



Thinking through memories of childhood in (post)socialist spaces: ordinary lives in extraordinary times

Zsuzsa Millei, Iveta Silova & Susanne Gannon

To cite this article: Zsuzsa Millei, Iveta Silova & Susanne Gannon (2019): Thinking through memories of childhood in (post)socialist spaces: ordinary lives in extraordinary times, Children's Geographies, DOI: [10.1080/14733285.2019.1648759](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1648759)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1648759>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 01 Aug 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 462



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Thinking through memories of childhood in (post)socialist spaces: ordinary lives in extraordinary times

Zsuzsa Millei ^a, Iveta Silova ^b and Susanne Gannon ^c

^aFaculty of Education and Culture, University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland; ^bMary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Center for Advanced Studies in Global Education, Arizona State University, Phoenix, USA; ^cAdult and Postgraduate Education, Western Sydney University, Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

In the history of modernity, childhood represents societies' hopes and desires for the future. An offspring of modernity, the socialist project had a unique preoccupation with children and childhood for the social (re)making of societies. However, research on both sides of the Iron Curtain has explored children's lives in socialist societies by focusing on the organised efforts of state socialisation, largely overlooking how childhoods were actually experienced. In this article, first, we delve into the utility of memory stories for exploring childhoods and children's everyday lives in a variety of socialist spaces. Second, we explicate how memory stories about everyday life can serve as data for cultural-political analysis. We aim to show how 'thinking through' memory stories enables us to learn about childhood and children's lives and to gain access to historical socio-political discourses and practices. We conclude with the relevance of our discussion for engagements with current global problems.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 August 2018
Accepted 16 July 2019

KEYWORDS

Memory stories; socialism; collective biography; becoming; knowledge production

Introduction

In the history of modernity, children have commonly reflected societies' hopes and desires for the future (Stephens 1995; Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018; Millei and Imre 2015). Perhaps more than any other group of human beings, children were viewed as central to the political, economic, and social (re)making of societies. An offspring of modernity, the socialist project had a particular preoccupation with childhood and children who were perceived to embody – both as human beings and metaphorically – a new social order (Kirschenbaum 2001; Kelly 2007; Millei 2011; Mead and Silova 2013; Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). 'A new "script" for childhood' governed children's upbringing and education to achieve this new order (Kirschenbaum 2001, 6). Children were also required to actively engage in building a bright socialist future. They participated in political organisations, such as pioneer or youth groups, or in economic production, during harvest-time or in summer camps. To pursue their agendas, both the political regime and researchers used top-down political socialisation theories which not only disregarded children's everyday lives but also considered children as malleable tabula rasa onto which new political ideals, norms, values, knowledge and behaviours could be written by adults. In many ways, socialist manifestations of modernity can be understood as extraordinary times for childhood studies, since the engineering of a new society hinged so intensively on childhood and children. In this paper, we want to explore how ordinary

CONTACT Zsuzsa Millei  Zsuzsa.Millei@staff.uta.fi

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

children's lives within different socialist systems can say something about these extraordinary times and societies.

Everyday life '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' and was differentiated even further in the diverse spaces and economic periods of the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc (Yurchak 2006, 6). Children skilfully navigated the paradoxes of everyday life while experiencing mixed feelings of attachment, optimism, dullness, and alienation towards state expectations (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). When children engaged in highly ideologised institutional practices, their participation ranged from following to resisting the official political regime spotted with many inconsequential and often invisible acts. As everywhere else in the world, children also participated in activities that were not explicitly or overtly ideological in nature. Memories of everyday life during the Cold War provide ample evidence of the kinds of vibrant lives that escaped, transgressed or rearticulated 'authoritative script' (Yurchak 2006, 290).

Gaining a glimpse into children's ordinary lives through memories would therefore enable us to overcome various dualist modes of thinking that are present in Cold War narratives. It could also illuminate the wider sociopolitical matrices in which children's everyday lives unfolded and how children variously positioned themselves alongside those (Philo 2016). In particular, recognition of the diversity of socialist economies and spaces, and the era of the Cold War can trouble easy interpretations of how it was to live a 'socialist childhood'. Emphasising the continuities, ruptures, and relations between different geographical regions (including the two sides of the Iron Curtain) and different historical times (different periods of socialism in different countries and pasts, presents, and futures), can thus develop rich understanding about societal processes and change, and children's embeddedness in and engagements with those (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). The analytical process through which we can gain insights about wider sociopolitical matrices, diverse lived childhoods, notions of 'the child' and children's multiple beings and becomings, is what we refer to here as 'thinking through' childhood. 'Thinking through' childhood can also help us consider the complex engagement of children with unfolding social change in present day contexts, including anthropogenic climate crisis, geopolitics, biopolitics, extremist ideologies and their historical antecedents.

'Thinking through' childhood by using memories of childhood requires epistemological, ontological, and methodological rethinking and retooling which we undertake in this paper. We discuss the analytical approach we take for the cultural-political analysis of childhood memories that foregrounds children's stories as remembered by adults (see Silova et al. 2016; Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). We argue for the use of memories as a productive tool to gain insights into children's everyday lives.

We engage in this paper with memory stories that are produced through collective biography. The method of collective biography is associated with Haug et al. (1987), subsequently retooled in a post-structural vein by Davies and Gannon (2006) and Gonick and Gannon (2014). It is an approach to research that foregrounds the shared generation and analysis of systematically recalled memories to explore the effects of structural, systemic, discursive and affective processes on the emergence of particular subjects, such as the neoliberal subject, the gendered subject, and the academic subject, or the child subject (e.g. Davies and Gannon 2006; Gonick and Gannon 2014; Hawkins et al. 2016; Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). Researchers working with collective biography acknowledge that 'there might well be no single, "true" method that is alone appropriate for this kind of work,' because 'the very heterogeneity of everyday life demands similarly heterogenous methods if it is to be understood' (Haug et al. 1987, 70–71). Depending on particular configurations of a research collective, participants may approach collective biography differently in terms of the ways in which they choose topics, invoke memories, incorporate other modalities (e.g. including images and objects, art-making and theatre), as well as in how they go about writing, rewriting and analysing the memories (see Haug et al. 1987; Davies and Gannon 2006; Gonick and Gannon 2014). Rather than a fixed methodological approach, it is crucial that each collective describes the particular processes that emerged as most suitable for their work.

At a broader conceptual and methodological level, our approach to collective biography shares several key elements with previous research. In collective biography, memory stories and their analysis are produced in the intersubjective spaces of a group of participants and in the interrelations between participants' presents and pasts. In a similar manner to memory studies, collective biography asserts that memories can offer insights to the social sciences 'over and above historical research' (Keightley 2010, 55). Memory is not a substitute for historical research nor is it a 'direct conduit to historical truth'; rather memory is a 'topic of research and a mode of investigation' that should be considered 'on its own terms, distinct from the epistemological criteria of history' (Keightley 2010, 56). Collective biography collapses the binary that separates the knowledge generating expert from the layperson remembering. Subject and object of research fold into each other. We adopt approaches to memory writing that focus on specific moments and scenes, that attend to the corporeality of memories, and we draft and redraft our memory stories in an iterative process of careful listening, reading, writing and rewriting (Davies and Gannon 2006; Gonick and Gannon 2014; Haug et al. 1987).

As researchers adapting this method, we search for understanding of how we have 'participated in our own past experience' (Haug et al. 1987, 35). Thus, we focus on the commonalities and differences in the remembering practices and memories of those children (us)¹ who grew up in Central and Eastern European socialist countries. We explore how childhoods are contoured by the powerful institutions, discourses and practices pressing against them and at the same time describe these discourses and practices in terms of transformations. Childhood memory stories written through collective biography extend beyond the individual, connecting private and public remembering and individual and collective interpretations in multifaceted and reciprocal ways. Each telling of a memory story calls forth more stories, mobilising resonances (and nuances of difference and detail) between stories.

During the Cold War, former socialist countries were described with the construct of the 'second world,' in contrast to the 'first world' that was claimed for the capitalism of 'the west'. This notion of the second world signalled specific conditions unifying a range of regions, socialist economies and societal processes which themselves changed during the Cold War and had distinct variations in various national contexts. To highlight this complexity of the time-spaces of historical socialism and what followed, we use the term '(post)socialist spaces' that for us acknowledges complexities and changing conditions in particular locales. The notion of the 'second world' after 1989 was reinterpreted in temporal terms, as the period post or after socialism. This temporal understanding however ignores the 'millions of people who share the experience of being branded for several decades as "the (communist) East" and who are still inhabiting this symbolic East which is fragmenting today under the pressure of new geopolitical divisions and North/South axes' (Tlostanova 2017, 1–2). In sum, for us the term '(post)socialist' indicates unfinished configurations and changing economic and socio-political conditions and various time-spaces attached to particular locales.

After laying out some coordinates for this paper, we continue by introducing earlier research on childhood and socialist transformations. Then, we explain those considerations that shaped our development of a methodology for working with childhood memories of everyday life in (post)socialist spaces. Finally, we offer three explicit analytical moves to show how 'thinking with' memories while 'thinking through' childhood opens opportunities for coming to know children's everyday lives and the social transformations within which they take place. We also reflect on how researchers are becoming with memory work and conclude with some thoughts on how memory work can inform our present analyses of children's everyday lives.

Research on childhoods and socialist transformations

During the Cold War, the region experienced socialist modernisation, incorporating accelerated industrialisation, economic development, militarisation and cultural transformation. State ownership was extended to industry and the market, which were centrally governed following five-year

plans that set out development and economic goals. Socialism as an ideologically shaped counterculture to capitalism aimed to create new, morally and psychologically superior human beings whose consciousness would be re-oriented away from materialism and individuality. Children were seen as playing an important two-fold role in this project. First, symbolic children represented the possibility of modernisation and cultural transformation towards a more equal and collective-oriented society. Second, real children were seen as important civic and political actors, and as an impressionable segment of the population and hence as embodying the new politics, social order and society. In this context, the perception, fulfilment, and facilitation of the needs, capacities, and interests of real children were often mixed with constructions of an idealised modern and collective-oriented childhood.

The centrality afforded to children in the utopian notions of a communist society and their actual roles in realising the new society had a direct impact on knowledge production about childhood and on children's political socialisation. A spectrum of academic fields, including psychology, pedagogy, medicine and social pedagogy, provided the increasingly professionalising workforce with the required knowledge to regulate and mold new types of citizens. In particular, political socialisation under socialism was distinctive in two aspects (Cheng 2009). First, in place of the espousal of loyalty to the nation and the transmission of basic norms and values that are common features of political socialisation in all societies, the communist party was identified with the state. Therefore the ideological doctrine of the party also underpinned the norms of everyday life. Political socialisation did not only require autonomous efforts from all segments of society, but also loyalty to the regime, which was imposed on individuals through political organisations. Second, political socialisation went beyond mere civic education to embrace a form of personal development that required children to participate actively in political, ideological, and economic activities. The political world of the child was thus intertwined with that of the adults, requiring children to participate in everyday political practices relating to institutions and peer cultures.

While socialist ideology framed childhoods in specific ways, we argue that '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' (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018, 5). Alongside ideologically scripted spaces, children led their lives in mundane spaces of everyday life. However, studies of childhood during the Cold War on both sides of the Iron Curtain have tended to ignore mundane spaces of childhood and those spaces where dissent, transgression, and resistance to ideological prescriptions took place (Connell 1987; Millei and Kallio 2018). Universalising research narratives also brushed aside the complex realities that shaped different childhoods in diverse socialist spaces. The research was often framed by dichotomies such as capitalist/socialist, religious/atheist and imperialist/liberationist. It obscured internal differences, overlooking connections and similarities with the West across different spheres of life, and paid insufficient attention to local political and ideological debates, the role of non-Party organisations (such as the church), and the plethora of other social, economic, political, and cultural formations present in socialist states.

Overall, most research published during the Cold War produced a familiar, yet inevitably one-sided, image of childhood, predominantly expressed in such universalising tropes as ideological indoctrination or oppression (Silova, Millei, and Piattoeva 2018). Writing against this historical and epistemological background, we felt compelled to decentre the 'master narratives' of both (post)-socialism and modern childhood in order to open spaces for sharing more complicated and varied accounts (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018).

In our memories, children (us) appeared as agents in their own lives. This positioning helped us decentre narratives that constituted children as passive receivers of societal norms in memory stories we have produced as part of an ongoing research project commenced in 2014.² In this paper, we focus on the methodological considerations we had to contend with in order to be able to say

something about past children's lives, and historical constructions of childhoods and societies from memories told by adults.

Epistemological, ontological, and methodological retooling

Epistemologically, to gain accounts of children's lives from their perspectives, socialisation-oriented research has to be turned 'upside down'. This task resonates with the project that Frigga Haug and her colleagues accomplished in their seminal text on memory-work, *Female Sexualization* (1987), co-authored by a collective of women in Hamburg and Berlin who formed around the Socialist Women's Association (Sozialistischer Frauenbund), and the Marxist journal *Das Argument*. They committed to working with childhood memories in order to trace women's subordination to patriarchal structures. The German title – *Frauenformen* or 'women's forms' – suggests their interest in the *formation* of gendered subjects, in what later came to be called 'subjectification' through Foucault (eg. Davies and Gannon 2006). Their earliest memories reached back into fascist ideologies and idealised notions of femininity and young female bodies that were part of the project of the state (e.g. what they came to call the 'hair project', the 'legs project').

Memories of childhoods similarly bring into focus children's 'mundane lives as permeated by politics in which they have their own positions and roles' (Kallio and Häkli 2011, 21). Through analysing these memory stories it is possible to explore how children have produced their own spaces outside, within and against spaces and discourses that adults constructed for them. They also allow us to explore how those accounts are bound together by the possibilities that one can act within available frames, such as social pressure to conform, imperatives of economic survival, or conditions given by culture, history and schooling. Haug and colleagues wanted to understand what those conditions were and what they reveal about society's control of sexuality, love and gender, since as they argued, what 'we perceive as "personal" ways of adapting to the social are also generalizable modes of appropriation' (Haug et al. 1987, 44). Haug and colleagues' aim was to identify those experiences that were subjugated by various conditions, for example enjoyment of diverse sensual pleasures. They saw within this work the key to liberate themselves from these pressures and to avoid reproducing experiences in the future in which their desires were limited by particular conditions.

Poststructural approaches to collective biography however are distanced from biographical research that assumes a unitary and bounded individual proceeding through life and who can liberate herself from societies' power structures. Instead they call attention to how 'we are discursively, affectively, materially constituted' at all times, and to the inherent instability of these forces (Gonick and Gannon 2014, 6). Thus memories produced through collective biography can point to social relations, dominant discourses, affects and emotions and materialities within which subjectivities and experiences are produced and performed. Exploring these memories can provide important analytical incisions into the social norms, values, issues and concerns driving and producing societal, cultural/ideological changes and social transformation.

Ontologically, these considerations raise a related issue about children's 'otherness' in viewing, understanding and negotiating the world (Jones 2008). As Jones (2013, 4) explains, adults have limited access to

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.

Children and adults have different positionings in becoming human, there are adult-becomings and child-becomings that are folded together in any search for understanding children and childhood (Jones 2008). This entails an 'ongoing flow of interconnects and disconnects' between adult created spaces and children's spatialities (Jones 2013), and adult-becomings and child-becomings (Jones 2008). Identifying these flows and connections can also point to the possible mobilisation of different discourses and to the larger societal processes within which those take place. In this way, memories

of childhood open spaces through which we can glimpse how children navigate adult orders and spaces from their own positionings and trouble views about children's lives that have become stale or stereotyped. We refer here, for example, to analyses that unify and singularise children's experiences during socialism.

Methodologically, such a shift raises important questions of representation, such as who can represent children's lives (Jones 2001; see also Piattoeva, Silova, and Millei 2017). The question of whether adults can intimate children's lives is a part of the problematic of studying all kinds of human groupings, since there is often a gulf between the people studied and researchers. A central tension for us here is that in studying (memories of) children and childhood, adult researchers are removed from children's ways of living their worlds (Philo 2003). Researching and thinking about childhood and children suffers from a form of 'colonisation', the use of adult frames in understanding childhood and children's lives (Jones 2001, 2008). Folded into the present of the adult person remembering, memories of childhood are therefore difficult to isolate: how childhood was felt from within, the ways in which the child sensed and thought about the world. In memories, the two are folded into each other in 'very complex and obscure ways' (Jones 2013, 6). First, adults' memories of childhood change forms as they are repeatedly reimagined in relation to different times and spaces (Keightley 2010). Second, memories are often informed by what Philo (2003, 10) terms 'popular mythologies' of childhood, common knowledges, concepts and views that shape adults' perspectives, including ideologised views and academic interpretations. Walled within these interpretations, memories of childhood thus require new frames to explore beyond adult, ideologised, and scientific expositions. We will come back to this point and the related analytical work it requires.

Imaginative construction always accompanies childhood memories to fill in gaps between fragments. Philo (2003) contends that 'reveries' of childhood can open avenues to the intimate spaces of children's worlds. In reveries, reality and imagination are indistinguishable, and in these spaces, senses of childhood return, such as in pointless acts, retraced movements, smells of rooms, lights in the afternoon, sensations of the damp cold air of a basement on our skin, materialities. As memories are re-inhabited, details of the scenes proliferate and the remembering subject experiences affective and sensory surges. This way of working with memories is productive and can often tell more about childhood than cognitive efforts that attempt to logically retrace past events. As Horton and Kraftl (2006a, 261) found through their own 'thinking/writing/doing' around fragments of childhood memories, 'some of these happenings were less the fruit of purely cognitive "remembering" than of "re-doing" or "being (t)here again"'. For the possibility to (re)inhabit childhood, a distance needs to be created, we must suspend what we think we already know. As Castañeda (2002, 11) suggests, we should know children's world 'otherwise', 'through some form of un-knowing'.

For us, this access to childhood can be gained through memory stories produced in collective biographies. Sharing memories in a group helps to create suspense and creates paces to re-inhabit memories through processes of telling, acting, sensing, listening, reflecting, writing, rewriting, sharing and collectively exploring and interrogating stories (Davies and Gannon 2006). Imagination is also an important part of this process. Processes of remembering and reimagining enable details to proliferate and make affect, sensation and embodied experience available for exploration. 'Thinking through' memories reveals connections between childhoods, children's lives, wider social matrices and social transformations. In this understanding, 'the child' is both subject and object of research in specific places and times, and beyond these 'the child' (or childhood) is deployed as a figure across times and spaces in relation to historical movements (Philo 2016).

Thinking through memories of childhood: from small spaces to large social processes

Memory stories and their analysis are produced in the intersubjective spaces of collective biography participants and in the interrelations between participants' presents and pasts. Crucially, while remaining aware of this circularity of time, we explore these memories in relation to broader social

issues and relations of power at the time of events that memories tell about. Haug and her colleagues examined gender, sexuality, love, and desire, and their appropriation by institutions ranging through the family, schooling, religion, and the state (1987). These interests continue in more recent collective biography research (Davies and Gannon 2006; Gonick and Gannon 2014). However, childhood memories as the nexus for collaborative investigation remain the most powerful strand of such research. In memory stories, children adapt in 'personal' ways to the social, and comparing and contrasting those stories enables us to bring into light generalisable modes of mobilisation of broader cultural, social and political ideals, governing norms and transformations taking place in these societies. This differs from conventional historical approaches in that we work from the bottom-up, beginning with memories in all their multiplicities, material and sensory details and affective potencies. We are interested in the mobilisation of these ideals, norms and transformations at the most intimate scale.

During collective memory sharing, resonances between memories can emerge. Resonances are subtle, nonlinear, affective, and often non-cognitive echoes between memory stories. They might also be feelings echoing and calling up other feelings and details. Resonances within fragments of memories might point us to similarities in the quality of spaces in which events took shape, the presence of shared subject positions and feelings, embodiments: crying, laughing, clumsiness, identifications of what mattered for us as children and our desires for the present and future, and whether what mattered to us could also be important for other children (Horton and Kraftl 2006b). Moreover, working this way means that 'new realisations, new happenings, new pieces of writing, new reflections and recollections, new laughs and sighs' can emerge (Horton and Kraftl 2006b, 261).

In what follows, we introduce three different analytical moves for working with memory stories of childhood, which we have crystallized through our previous work and thinking. We have applied some of these moves in our previous collective biographies and memory writing, as well as in our attempts to read across memory stories (Millei et al. 2017). These moves operationalise the epistemological, ontological, and methodological considerations we have developed and explicitly focus on the task of thinking through memories of childhood in order to gain insights into wider matrices of sociopolitical conditions and social transformations. They mean that the collective biography processes that we have developed do not merely entail the passive production and collection of individual memories but they entail rigorous and careful collective work on and with the memories.

Working through dominant interpretative fragments

Memory stories often incorporate interpretative fragments or explanations that may have developed through multiple telling of stories in different times and spaces. These interpretative fragments might be judgements about childhood and / or socialism drawing on prior knowledge, theories, popular knowledge, and images that surround childhood stories have gained through the multiple tellings they have undergone. Interpretative fragments are also operative in our different contexts, making people social and socialising us within larger social processes however they can tend to overcode and draw on habituated ways of explaining events or on clichés and assumptions (Davies and Gannon 2006). Looking out for these, subjecting them to careful exploration and analysis, and removing them or reducing their effects as we redraft and interrogate our memory stories can help us move away from quick and easy interpretations and force us to reflect on how our thinking and perceptions were also ideologized, through 'interpretative models, feelings, thoughts, snippets of popular wisdom, judgements' (Haug et al. 1987, 59) prevailing in socialist spaces, in our education history, or in different contexts in which we lived. Instead of presenting the assumedly objective facts, through our processes we claim that knowledge emerges in the in-between spaces of memories, in the ways in which they affect us, where something surprising disrupts the usual way of thinking and feeling. How they affect us poses questions that require re-examination of taken-for-granted

views about everyday life (Davies and Gannon 2006). When stories become all too familiar and lack detail, or when they resonate in strange or unidentifiable ways, there is a chance that interpretative fragments might inform those. The process of thinking through memories, and the iterative processes of collective biography enable us to critically address these.

It is also helpful to position memory stories against various normative prescriptions and subject positions – socialist selves – produced by socialist ideologies, Cold War and transition research, as well as literary texts aiming to interpret socialist subjectivities. Chatterjee and Petrone (2008, 982–983) have described many of these positionalities or models of selfhood that Western historians applied ‘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’. These models of selfhood draw on various theoretical frameworks that allow for reading and explaining everyday life but also orient 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 about the frames of selfhood in research that construct socialist subjectivities and shape interpretation of those societies and cultures. Thus, in the analysis of memories, reflexivity to these types of interpretations and positionalities is necessary.

For example, one notion of the socialist self is the ‘image of a lonely, atomized and fearful’ self (Chatterjee and Petrone 2008, 983) referring to an individual who is powerless or less able to take action against imposed norms and structural power prevalent in socialist regimes. Perhaps this is the construction of selfhood that stands closest to popular Cold War frames. This prototype of a socialist individual could appear in memory stories as a teacher who blindly follows ideological prescriptions and rules, the student as passive recipient of norms or a person who learned not to initiate on her own as it might lead to trouble with authoritarian personalities or the authorities. Another conception of the self is built on a productive notion of power. These individuals might appear in memory stories as actively fashioning themselves against the normative construction of the socialist self which produced the illusion that they were acting autonomously without some ideological constructions’ normative or governing effects (Chatterjee and Petrone 2008). This figure can appear in stories as a teacher who is explicitly acting against the norms of socialist personhood – seemingly acting on his or her own will – for example, not teaching according to the party line or giving alternative historical truths. Questions then must be asked, what other rules and norms guided these assumed free choices and actions, and could a person actually act in this singular way? What is silenced when this interpretation takes priority and what other possible readings remain unexplored?

Answering these questions could bring us closer to those discursive frames and norms that operated in those moments, telling us about alternative spaces in society besides stated and known ideology. By looking out for these positionalities and easy explanations present in our memory stories and by interrogating these interpretative fragments, we can explore what the embodied, affective and material details in the memory stories tell about how we positioned ourselves and performed our childhood at the intersections of mundane individual and social realms. In these mundane acts, like Haug’s collective also found, practices associated with disciplining bodies and souls that ran alongside stated ideals, and performing routine acts were particularly productive in our shaping as social actors. And these are precisely the acts, feelings, and sensations that resonated in our memory stories. Exploring these resonances enabled us to better understand wider matrices of power in societies and transformations without stopping our analysis at scripted ideological expectations that have not only shaped the creation of our memory stories but also intensively shaped previous academic research.

Working with and across the production of child subjectivities and notions of childhood

In their collective biography, Haug et al. (1987) explored the process usually defined as ‘female socialisation’. They operationalised this process in a way that would avoid circumventing ‘the active participation of individuals in their formation as social beings’ (33). They instead investigated the

production of a 'specifically feminine sexuality' alongside the constitution of 'sexuality' itself 'as a process that produces the insertion of women into, and their subordination within, determinate social practices' (34). In a similar manner, instead of only looking at how children were socialised into socialist societies and taken as objects whose bodies were trained for social transformation – as earlier research has explored – memories can decentre the frame of childhood socialisation in two ways. First, through memory stories we can explore how child subjectivities were produced in everyday social practices, materialities, affects and sensibilities and the various participation of children in those processes in relation to constructions of childhood present in their respective societies. Second, constructions of socialist childhood also inserted real children within particular spaces, social practices, power hierarchies and relations, and how children grappled with those is shown in their memory stories. For example, in Czechoslovakia, Kaščák, and Pupala (2017) show how pioneer meetings were turned into spaces where teenagers could drink and smoke away from the adults' gaze.

Child subjectivities can be constructed variously by different participants in memory stories. It is also important to explore how these constructions relate to those that were officially sanctioned in curricula, pedagogy, other official documents, in popular and scientific knowledge, and in official state rhetoric. Proceeding this way can help to map notions of childhood and examine how childhoods have been variously practiced in different spaces, exploring their relations, contradictions, contestations and silences, while pointing to the processes that operated in general and how people navigated state socialism in their everyday lives. For example, children were dressed up for official photo days in kindergartens, including bows in girls' hair in many contexts. Teachers usually helped children to look the best on these photos, in line with notions of a well-cared for and happy childhood, to embody official idealised images of children (Millei et al. 2017). Similar practices of pretense have been described by Yurchak (2006). Keeping up appearances, however, did not necessarily happen as a form of resistance towards stated norms, rather keeping up appearances was the social norm that children also learned to perform (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2018). Moreover, this pretense had a lot to do with keeping in sight and showing commitment to the ideals of and processes for social transformations.

In identifying different notions of childhood in memory stories, Burman's resource, 'child as method' is a particularly productive analytical tool. Drawing on Chen's (2010) *Asia as Method*, Burman has developed 'child as method' – as an analytical and methodological resource – building on poststructural and postcolonial theories. In socialist societies, childhood served as a very powerful metaphor for the transformation of societies. Metaphors were often mixed with reading and relating to real children's acts, and this very tight circuit between notions of childhood and social practices can provide rich connections for investigations. 'Child as method' offers a strategy to be 'attentive to forces and relations of (re)production at issue within adult-child' and 'child-state-growing up' relations (Burman 2019, 1). In 'child as method',

"child" is understood as a figure or trope (Burman 2008; Castañeda 2002), "childhood" as a social condition or category, and "children" [as] the living, embodied entities inhabiting these positions and their corresponding institutional practices across a range of geopolitical arenas. (Burman 2019, 3)

Taking into account this three-fold meaning of 'child' in the explorations of memories and together with the three-fold colonisation of childhood in (post)socialist spaces can produce rich insights into wider matrices of power operating through the interrelations of these notions and practices. In regards to (post)socialist spaces, Millei et al. (2017) propose a three-fold colonisation of childhood: first, 'modern childhood' with the separation between childhood and adult spaces and children's relegation from work to the school; second, 'cult of childhood' in socialist societies that we described above and that colonised children's lives with socialist agendas; and third, re-Westernization of childhood after the fall of the Berlin Wall as part of the creation of democratic societies, including the reformation of assumedly passive subjects of authoritarianism into democratic citizens. In this complex analysis, multiple constitutions of the 'child' can be traced as an object of intervention

and manipulation as it is enlisted in a range of political projects linked to different agendas of social transformations.

This analysis can be also combined with Chen's (2010) method of inter-referencing. Inter-referencing means an analytical move where memory stories located in (post)socialist spaces are referencing each other, rather than referencing the West. This comparative approach thus shifts reference points into new directions and therefore troubles the multilayered logic of coloniality. This approach is helpful in exploring the cultural-historical variations of childhoods as they were re-worked under various and changing conditions of coloniality and social, political and economic transformations (Millei et al. 2017). It also aids in making visible the mutual and mutually constitutive relations between different avenues to social transformations and drawing attention to the ways in which they could be also de-stabilised as both local and wider systems of domination.

Thinking through, coming to know and becoming with memories of childhood

We understand childhood as a process which refers to the practices – ways of 'doing' childhood or accomplishing childhood – that happen besides, within, or against ways in which children were inserted into various broad and smaller scale conscious efforts to transform society. This understanding ties in also with the notion of child-becoming (Jones 2008) or emergent self, emphasising the irrational, messy, embodied unfolding of child selves. 'Thinking through' 'doing childhood' requires an iterative process of reflection and representation of memories like that involved in collective biography work. This process is similar to what Richardson and St. Pierre (2008) refer to as 'writing as a method of inquiry' according to which writing is data production, analysis and which allows for creative forms of representation, such as poetry or drama. In collective biography work, similarly, as the person remembers the childhood event, creates the memory story, and collectively reflects on the story and re-represents it in an iterative manner, the person (and the collective) comes to know differently. The moments in memory that are documented and worked with become provocations to 'mo(ve)ment' beyond sedimented ways of thinking (Davies and Gannon 2006, 7). Thus, it is in between thinking through these stories collectively that knowledge is created.

Knowledge emerges in between memory stories and participants, and the emergent knowledge is inseparable from the researcher's self. With coming to know, the researcher is becoming-other in a 'space of becoming in between one state of being and another ... as working at the limit, the edge of self' as we remember and work with our childhoods (Somerville 2007, 240). While thinking through childhood memories, the researcher emerges with the childhood and child emerging in the story. This is how for us child becoming and adult / researcher becoming fold together as we think through memory stories (see also Horton and Kraftl 2006b).

In relation to thinking through childhood memories, we can come to know about mundane routines of childhood that drill certain relationships with children's bodies, subjugation and fear for authorities (teachers, parents, leaders) but also provoke release in bodies as children laugh at jokes troubling the power of these discourses. We also come to know how, while easily missed as free action performed in resistance to authorities, children are capacitated to act this way by perhaps less dominant discourses. By capacitation we refer to Foucault's (1994) idea of productive power and freedom, according to which subjects are invested with particular faculties to be able to act in certain ways and consider those acts as free. Thus children might experience themselves as acting freely, but these acts, feeling and embodiments also proceed in line with available discourses, ideals, values, norms and appropriate feelings, and capacitate child subjects to enact responsibilities or perform duties and certain alliances as part of 'doing childhood'. Through these explorations, we can come to know some ways in which all of this is woven into social relations and emergent selves in (post)socialist spaces. We can also create representations of how children were re/producing society as a whole by performing and altering expected roles for children, producing their subjectivities with, within, and against dominant narratives and with those the ways they were simultaneously reiterating, rewriting, silencing or resisting pre-given categories of childhood. Most importantly,

from identifying how children acted, memory stories can reveal personal differences and point to processes whereby children learned to 'perceive any given situation, approve or validate it, assess its goals as proper or worthy, repugnant or reprehensible' (Haug et al. 1987, 41). These reflections and conditional representations of memory stories, also create liminal spaces between emerging child and researcher selves.

Socialist ideology, for example, can translate into classroom pedagogies that teach children to 'not reflect', to 'not take initiative', and to closely follow instruction (Oates-Indruchová 2017). These pedagogies can capacitate children to act with automation, to only notice and desire things as instructed and not to notice others, and to act in prescribed ways. Memory stories also tell about ways in which children were 'doing' childhoods within, against or with these pedagogies and positionings that were assigned to them. They tell about children who became passive, others who identified less with stated expectations and performed those knowingly, and yet again others who explicitly questioned rules of behaviour that may have been informed by less dominant discourses and norms. By paying attention to becoming children, we also saw how in spaces created by children – within familial and public spaces, or in spaces relatively unsupervised in institutions or during holidays – different desires took hold. Children were becoming, for example, with their 'Western' pen pals and breaking out from conformist molds.

The identification of these processes can help in reconstructing different ways in which becoming children proceed (or not) independently, in line with, or altering social transformation agendas. Memory stories also tell about the 'interconnectedness that exists in the variety of human experience', such as between the Pioneer and Scout movements, or in watching Jesus Christ Superstar or *Istvan, the King* (a Hungarian rock opera from 1983), as we 'try to examine and understand the larger megaprocesses that our small individual experiences are woven into' (Imre 2017, 267). Thinking through memories leads us to question whether and when we as children were contributing to 'big things ... [and] moving toward a greater collective progress, or simply [were] piecing together random coping mechanisms' (Imre 2017, 269), or living obliviously of regimes that targeted our very desires for living and doing our childhoods.

Ordinary lives in extraordinary times: some concluding thoughts

We set out to outline how we think through memory stories of ordinary childhoods to explore extraordinary times in (post)socialist spaces that positioned children as the key vehicles for social transformations. We described the epistemological, ontological, and methodological considerations we took to learn about 'doing childhood', wider socio-political matrices and researcher becoming. Similar to Haug et al.'s (1987) collective memory project, the emerging 'written mosaics of ... childhood' can make visible 'patterns from the fabric of life, rather than any pre-planned coherence' (52) that socialisation frameworks point to. By producing memory stories from child perspectives, children's active participation in the formation of their own pasts in a variety of (post)socialist spaces can emerge instead of the singular construction of socialist childhood which tends to understand children as blindly following scripted socialist ideals. From memory stories, we can come to know how children lived vibrant childhoods that often escaped, transgressed or rearticulated the prescribed norms. Memories of children's everyday lives highlight ambiguities and complexities of childhoods lived in a variety of (post)socialist spaces, while at the same time they destabilise singular representations of both childhood and sociopolitical change.

While working with memory stories related to (post)socialist spaces, we also came to know about current power relations that impose limits not only on the validity and usefulness of memory work and the area and era they explore, but also their academic value. Childhood memories are often brushed aside as nostalgic longings or partial and naive truths, or as lacking scientific rigour due to their lack of information about objective historical truths and partly because they are told by 'post-Soviet' scholars, who are constructed as ideologically biased. Working with memory stories of childhood in relation to (post)socialist spaces thus is a stance against the very power structures

that marginalise knowledge production originating in the post-socialist region and that strive to narrow research imaginaries to singular narratives that compare childhoods against the yardstick of the ‘West’ and are devoid of politics (Silova, Millei, and Piattoeva 2018). Together with other post-socialist scholars we thus aim to advance critical work by engaging with our own histories and present through memories of our own childhoods.

The socialist project targeted children as central to the political, economic, and social (re)making of the society. The extent that projects of childhood in the ‘West’ have appeared as less ideological is arguably only because their particular ideological rationales are embedded in less overt and more naturalised discourses that, paradoxically, are premised on liberatory, emancipatory foundations and liberal democratic ideals (Millei 2011; Mead and Silova 2013). Despite the differences, however, childhoods globally are being increasingly scripted by adults to serve predetermined futures and children are made responsible for ‘saving’ the future – whether living peacefully in diversity, embodying healthy ways of living, engaging in conscious acts to protect and restore the environment, or advancing on a competitive academic achievement ladder in hopes of getting good jobs. For us, these projects are highly ideological in nature, similarly to different forms of the socialist project; however, when these projects are put into practice – often simultaneously unfolding within the same societies – they are lived and practiced in a multitude of ways. From childhoods and child becomings emerging from memories of childhood we can thus think through how these realisations work in everyday life and how children negotiate prescriptions and expectations these desired transformations place upon them.

Notes

1. Susanne’s involvement began as book and conference respondent, rather than the initial post-socialist childhoods project.
2. This work resulted in the special journal issue *Revisiting Pasts, Reimagining Futures: Memories of (Post)Socialist Childhood and Schooling* (Silova et al. 2016), edited book *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life* (Silova, Piattoeva, and Millei 2017), and an ongoing curation of the living archives of childhood memories (see *Decolonial and de-Cold War Dialogues on Childhood and Schooling*) <https://coldwarchildhoods.org/>

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Zsuzsa Millei  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4681-6024>

Susanne Gannon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2182-3615>

References

- Burman, Erica. 2008. *Developments: Child, Image, Nation*. New York: Routledge.
- Burman, E. 2019. “Child as Method: Implications for Decolonising Educational Research.” *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 28 (1): 4–26. doi:10.1080/09620214.2017.1412266.
- Castañeda, C. 2002. *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Chatterjee, C., and K. Petrone. 2008. “Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective.” *Slavic Review* 67 (4): 967–986.
- Chen, K. H. 2010. *Asia as Method*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cheng, Y. 2009. *Creating the ‘New Man’: From Enlightenment Ideas to Socialist Realities*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Connell, B. 1987. “Why the ‘Political Socialization’ Paradigm Failed and What Should Replace It.” *International Political Science Review* 8 (3): 215–223.

- Davies, B., and S. Gannon. 2006. *Doing Collective Biography: Investigating the Production of Subjectivity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Foucault, M. 1994. "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom." In *Michel Foucault Ethics Subjectivity and Truth*, Translated by R. Hurley, edited by P. Rabinow, Vol. One, 281–302. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press.
- Gonick, M., and S. Gannon. 2014. *Becoming Girl: Collective Biography and the Production of Girlhood*. Toronto, ON: Women's Press.
- Haug, F., S. Andresen, A. Bünz-Elfferding, C. Hauser, U. Lang, M. Laudan, M. Lüdermann, and U. Meir. 1987. *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory*, Translated by Erica Carter. New York: Verso.
- Hawkins, R., K. Falconer Al-Hindi, P. Moss, and L. Kren. 2016. "Practicing Collective Biography." *Geography Compass* 10 (4): 165–178.
- Horton, J., and P. Kraftl. 2006a. "Not Just Growing Up, but Going on: Materials, Spacings, Bodies, Situations." *Children's Geographies* 4 (3): 259–276.
- Horton, J., and P. Kraftl. 2006b. "What Else? Some More Ways of Thinking and Doing 'Children's Geographies'." *Children's Geographies* 4 (1): 69–95.
- Imre, Robert. 2017. "The Worlds of Childhood Memory." In *Childhood and Schooling in (post)socialist societies: Memories of everyday life*, edited by Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, and Zsuzsa Millei, 267–270. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jones, O. 2001. "'Before the Dark of Reason': Some Ethical and Epistemological Considerations on the Otherness of Children." *Ethics, Place and Environment* 4: 173–178.
- Jones, O. 2008. "'True Geography [] Quickly Forgotten, Giving Away to an Adult-Imagined Universe'. Approaching the Otherness of Childhood." *Children's Geographies* 6 (2): 195–212.
- Jones, O. 2013. "'I was Born But': Children as Other/Nonrepresentational Subjects in Emotional and Affective Registers as Depicted in Film." *Emotion, Space and Society* 9: 4–12.
- Kallio, K. P., and J. Häkli. 2011. "Are There Politics in Childhood?" *Space and Polity* 15: 21–34.
- Keightley, E. 2010. "Remembering Research: Memory and Methodology in the Social Sciences." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 13 (1): 55–70.
- Kelly, C. 2007. *Children's World: Growing up in Russia, 1890–1991*. New Haven, CT: Yale University.
- Kirschenbaum, L. A. 2001. *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Mead, M. A., and I. Silova. 2013. "Literacies of (Post)Socialist Childhood: Alternative Readings of Socialist Upbringings and Neoliberal Regimes." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 11: 194–222.
- Millei, Z. 2011. "Governing Through the Early Childhood Curriculum, 'The Child', and 'Community': Ideologies of Socialist Hungary and Neoliberal Australia." *European Education* 43 (1): 33–55.
- Millei, Z., and R. Imre, eds. 2015. *Childhood and Nation: Interdisciplinary Engagements*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Millei, Z., and K. P. Kallio. 2018. "Recognizing Politics in the Nursery: Early Childhood Education Institutions as Sites of Mundane Politics." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 19 (1): 31–47.
- Millei, Z., N. Piattoeva, I. Silova, and E. Aydarova. 2017. "Hair Bows and Uniforms: Entangled Politics in Children's Everyday Lives." In *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life*, edited by I. Silova, N. Piattoeva, and Z. Millei, 145–162. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oates-Indruchová, Libora. 2017. "A Dulled Mind in an Active Body: Growing Up as a Girl in Normalization Czechoslovakia." In *Childhood and Schooling in (post)socialist societies: Memories of everyday life*, edited by Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, and Zsuzsa Millei, 41–62. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ondrej, Kaščák, and Pupala Branislav. 2017. "On the Edge of Two Zones: Slovak Socialist Childhoods." In *Childhood and Schooling in (post)socialist societies: Memories of everyday life*, edited by Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, and Zsuzsa Millei, 63–86. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Philo, C. 2003. "'To Go Back up the Side Hill': Memories, Imaginations and Reveries of Childhood." *Children's Geographies* 1 (1): 7–23.
- Philo, C. 2016. "'Childhood is Measured out by Sounds and Sights and Smells: Before the Dark of Reason Grows': Children's Geographies at 12." *Children's Geographies* 14 (6): 623–640.
- Piattoeva, Nelli, Iveta Silova, and Zsuzsa Millei. 2017. "Remembering Childhoods, Rewriting (post)socialist lives." In *Childhood and Schooling in (post)socialist societies: Memories of everyday life*, edited by Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, and Zsuzsa Millei, 1–18. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Richardson, Laurel, and Elizabeth Adams St Pierre. 2008. "Writing: A method of inquiry." In *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by N. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, 473–500. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Silova, I., E. Aydarova, Z. Millei, and N. Piattoeva, eds. 2016. "Revising Pasts, Reimagining Futures: Memories of (Post)Socialist Childhood and Schooling." *European Education* 48 (3): 159–169.
- Silova, I., Z. Millei, and N. Piattoeva. 2018. "Interrupting the Coloniality of Knowledge Production in Comparative Education: Postsocialist and Postcolonial Dialogues After the Cold War." *Comparative Education Review* 61 (S1): S74–S102.

- Silova, I., N. Piattoeva, and Z. Millei. 2018. *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Somerville, M. 2007. "Postmodern Emergence." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20 (2): 225–243.
- Stephens, S. 1995. "Children and the Politics of Culture in 'Late Capitalism'." In *Children in the Politics of Culture*, edited by S. Stephens, 3–48. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tlostanova, Madina. 2017. *Postcolonialism and Postsocialism in Fiction and Art: Resistance and Re-existence*. Cham: Palgrave and Macmillan.
- Yurchak, A. 2006. *Everything was Forever Until it was no More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.