freedom, trade unions, and many other things that we either never had or quickly lost.

In the Soviet system, we were forced to forget both about our communal and ethnic-national heritage and about the nascent individualistic secondary modernity in favor of the rigid socialist collectivism glued together by an artificial common idea. Predictably, we then nourished the dream of Western individualism and independence in knowledge production. Yet when many of us found ourselves in the West either individually or as a group, we soon gave up on this dream, realizing that we were not allowed to be part of it in the role of knowledge producers and moreover, we were told to go back and start from scratch—correcting our wrong socialist modernity to the right Western one. Having discovered this, many postsocialist subjects turned to a critical rethinking of their/our experience, to be able to understand our postsocialist human condition in all its complexity and imagine our futures.

For most of us postsocialism is not a time after socialism; it is a space of our lives which we would like to claim as a geopolitical and corpo-political location with its own genealogy of knowledges. It does not have to be necessarily fit into or be distorted in accordance with the grand narrative of the global modernity/coloniality which does not have a place for us. We remain invisible, appropriated, packaged according to fashionable theories. But we have our own stories to tell, and they need to be heard in order for the postsocialist people to leave the void that we have inhabited for the last 25 years and attempt a re-existence (Albán Achinte, 2009) as a positive world re-creation anew.

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Beyond the Young Pioneers: Memory Work with (Post)socialist Childhoods

Susanne Gannon

How can I respond to such an extraordinary cascade of memories of socialist childhoods from so far outside those worlds? This feels like an 'afterword' from an 'other world.' Geopolitically and ideologically, my childhood in rural Australia seems to be more than a hemisphere away. But memories work subliminally and affectively and moments of resonance will take any reader by surprise. Images and iconography circulate beyond their geopolitical contexts. Fragments of experience, conversation, and popular culture float to the surface.

I've just finished watching *Deutschland 83*—a joint German-US television hit series set in East and West Germany. The series has a notable absence of children—although socialist childhoods are implied in the values, behaviours, and crises faced by the young couple of the East, the young soldier spy Martin Rauch and his pregnant girlfriend Annett Schneider. The music and mise en scène seemed perfect. I recognised the modernist interiors of the Stasi headquarters in Berlin, now a museum. I visited Berlin first in 2000, after I finished the semester of the Internationale Frauenuniversitat (IFU) in Hanover, Germany. My friends in Berlin had all moved into Prenzlauer Berg, formerly in East Berlin. Navigating home to their various apartments meant orienting via the television tower in Alexanderplatz, built by the GDR to symbolise modernity and the site of

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mass demonstrations by East Germans as the regime came to an end. I made my way around the city with an elaborately folded street map, tramping along Karl-Marx-Allee, with traces of the not so distant past all around me. Visits to people's homes included an abandoned apartment building in Friedrichshain, where a friend's brother was squatting. I was struck by the charm and decrepitude of (as yet) unrenovated apartment blocks: high ceilings, tiled stoves, full-length bathtubs tucked into drawers under kitchen sinks, shared toilets on landings between apartments. Nearby loomed the shallow layers of Plattenbauten, prefabricated concrete multistorey apartment blocks built from the 1950s to bring modernity to the East. Ostalgie, or nostalgia for East Germany, was everywhere and it was infectious. I bought a brown cardboard suitcase at a second-hand market. In another small museum, I found some Young Pioneer posters going cheap in the bookstore. I rolled them up in my cardboard suitcase and brought them home to Australia.

The iconography of the *Junge Pioniere* posters resonates with many of the details of the socialist childhoods in these chapters. They feature children wearing uniforms with red scarves, logos, and emblems (*Antifaschistische Aktion*, the red star of KPD, the Communist Party of Germany), and they reference large-scale public celebrations (*Internationale Kinderwoche*, International Children's Week). There are propaganda and recruitment posters, probably from the late 1960s or 1970s. The first poster for *Internationale Kinderwoche* (IKW) shows a teenage boy blowing a trumpet, heralding the future that the socialist state is creating. He seems to look towards the future, and the light that falls on his image and on the instrument suggest that the future is bright, and that it belongs to the children (Fig. 1).

The central figure of the second poster is a younger boy, striding with the *Antifaschistische Aktion* emblazoned on a large red flag. The line of the boy's body and the flagpole bifurcate the page. His mouth is open, as though he is speaking, and though we don't know what he says, the implication is that it is some sort of rallying cry or chant. His brows are furrowed in concentration. He looks serious, determined, and impressive. He is strong, holding the flag in one hand as he marches along. Behind him is an urban residential street. The facades of the buildings look tired and traditional with their monochrome flowerboxes and damaged plaster. They predate the revolution. Two other (non-pioneer?) children wearing dark coats cluster in the shadows in the bottom right-hand corner. They are looking in the wrong direction. The boy in uniform is striding away

Fig. 1 Internationale Kinderwoche (International Children's Week). Caption (trans): Fight with us against hunger, fascism, war. Become young socialist pioneers

from them, from the past towards the future, from the dark towards the light. Here the future is represented on the left-hand side of the poster, in the red star of the KPD and the images embedded inside it. Two young girls wearing their pioneer scarves hold up fruit and smile into the camera. Behind them we see machinery and smaller images of groups of adults in the background. The girls' arms are bare; they are involved in outside activities and eating healthy food. Although the girls are not positioned in central or active locations in the image, they are crucial for the promised happy, healthy, and collective future (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2   Workers' children! Become Young Pioneers!

All my friends and most of the German women who had attended IFU had grown up in West Germany. But in Hanover I lived in a student dormitory for three months, behind the social sciences library. All the IFU women in our dormitory were from the former USSR—Russia, Ukraine, Georgia—and I made fleeting friendships with women from Estonia and Kazakhstan. Traces of socialist childhoods emerged in stories of summer fieldwork expeditions to harvest potatoes, of youth groups and outdoor camps, of transmigration across thousands of kilometres. In the collective biography workshops that I co-convened with Babette Müller-Rockstroh, Soviet schoolgirls' breasts were measured and catalogued each year as though women's bodies were part of the means of production of the state.

These fleeting and superficial fragments touch only for a moment on the remarkable stories in this book. But that's how memories work, through an affective register, making connections in unpredictable directions, even for the most tenuous of readers. Memory entails dynamic and generative processes. Objects, artefacts, and images are implicated, and they can trigger new memories.

The authors in this book have worked rigorously to push themselves and each other further and further, as they improvise and adapt memory methods for the very particular purposes of evoking and interrogating (post)socialist childhoods. Memory has not been approached merely as a method of retrieval of intact or fixed accounts, like images in an album merely requiring opening and labelling with forgotten names and locations. Instead memory is a process, requiring diligence, precision, and meticulous work. By deploying methodological strategies for critiquing and complicating memories, they keep them on the move so they do not settle too easily into habitual accounts. Authors work with each other, and with others in their milieu, to question and to trouble memories, to layer them and juxtapose them with other memories, objects, feelings, and historical accounts. They refuse nostalgia.

Crucially, they bring into dialogue personal and public narratives and demonstrate the limits of binary thinking that would keep them apart. They stage collisions between ideologies, discourses, and everyday practices. They insist that history is etched into the bodies and desires of children, and the memories of the adults they become. The authors carefully construct the precise spaces and times of twentieth century state socialism, tracing vernacular variations and entanglements with national and regional narratives and identities. They document the diverse trajectories of state collapse and ambivalent transitions towards democratic capitalism. And, at the same time, they trace micropractices of resistance that children improvise from whatever resources become available to them, including objects and alternative discourses. Rather than passive young subjects of the state, children are repositioned as agentic and creative. Schools and teachers privilege transmission pedagogies and deploy ideologically framed textbooks, and at the same time they provide opportunities for counternarratives and subversive practices, sometimes inadvertently and sometimes at considerable risk.

Having revealed myself as a distant traveller from another world, with only the most fleeting connections to the materialities of socialist and postsocialist childhoods, the book also challenges me to consider the

ideological milieus of my own childhood. Transmission pedagogies dominated. State-sanctioned textbook versions of the world perpetrated dangerous nonsense ranging from the deliberate erasure of Aboriginal Australians through to the valorisation of export industries and corporate profit (merino sheep, brown coal, etc.) that had supposedly made the nation great. Catholic schools laid down ideological strata that will take a lifetime to undo. American television saturated our screens, and children and heroes (like the dog in *The Littlest Hobo*) were valiant and individualistic. New worlds were discovered and obstacles overcome by entrepreneurial individuals or small groups (*Lost in Space*, *Gilligan's Island*). Eastern European parodies were crucial for many television comedies (*Get Smart*). Meanwhile my young parents swallowed the great Australian dream of economic autonomy and opened a franchise selling shiny new American cars—Ford Falcons, Fairlanes, Mustangs—into the Australian countryside. They were on the brink of bankruptcy before I was ten and hobbled forward into a future of tenuous small business, the family ideology intact and perfectly aligned with the ambitious and uneven capitalist state. I would need to do a lot more work to unravel and interrogate the political and personal legacies of childhood in this place and time, but the authors of this book show how it might be done. Whether or not it is of interest (beyond myself) is another question, given widespread accessibility to perspectives from capitalist childhoods of the last century. This book on socialist and postsocialist childhoods enters into overlooked spaces and narratives and demonstrates why such work is so important.

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A New Horizon for Comparative Education?

Jeremy Rappleye

What implications does this volume hold for the field of comparative and international education, particularly for those of us who came to the field in hopes of escaping the parochial horizons of our childhood? At first glance, it may appear the implications are very few. For decades now, the child has been absent from the field. Most comparativists remain enamored with megastructures and global trends, transfixed by transcendent visions and increasingly abstract comparisons. Methodologically, the authors call to draw from the well of personal experience, dig up our memories, and piece together stories of our *selves*, looks woefully out of touch with the accelerating trend toward measuring an objective material world, painting educational portraits with numbers, and banishing subjectivity completely from our imminent Kingdom of Means. How could the authors have failed to get Francis Fukuyama's memo that the collapse of state socialism marked the *End of History* and—most (but not all) contributors being women—they should hasten instead to become the *Last Man*?

But, of course, another way to read this volume is a challenge to all such delusions. The return to history, lived experience, and—perhaps most of all—the child can be read as a timely move to counter current trends; a contestation to redoubled attempts to solidify a single (Western) horizon

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for educational scholarship and practice worldwide. Perhaps this is not how all the authors themselves envisage their project, but it might be one fruitful way for comparativists to engage with it.

I could have not imagined that contemplating childhoods in postsocialist spaces would be something "relevant," either for my own scholarship or my own life. But it is the depth of these contributions that such *creates* linkages. The authenticity of the accounts reaches out to us. The chapters are bound and bind to us through sinews of shared experience, not through agreed upon *a priori* categories. As but one example, the imagery of Chinese pencil cases and Panda Bear pens pulls me in—I distinctly remember trading away lunch delicacies Mom had carefully prepared to secure similar booty on my American playgrounds—but then it pushes me to contemplate the authors' conclusion: "children under socialist regimes were both object of state efforts to raise future ideal citizens for a utopian society and agents in their own right, caught within a multiplicity of repressive and enabling regimes" (Lénárt-Cheng & Luca, p. 24). And somehow, amidst our brave new world of proliferating OECD standardized learning assessments, I remain bound. I cannot help but feel that what was true for postsocialist spaces in the past is now relevant for me and contemporary childhoods almost everywhere: all are heavily marked by living out someone else's project.

More optimistically, the rich texture of life that emerges through these contributions beckons us toward a possible exit. Who could have imagined the conflicted emotions bubbling up in the mind of a Red Guard on the night of her wedding (Wu)? The pride of a Vietnamese child in foregoing a small breakfast to contribute to the big project of rebuilding of her country (Ho)? The reeling and rebirth inflicted by stairs and stares (Battalova)? The glowing pride of a young girl riding one's bike on the "real" road (Oates-Indruchová)? No such texture could ever emerge in comparative education when the projects we partake in demand that the future is foregrounded, experience is replaced by numbers, and subjectivity must be demeaned as "nonobjective."

And it is only within the sort of rich spaces opened up by these contributions that texture transfigures into interconnections. In a brilliant chapter, Millei, Piattoeva, Silova, and Aydarova coconstruct an account that—through the apt imagery of the bow—ties together childhoods, memories, femininity, beauty, past, present, politics, macro-trends, micro-perspectives, poststructuralist theory, and long-forgotten family photographs. What might comparative education look like if it could

learn to *again* see discrete, seemingly unrelated entities in such vast webs of interconnection? Comparativists are obliged to pay homage to the modern concept of "context," but this postsocialist bow takes us back to the primal depth of the idea itself: to weave together ("con-texere").

So What Comes Next?

It feels somehow impolite to ask this question when this important volume has not yet gone to press. But holding the authors at their word, their project surely invites moves away from a terminus, static horizon, or final resting point. Implicit in their celebration of subjectivity and becoming must surely be an eagerness to continue the journey of self-discovery, to welcome other opinions and move into the next phase through further engagement.

As such, my query to the authors and like-minded readers is this: Does this archeological compendium of socialist childhood experiences dig deep enough? Where would we be if we kept digging? Who would we be or become?

Here the challenge is not to, say, refine our view of how adult-generated memories mediate access to childhood experiences. Nor is it an appeal to describe even more multiple and situated socialist selves, cataloguing further memories and exposing greater diversity of experience. Instead, the challenge I have in mind is to surface the existential-ontological uncertainties that was—at least for me—a major part of what it meant to be a child. Might the next phase of this project engage more directly with existential-ontological questions?

In this volume's final chapter, the editors walk us bravely into the realm of deep theory, making the overarching case that "childhood" should be delinked from the logic of modernity/coloniality (following Mignolo). Specifically, they invite readers to (i) "rethink childhood," (ii) "time and space," and (iii) "self and other." There is no doubt that decolonial pathways promise to take us deeper.

Yet, the discussion unfolds against the larger backdrop of politics, often viewing children primarily as "political actors." Undoubtedly important, doesn't this still construct childhoods in relation to the adult concerns of politics rather than a childlike curiosity of existence itself? That is, might the borders of Western European modernity already function as the unacknowledged frame of the postsocialist analytical lens itself? Furthermore, isn't the talk of "schooled subjects" and "subjectivity" already part of the

Cartesian subject/object split, a worldview arguably transmitted via the French Revolution to the Bolsheviks and then translated onto the pages of this volume? Can we say the same for time? Is there not a deeper layer than linear time? Is there not something more at stake in rethinking time than simply taking "time out" or subordinating it to well-worn social categories? To be sure, some contributions and the editors' conclusion do nudge readers in this direction. But we are apt to remember that, for example, the Russian Revolution initiated the transition from the Julian Calendar (dating to 46 BC) to the Gregorian chronology (1582). What came before the convergence? Was that divergent temporality "all gone" by the time the authors emerged on the scene? And isn't there another layer still, one perhaps most accessible to those outside the deeply Christian West, for example, the pagan time of Latvia or the seasonal, astrological time of China? And last, does the final assumption of "self and other" already start with negating "self/other" as another potential starting point for existence?

The question again: Is there not a more primal—if that word can be permitted—layer of existence lurking? As I read, I often found myself wishing the authors dug deeper into their thoughts and memories of why "each new discovery only leads to greater insecurity" (Lénárt-Cheng & Luca). I wanted to know more about what ultimately grounds meaning when life is recognized only as a "space of self-making where one receives whatever comes and in acceptance, gropes to make better meanings out of it" (Wu, p. 205). How deep did doubt seep into *all* received truth when the old socialist ideological symbols on the surface were suddenly cast aside (Bogic)? What deeper views drove the feelings of existential "superiority" (Kaščák & Pupala)? Where did one's own existential loyalties ultimately come to rest when the multiple, complex entanglements of religion and socialism started to diverge (Przybylo & Ivleva; Kaščák & Pupala)?

Here I intend no critique only deeper contemplation. Again: Might one way to move this project forward be to dig still deeper? Is it possible that future work along these lines can lead us beyond the most deeply rooted categories of Western modernity, ones so ingrained they often remain unthought? This path would complement the editors' final reminder that realization of the self often comes the moment that the previous self is overcome: "Letting one's self go—may threaten the subjectivity of the researcher," but it also creates the "liminal spaces of being and becoming [that] reveal open-endedness, uncertainty, and unpredictability where new knowledge becomes possible." This is an important

message for comparative education, which so often seems to be more intent on solidifying horizons than opening up new ones. Indeed, once the self itself comes to be viewed as constitutive of horizon, this volume can be read as opening a much-needed "liminal space" for a new emergence to arise.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by "n" refers to notes.