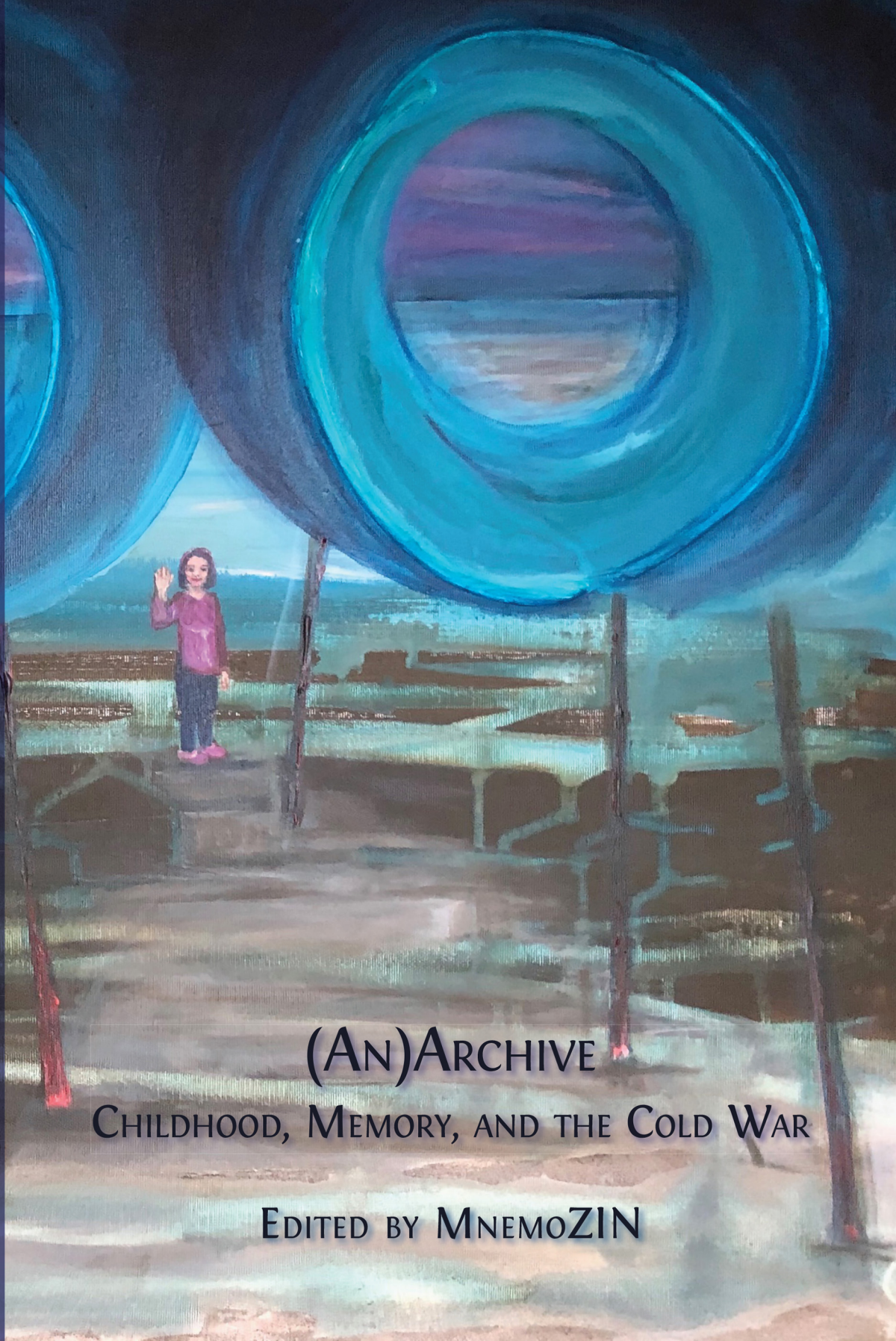

(An)Archive

Childhood, Memory, and the Cold War

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4. The Other Side of the Curtain?

Troubling Western Memories of (Post)socialism

Erica Burman

I interrogate my historical and current positionings in this chapter by recalling memories of growing up during the Cold War but on the other (Western) side of the so-called Iron Curtain. Focused on a specific example from my minoritised but otherwise quite privileged background in the north of England, I explore what returns to me now as either topicalised or occluded by, presumably, the cultural-political construction of the Cold-War period that dominated my own place and time. Specifically, I attempt to retrieve my memories of what I knew and understood about the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign in the 1970s, and consider what it these might indicate about how now-former Soviet and allied communist countries were perceived. During this process, I encounter memorial gaps and obstacles and address the temptation to fill these in and to elaborate upon my recollections from my current geopolitical, chronological, and biographical position. What emerges is the impossibility of 'looking back' without also reflecting on the 'now' and how it shapes the perspective from which the review takes place.

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My prior interests in the geopolitical contextualisation of children and childhood, especially via the approach I have called 'Child as method' (Burman 2019a and 2019b), were what initially led the research team devising the Post-socialist Childhoods project to involve me in its proposal and design from an early stage. It has engaged and fascinated me ever since. While convinced from the outset of the relevance and significance of the project even then, what has been less clear (to me, as perhaps also other participants in the project) is how I am positioned in relation to it.

This chapter is the outcome of my exploration of this positioning. I see this question of my relationship to the project as (auto)biographical and historical as well as general and particular, since my singular subjectivity must reflect wider sociocultural features past and present, even if it is not absolutely determined by these. Further, this personal-political history necessarily interpellates, as well as is interpellated by, my narrative-accounting process here. This piece of writing takes the form of a memoir but also (I hope) offers some analytical reflections on the conceptual-political issues set in play by such accounting processes. I also use it to instantiate, or respond to, calls to decolonise subjective as well as material practices by interrogating a small enactment of received hegemonic stories of the Cold War within my own childhood, which was lived in a (capitalist) 'Western' country as opposed to a (state socialist, or 'communist') 'Eastern' one.

Whether this effort succeeds in disidentifying with the normative positionings associated with my context is a question I must leave to the reader, alongside whether such a project is, indeed, possible. At the very least, I hope this chapter illustrates some indicative disjunctures between the individual and sociopolitical 'border thinking' of the kind called for by feminist commentators who have drawn on postcolonial debates specifically to explore post-socialist conditions (Tlostanova et al. 2016; Gržinić et al. 2020). My aim, moreover, is to contribute to an awareness of how the Cold War figures within other, both earlier and contemporaneous, colonial dynamics, thereby highlighting the relevance of the third element that Chen (2010) identifies in his key postcolonial cultural-studies text *Asia as Method*: after decolonisation and de-imperialisation, we must 'De-Cold War'.

While working with the Post-socialist Childhoods project, I have wondered much about how and where the Cold War appeared in my childhood. I was born in 1960 and, so, grew up during its peak period (so to speak). Therefore, the analytical starting point must be the question of 'how', rather than 'whether', it impacted on my childhood. In addition to identifying overt references and events, the task here is one of excavating normalised assumptions that have been naturalised into absence, into the social unconscious (as group analysts put it (see Hopper 2003; Dalal 2001)), or into what might have been called, in less poststructuralist or postmodern days (or, in Marxist terms), 'ideology'.

This point also prompts me to speak of another commitment, one shared (I think) with others on the project team. I sought to bring a socialist as well as a feminist consciousness to bear on the project material, including, here, on my own memories and memorial-accounting processes. The current context of late, racial capitalism (Bhattacharrya 2018) proclaims that this system has won, that 'there is no alternative', even as its necropolitics produces new disposable labour forces (from and in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa). Formerly communist states, notably Russia, are hurtling into what Gržinić et al. (2020) aptly call 'turbo capitalism'. The search for new markets and goods to extract and exploit, both within and beyond national borders, seems endless.

Yet, I do believe there are alternatives, both current and to be forged in the future, as there have also been at some earlier historical moments—even as I have no illusions about state-socialist practices of the past. After all, socialism cannot be practised in one country and so, in the context of the stranglehold of the West, it was perhaps unsurprising that so-called socialist countries (as also many other countries across the world) slid into nationalism and, from thence, into authoritarianism. In making this point I am in no way sanitising or exonerating the evils of Stalinism, its physical and psychological regime of brutality, terror, and oppression. But, just as the Post-socialist Childhoods project has generated an anarchive of 'memory stories', tracing the diverse as well as myriad ways the Cold War entered into and configured the participants' childhoods, so too must my exploration confront how the context of my childhood under Western capitalist conditions structured and reflected contemporary assumed meanings of the 'East'.

I am conscious of the claim, often repeated in discussions of antiracist or decolonial practice, that no one seems to inhabit the position of the oppressor. So, let me say now that, as a child of the West, I clearly have benefitted from the (demise of the) Cold War, even as I feel repugnance at the neocolonialism, and the intensifications of and inventions of new forms of racism, this has enabled. Yet, if intersectionality is taken as a starting point, then complexities, conflicts, and contradictions must be at play—at the level of subjectivity as also within political economy—that can, perhaps, form the basis for a renewed politics of engagement. Just as no one is entirely a 'victim', no one ever only inhabits a position of dominance, even as the privileged consequences of such positioning must not be forgotten or displaced.

In particular, as children, we have all been helpless and dependent on others. How we have dealt with those experiences—which must include terrible fear and anxiety—is a moot political point, however. This is the point Fanon (1958/2008) makes at the opening and closing of *Black Skin, White Masks*: that the 'tragedy' of the adult is shaped in childhood. Nevertheless, he understood that we can transform even the most negative or traumatic of childhood experiences through deliberative reflection and action. Solidarity and collective action is forged via recognition of and identification with the oppression of others. So, my attempt here is to unearth, bring to the fore, both complicities and resistances but also to stay with the sense of uncertain, partial, and absent knowledge.

A Significant Aside

As already mentioned, I have struggled to recall specific instances or tangible examples of how the Cold War impacted in consciously experienced ways on my childhood. I must assume, therefore, that these impacts are structured into other classed, gendered, and racialised incitements, experiences, and sedimentations. Only one material instance has come to mind, and so I will run with this and see where it leads.

But let me first set out the frame. I grew up in Liverpool, within a small Jewish community. By the 1960s, Liverpool was no longer the great English port it once had been and, notwithstanding the Beatles

and football, was a poor and declining city. Its real heyday was during slavery, when the port was a major transport point (see, for example, Williams 2013), though as a child I did not know about that. The port location was important though, as the point of my family's arrival to the UK. Both of my grandfathers were first-generation immigrants to Britain, coming in the 1890–1920 period when many Jews from Eastern Europe arrived on boats in search of a better life, and to escape from poverty and pogroms, that is, economic and political persecution. They, like the desperate Syrians, Afghanis, Kurds, and Somalis who now risk—and often lose—their lives crossing the English Channel in tiny rubber dinghies, were fleeing from oppression but would have been classified formally as economic migrants. As my dear dead friend and comrade, the immigration lawyer Steve Cohen, put it: 'It's the same old story' (1987). Moreover, until Brexit, many Eastern Europeans continued to come to the UK as economic migrants once European borders opened for business with the so-called 'free movement' of labour.

I say my family came from 'Eastern Europe', rather than being more specific, because, like many Ashkenazi Jews,[1] my grandparents and their families had lived in the region at a time when the borders between Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Poland, and Russia were in flux. Of course, this heritage nuances my engagement with the Post-socialist Childhoods project in various ways. Moreover, while both my grandmothers were British-born, their parents had also come from similar regions. Had my grandfathers not migrated then, it is likely that I would either have grown up under state socialism or else—depending on how my forebears had fared during Nazi occupation of these countries and the Nazi industrial-scale genocide of Jews—not have been born at all. This latter scenario undoubtedly coloured the political context of my childhood, since I was surrounded by migrants and the children of migrants, including direct refugees from Nazism. Their constant refrain

1 Jews are typically identified into two main categories: Ashkenazim refers to Jews originating from Central and Eastern Europe, and Sephardim to those originating from Spain, Portugal, and North Africa. A more recent term, Mizrahim, usually now designates Jews of non-European background, including those from the Middle East, Africa, and further east. There are other named Jewish communities, including Georgian and Mountain Jews, and Bene Israel Jews from India. Shifts in designations and categorisations are due, in part, to the massive migration and displacement of Jews after the Second World War, as well as to the advent of the State of Israel and its immigration policies.

was 'It couldn't happen here' and 'how wonderful Britain is', but this sentiment was also interestingly tempered by an insistence that 'the British are so slow and cold-blooded that we would have time to escape if things got bad…'. So, maybe not so wonderful, but Britain was at least safe—for the time being.

Safety and security were, therefore, provisional and discretionary. The dominant narrative, then, was the typical one of the grateful immigrant who can pass for white in white-dominant societies: don't cause trouble, don't draw attention to yourself, don't stand out as different. (It is worth recalling that, during the Second World War, many Jewish refugees from Nazism were treated as enemy aliens in Britain and interned in camps, often alongside Nazis. So, fear of standing out, of being noticeable, can be said to have had some basis.) This extended into religious practice, wherein, to this day, a prayer for the British Royal Family is said at each of the morning, afternoon, and evening services, as written into the 'authorised' prayer book used by all mainstream Orthodox synagogues (or what in the US is called the United Synagogue Jewish movement of Ashkenazi communities), and the US version has an equivalent Presidential/Congressional prayer. This prayer-performance of loyalty to the British state was, it should be noted, also accompanied by a prayer for the State of Israel (later versions also included the Israeli Defence Forces), and, unlike many other prayers, each were recited in both Hebrew and English. As Sarna (1998) notes in relation to US Jewry (but addressing a longer and more widespread phenomenon), these texts clearly indicate a longstanding and important political history; the inclusion of such secular devotional inscriptions into services practised by Jewish communities across the world dates from at least the seventeenth century.[2]

2 Sarna writes, 'The practice of praying for the welfare of the sovereign was common not only in Antiquity but also in mediaeval Christendom and Islam. Jewish prayers nevertheless stand out as expressions of minority group insecurity. In one case, for example, Jews added to their prayers a special plea for "all of the Muslims who live in our country". Another Jewish prayer book contains a special blessing for the welfare of the Pope.' (p. 206) Tracing the vicissitudes of the canonical prayer to the (American) state from its inception in the mid-seventeenth century onwards, he also addresses how the prayers reflected and accommodated to the establishment of the State of Israel: 'As so often before, so too here, liturgy sheds light on an issue of central importance to American Judaism: the immensely sensitive political and moral question of how to balance national loyalty with devotion to Zion' (p. 223).

Here, then, was a prime exemplar of the dual-ideological structuring of mainstream Anglo-Jewish identity. Oriented around compliance and obedience to the British state, these prayers also enacted a performance of concern around the State of Israel. The latter, during my childhood, was seen as a metaphorical place of safety, or perhaps for curious visits, as much as for migration. Indeed, those contemporaries and friends who made *Aliyah*—those who, literally, 'went up' to go and live in Israel—were looked upon by the community as misguided if not deranged, and usually as 'losers' who had nothing better to do. This attitude was reflected in the practice of sending off children who had not achieved well at school to Israel for a year or more: a 'gap year' of expedience.

Now I find myself perplexed and distracted from my original theme. Surely, this chapter, on my relationship to the Cold War, is not the place to enter into greater detail about the changing relationship British Jewish communities have had with Israel and Zionism? And yet, it seems one colonialism casts its shadow over another.[3] I must return to the present for a moment to note, first, that British Jewish communities' current (presumed) support of the apartheid State of Israel is a recent historical phenomenon. Second, the British Board of Deputies, the self-appointed political 'representatives' (i.e., not at all 'representative') of the (presumed monolithic) British Jewish community, were initially opposed to the Balfour Declaration which first proposed a Jewish state in historic Palestine. They objected on the grounds that such a state might undermine the political position of British Jews by appearing to divide or reduce their loyalty to Britain. This was of a piece with the ways the Jewish elites (some of them Sephardis long settled in the UK) were, at that time, attempting to socialise the newly arriving 'Ostjuden' (Eastern European Jews) by encouraging them to look and sound as

3 This chapter was first drafted in 2020, long before the current (at the time of going to press, early 2024) now already months- long bombardment of Gaza by the Israeli state and its armed forces (alongside acts of terror, mass arrests, and the demolition of houses and institutions in the West Bank). I hope its exploration of the emergence, contingency, and variability of British Jewry's Zionist commitments may work to help understanding of how and why such commitments may remain, even as also of how they could change. Equally, the current configuration of Euro-US power in supporting the Israeli state, even in suppressing calls for a ceasefire and—as I write this—attempting to silence calls for Palestinian solidarity, should be read in the context of misguided responses to historical complicities within the Nazi genocide of Jews.

English as possible. Their methods included disallowing the speaking of Yiddish in the Jewish schools and requiring Yiddish first names to be changed into English upon arrival (Burman, personal communication 2021; Williams 1985).[4]

Why do I have to say this? Because somehow these points have acquired greater focus as I have worked with these ideas. The key point is that, in my early to middle childhood, the political movement of Zionism was really quite remote to mainstream British Jewish community life.[5] I feel I can say this with some authority, as, when I joined a Zionist youth group at age nine, I recall encountering a great deal of suspicion and bemusement at my passionate engagement. This was before the 1967 war had really made an impact on the collective psyche of the Jewish community. Such youth groups were exhibitions of what Hakim (2012) calls 'Popular Zionism', that is, 'primarily a (highly charged) affective disposition practised on the planes of everyday life, pop cultural consumption and cultural identity' rather than some informed political commitments or analysis (p. 302).[6] Clearly, there is much to be said

4 The categories of black and white were and remain much at play within Jewish communities, as well as between Jewish and black communities. This is because black Jews and many Sephardic Jews encounter racism on the basis of skin colour inside as well as outside the communities. In April 2021, a 'landmark' report acknowledging this issue was published by the British Board of Deputies: https://www.bod.org.uk/bod-news/board-of-deputies-publishes-landmark-report-on-racial-inclusivity-in-the-jewish-community/. A similar internalisation, so to speak, of wider dynamics can be seen in the ways the categories of East and West functioned within and between different 'waves' of Jewish migrants at a specific moment as a differentiator of class and civilisational status. 'Westerners' (migrants from central Europe, for example, Germany) were considered to be more highly educated, intellectual, secular; while 'Easterners' ('Ostjuden') were regarded as working class, possibly tradespeople, and uneducated. These class and cultural distinctions between Jews were so profound as to be almost racialised (see Williams, 2010).

5 For a more general review, see Kahn-Harris and Gidley (2010) and https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/resources/js

6 Hakim concludes that, 'Up until 1967 it had been respectable (in differing degrees) for British Jews and their institutions to be anti- and non-Zionist. The reason this changed after the war [...] is because although during the 1960s British Jews were experiencing unprecedented measures of status and power, both socio-economically and within Britain's racial hierarchies, they still felt vulnerable to anti-Semitism. This produced a contradictory affective economy within the assemblage that was reinforced in the ways that Jewishness was being coded in popular culture at the time. The successful attempt by Zionist institutions in coding the 1967 war as a (super-) heroic Israel fending off its annihilation and the genocide of its Jewish population resolved these contradictions by reflecting the increased status of British

about when and how I came to understand that Palestine was not an empty land, and that the Israeli state had expelled, dispossessed, and massacred Palestinians to take occupation of this region.[7]

All this is for another book perhaps, but others echo my own experience of having been drawn to the Zionist youth-group scene because it had less stupidly gendered activities than the other religious groups. Some commentators highlight the incipient feminism structured into and by such youth groups, with their focus on outdoor activities, camps, and nightwatches. They were a kind of Jewish version of the Scouts or Girl Guides which, because these were actively Christian forms of colonial adventuring, I would have been neither admitted into nor allowed by my family to join (see Griffiths 2021; Meinhard 2006). Here, exemplified, is the intersection of gender with nationalism, echoing other literatures on gender and imperialism, including how, in nineteenth-century Britain, when these groups were established, being a colonist could be promoted as a feminist enterprise (Amos and Parmar 1984; Chaudhuri and Strobel 1992; Ware 2015).

Yet, what I want to highlight here is how, firstly, the engagement with the Zionist youth group marked my introduction to politics, specifically to a socialist politics. We were taught explicitly about different models of society and its structures. Indeed, we were taught about the various different Zionist positions on whether the founding of a Jewish state would allow Jews to form a nation like all others, with different classes of people and including criminals and prostitutes (yes, I think I recall those examples), or whether it would somehow be 'better' and more equal. The particular organisation I joined (Hanoar Hatzioni) did not promote a politics as leftwing as those of some other Zionist groups (for example, Habonim and Hashomer Hatzair, which were associated with many of the original kibbutzim in Israel), but it was certainly allied to a socialist project of equality for all (all Jews, that is, as the land of Palestine was configured as empty and awaiting cultivation to make the desert blossom etc.).[8]

Jews in British society whilst also making them feel protected against the threat of anti-Semitism (which was, paradoxically, at an historic low).' (p. 299)

7 Given this history, it is perhaps unsurprising that solidarity with Palestinians in challenging the Israeli Occupation is a key site and outlet for my political activity now.

8 The origins of the Zionist slogan 'A land for a people for a people without a land', interestingly, are multiple or contested. This notion, which has powerfully

And so now a second reflection on the community's reaction to my ostensible Zionist fervour emerges: perhaps it was this socialist politics that attracted suspicion, as much as the expressed commitment to, or psychic investment in, a 'foreign' State.

Another apparent diversion follows. Clearly, there is a class issue here, and one that I sense was intensified within a small, self-preoccupied Jewish community that perceived itself as peripheral and constantly in crisis. Growing up Jewish in Liverpool was, presumably, very different from doing so in London, which had large, visible, and vibrant working-class Jewish areas, or even in other more populous North-of-England cities with substantial Jewish communities, such as Manchester or Leeds (where the class backgrounds and affiliations of these communities were more radical and aligned with different migration trajectories from different parts of Eastern Europe). Demonstrating loyalty to the British state meant not being a burden to it.[9] Poor, working-class Jews did not seem to exist in the community I grew up in, an invisibility that, of course, feeds antisemitic stereotypes about Jews and money, along with the other antisemitic, racist tropes associating Jews with capitalism. It is, however, relevant to note that a key, perhaps unique, feature of antisemitism as a form of racism, is that Jews are seen as both a capitalist and a communist threat. Well, racism is not rational so the contradictions are difficult to acknowledge (as I have discussed in Burman 2018).

Of course, there must have been many poor Jews, and, dimly, I can retrieve some wisps of conversations and references by relatives, even about other relatives! But their presence was hidden, and they were, perhaps, also excluded from many of the visible markers of Jewish observance (buying kosher food, synagogue membership, etc.) through lack of money. The long history of Jewish social services and support organisations that ran in parallel with the more-prominent Christian ones comes to mind. As a grateful, good minority community, it 'looked

reverberated for many years with Christian Zionists as well as Jews, of course erases the existence of Palestinians and their longstanding habitation and corresponding claims to the territories of Palestine.

9 This is rather graphically supported by Hochberg's (1988) account, which documents how, between 1881 and 1914, it was Jewish-community policy to send back to Eastern Europe any Jews who applied for relief: 'It was a matter of historical pride to the community, as well as prudent politically, to be able to take care of its own' (p. 49).

after its own'. This was work performed especially by Jewish women (Marks 1991).

Surely this presented image of a self-sufficient, prosperous community discloses a deep insecurity and anxiety wrought from its own all-too-recent and precarious class transition and fragile hold on upward mobility? But more than that, the erasure or cutting off from working-class movements severed other links too. Now I am reminded of Alexei Sayle, who also grew up in Liverpool not so long before me. His comedy career relies on his stories of his Jewish communist (Stalinist parents who were members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and their (largely misguided) activism), albeit that, even as he lampoons his parents, he remains leftwing and socialist but not in any party (after a brief spell in a Maoist group).[10] But, they were working class (I subvocalise this word as I write it, suddenly hearing myself inflect the 'a' of 'class' with a northern-English, if not Liverpudlian, accent...).[11]

Mining my childhood for traces of 'politics', I identify the Zionist youth group as one key arena wherein exploration and self-expression, as well as political education, were taught. Yes, individual self-expression was discouraged by the broader community, another way to avoid attracting notice. I can feel again that sense of liberation and self-assertion fostered by the youth group, the relief of claiming individuality in marking myself apart from family affiliations and allying with what was a minor, nonnormative, position. Although the group I had joined was less left wing than other Zionist organisations, at least it had some such politics. More to the point, it was the only such group in Liverpool (though I recall we did meet up with some of the *Habonim* members from Manchester sometimes for joint activities).

It was only decades later that I heard from my mother about friends in the community who had been communists, including some that had lost jobs because of their political affiliations (as a minor British reflection of McCarthyism). It was a long time later that I learnt that

10 For a sociological analysis of Jewish membership of the Communist Part of Great Britain, see Heppel 2004.

11 While 'RP' (Received Pronunciation) English may be perceived as neutral, it is, in fact, middle class. Regional accents in the UK are associated with working-class status. Liverpool has its own accent, or dialect, Scouse, which uses short vowels, as opposed to the longer drawn-out version used in the South of England and RP.

my father had (rather briefly) been a member of the party in the 1950s. When my mother told me this, she also reported my father being asked by his comrades if my mother was a member too, and he supposedly replied 'No, but she is very intelligent'! Nevertheless, it seems that marriage ended my father's communist activism, whether because of likely disapproval from his parents-in-law, disinterest on the part of my mother, or the demands of being the breadwinner. Or, perhaps, he left out of disillusionment in the wake of news of Stalinist atrocities. Which, or how many, of these reasons apply remains unclear. He had died before I was able to ask him.

A Particular Window on the 'East' in the 'West': 'Save Soviet Jewry!'

All this may seem a long way from reflecting on Cold-War childhoods. And also from the project of memory work, with its commitment to specificity and deepening understanding of the moment and context of each memory generated. So I am frustrated by the generality of the memory traces I retrieve. Yet, the very vagueness or lack of specificity seems to speak to a normalised absence of culturally foundational assumptions that is also in need of interrogation. Further, I am convinced that class and gender statuses, such as identified above, but also immigrant insecurities that modulate minoritised or racialised status, impinge on configurations of the Cold War as structured into a minoritised middle-class, white childhood lived in a particular location within 'the West'. One example is the blue-and-white-painted, gold tin collection box for the Jewish National Fund that could be found in every Jewish living room I knew in my hometown. It held change set aside for the buying of land to make a Jewish state in historic Palestine (see https://www.jnf.org/menu-3/about-jnf),[12] yet I cannot recall the contents ever being collected. Omnipresent but largely inactive, then, this tin suggests how subtle or unconscious the coding of political affiliation might be.

12 The Jewish National Fund (JNF), which was set up in 1901, remains implicated in very direct dispossession of Palestinian lands and links with military actions. Active campaigns demand that it should be stripped of its charity status: see www.stopthejnf.org

The only instance I can dimly recall from my childhood where the Cold War explicitly figured was a campaign to 'Save Soviet Jewry'. Even so, this is a general memory of a phrase, rather than an event or situation, although I have a sense of attending or hearing about fundraising activities or even meetings as part of the backdrop of family and community life in the 1970s and 1980s. Such memories are hazy, and it has been hard to ward off the desire to check out facts and dates before writing this. Without doing so, I maintain the sense that this campaign was a national (and likely international) mobilisation of Jewish communities in support of 'Soviet Jews' who were 'trapped' in communist countries (principally the USSR), sometimes imprisoned as dissidents for applying to leave, or otherwise deprived of rights. In my mind's eye, I can see grainy images, photocopied faces of men and women, features indistinct, in leaflets and posters, around whom campaigns were being organised. The meetings, coffee mornings, and other fundraising events paralleled those for Zionist causes. In my memory, these were as much social opportunities for catching up with friends and relatives, including exchanging the latest gossip, as serious political business. Some people, likely, were very actively involved in this cause, but such commitment washed past me. I have the sense that the campaign started in the 1970s and continued into the 1990s, but this could equally be just because this was the period of my middle childhood and adolescence—a period when I was more likely to notice such things.

Now I feel rising within me questions about the nature of the 'oppression' suffered by the 'Soviet Jews'. The key point, it seemed, was that they wanted to leave the USSR but were not allowed to do so. The mobilisation was, I assume, to exercise political pressure on both the USSR and other countries and also to generate money to support those lucky enough to get out. From my vantage point now, I feel some suspicion about this campaign, not least because the destination for the Jews permitted to leave was Israel. Even the category 'Soviet Jew' raises doubts as I have the sense that it is widely acknowledged that many Russians who were able to 'get out' to Israel by claiming to be Jewish were, in fact, not Jewish. Probably mistakenly, I also dredge up some association between activists politicised by the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign who then became rampant political Zionists. But, on the other

hand, there is no doubt that Israel was promoting the immigration of Russian (supposed-) Jews as a way of populating the (expansionist and ethnonationalist project of the) nation state. Yet, that invites the questions: what does, or did, it mean to be Jewish? How did one claim this status in Russia, after generations of marginalising the identities of religious and cultural minorities?

This takes me to the proud history of Jewish revolutionaries and the little I know about the Bund (Jewish Workers Party), about Jewish activists in the October Revolution, about minority rights in the Soviet Union, and about Lenin's promise of a Jewish autonomous region within the USSR. I learned, from a documentary I saw only around ten years ago, that this region was eventually established in 1934 and called Birobidzhan. It is in Siberia, near the border with China, and, according to my memory of this film, is now entirely populated by non-Jewish but Yiddish-speaking people.[13] And, while some of my (more often male) Jewish socialist comrades occupied themselves with learning Yiddish as part of their revolutionary heritage, my main association with the Bund now is a visit to its headquarters during my first-ever trip to the US in 1991. The organisation was based in a crumbling tenement block in New York's Lower East Side. Its small and dusty office was full of Yiddish newspapers and pamphlets written in both Hebrew and Roman characters. Somehow it seemed significant that this building also housed the American Group Psychotherapy Association (I was, at that time, first becoming interested in group psychotherapy).

At any rate, reflecting the overtly socially conservative ethos of my community (but noting the history of communist and socialist affiliation this suppresses), the affect I retrieve surrounding the term 'Soviet' suggests something repressive. The name and the feeling of brutality it evoked effectively stood for the whole of Eastern Europe at that time (notwithstanding the many different politics, and politics of Jewish communities, within these). On the other hand, I retrieve idealised representations of the Shtetl, the Heim, picturing the Eastern European

13 According to a 2017 *Guardian* article, efforts to revive the Jewish character of Birobidzhan are now being made. As most Jews were purged under Stalin and the remainder left at the fall of communism, the garish iconography that gives Birobidzhan the flavour of a 'Jewish Disneyland' is, doubtless, an attempt to attract tourists as well as new settlers to this remote region (Walker, para. 22 of 30).

village backlit with nostalgic images akin to those of the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* (which I remember seeing, around age twelve, in a packed Liverpool theatre) and Chagall paintings (which my mother particularly liked).

Writing this now makes me remember Bruno Bettelheim's (1986) harsh critique of Chagall's glowing, quasi-mystical representations of Jewish communal life in the villages of Eastern Europe. While Bettelheim's suggestion that these contributed to the Jews' delayed flight from destruction and extermination may be hyperbole, at the very least, Chagall's paintings do perform a noxious romanticisation of poverty.[14] Yet, such colourful images contrast with the stark black-and-white photocopied campaign posters of unrecognisable faces, rendered anonymous through poor reproduction as well as alienness. They are just faces, of individuals not families, and they are disembodied. This contrast seems to reiterate the presumed difference between 'the old days' and 'modern-day' supposed bleak and brutal Russia. During a visit to Moscow and St Petersburg in the 1990s, I was surprised to see the beauty of the architecture, including from the Soviet era.

It seems curious that 'Save Soviet Jewry' is the only explicit memory I can generate of the Cold War. Of course, I was aware of the Arms Race, and so on, and a supporter of CND. And, in the late 1960s, my aunt married a Hungarian-Jewish emigrée (I remember this distinctly because it was my long-awaited moment to be a bridesmaid). Most of his relatives had been exterminated in the Second World War, but he maintained Eastern European business connections, especially in Hungary, after coming to Britain in the late 1950s or early 1960s. My aunt has stories of her travels with him that include many Cold-War tropes, but these I have heard only recently.

Back to the blue-and-white Jewish National Fund tin and the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign. One feature common to both is how charity,

14 It is worth recalling that Chagall was inspired by the allied revolutionary project in Russia and was appointed Commissioner for Fine Arts in his native Vitebsk. He founded The People's Art School there, and key avant-garde figures such as El Lizzitzki and Kazimir Malevich taught at the school as part of a short-lived project to create a form of leftist art expressing the revolutionary values of (as one exhibition put it) 'collectivism, education, and innovation' (see: https://thejewishmuseum.org/index.php/exhibitions/chagall-lissitzky-malevich-the-russian-avant-garde-in-vitebsk-1918-1922)

or rather the performance of philanthropy, is a demonstration of class identity and status: one identifies as a giver rather than as one in need. A second is that both were institutionally-sanctioned mobilisations that signified some communal transnational affiliation and solidarity that transcended citizen loyalty to the 'host' nation-state. It may be (as I hinted above) that the two mobilisations, Zionism and support for Soviet Jews to leave Russia, had greater political alignment than I realised at the time. If so, then, perhaps, it is important to stay with the possibility of their separation, or disaggregation, as much as with their connection. That is, it is noteworthy that there had been two such movements beyond mere nationalist conformity to the British state, even if—in the light of the fall of communism—Zionism has now emerged as the only such expression for many British Jews.

Thinking about it now, it is easy to draw the conclusion that the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign was a perfect demonstration of British Jewry's commitment to the capitalist West. Bound up with loyalty to Britain was loyalty to the West, against the (communist) East. What better way to manifest trustworthiness to a suspicious state, and to ward off the memory of working-class Jewish communist and socialist activism! Here, as is the experience of so many minority communities, class interests meet migrant assimilationist politics. On the other hand, those of us politicised ('radicalised'?) in Zionist movements did not only become army fodder for the Israel Defence Forces or fundamentalist settlers in the Occupied West Bank. Many of the people I first met at Hanoar Hatzioni camps, I encountered again in the Jewish Socialist Group,[15] which has long called for the decentring of Israel from Jewish communal identity and revives radical Jewish histories across the world, most notably from Revolutionary Russia, and even in short-lived UK Jewish feminist movements. I discern similar or equivalent histories among fellow Jewish activists in other socialist and Palestine-solidarity organisations. So, this political trajectory is clearly not only mine.

Questions surface: what does it mean that it seems I first encountered the term 'dissident' in relation to the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign, that is, as an anti-communist trope? Was I able to reshape or rework my understanding, or is the term still invested with this Cold-War association? In a supposedly 'post-political' era, when resignation,

15 https://www.jewishsocialist.org.uk/about

passivity, and apathy prevail, I find myself clutching at even perhaps-misguided moments of collective organisation and transnational affiliation. I suppose the key issue is what kind of political imaginaries were, and can be, fostered from diverse and contradictory resources.

Here, at least, I recognise one key asset that my geopolitical, embodied experience has brought to the Post-socialist Childhoods project: a desire to attend to minoritised cultural, ethnic, and religious positionings and to disrupt any sense of homogeneity of Eastern-European populations, as elsewhere, whether Roma, Jewish, Muslim or any other minority affiliation (including diverse embodiedness and sexualities). My 'heritage' (or geopolitical cultural positioning) has generated in me a constitutional suspicion of all nationalistic claims of universality and uniformity that work to suppress and oppress marginal groups. Asking questions to disrupt what I heard as generalised assumptions has sometimes felt uncomfortable, inappropriate even. Such questions may well have been ill-informed, and I have learnt so much through the process of engagement in this project. But I also hope that, clumsy as they may have been, and shaped by a political subjectivity forged from the West rather than the East, my questions helped to further expose some key tropes and tenets structuring both the narratives of Cold-War childhoods and their interpretation.

I acknowledge that the examples I have discussed here are recalled signifiers (and, in the case of the JNF box, a material object) rather than a memory story or retrieved narrative of personal experience as is more usual for memory work. Yet, as is also the case with memory work, I am trying here to excavate that which has been assumed and normalised. But what I have relayed are such pervasive, enduring, and implicit features of the cultural-political life of my childhood that it would be disingenuous to try to pin the analysis onto a single episode or event.

Layers of complicity coexist with potential resistance, and collective political amnesia intersects with personal repressions to the extent that one cannot disentangle which arises from which (see, for example, Williams 2010). What remains from this process is an enduring sense of the fragmentariness and instability of memory as well as a deep uncertainty about the validity of my own commitments, strongly felt though they may be. The myriad layering of experience, of years passed and subjective defences acquired since and at play now, render

this account as unreliable—and in places as obscure to me—as it must be to others. I am an other to myself, and this estrangement has to be acknowledged and embraced as a necessary component of any decolonial, De-Cold War process. Interrogation, rather than exoneration, is the starting point for further exploration. As Scholz (2011) put it,

> The unconscious is not a reservoir of eternal topics, released from the laws of time and space. Unconscious life has a special relation to time and has its special media … embodied memories and values, the significance of family talks, and … externalizations such as books, museums, and rituals, as well as places (p. 365).

She further distinguishes between what she calls communicative and cultural memory to highlight how 'personal memories emerge from, and are based in, collective memories' (ibid.).

Whether I have disidentified, or rather which kinds of re-identifications I have now installed, is not for me to say. I do, however, hope that I have indicated some of the existing borders and bordering practices that are at play in the disruption if also reiteration of prevailing East/West binaries. I inhabited a Cold-War childhood to the extent that I was constructed and produced as its normalised other, situated 'outside' to peer in through its curtains. Nevertheless, my recollections of the felt experiences of those times relationally and correlatively disclose my own and other Western-majority and -minority positionings, both then and now. The Cold War was fought on many fronts, within and between Europe and the Americas, but also across Asia and Africa. As Chen (2010) noted, its legacies pose urgent subjective as well as geomaterial challenges, and—to extend his point—interface with the forms, effects, and affects of its more recent renewal across the globe.

And Now, the 'Facts'…

After the struggle with memory retrieval and the mining of the encounter with the contradictions of the past, I now offer some broader historical account of the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign and its relationship with Zionism, as a way of also illuminating my process here. While not-quite following the instructions for memory work (although I did try thinking through these stories from the third person, as well as the first), my 'method' here was one of attempting to stay with recollected

past representations or memory stories. Now, however, having written the above, I have allowed myself to 'check' the 'facts' of the campaign. This causes me to think of Deborah Britzman's (2012) notion of 'after-education', perhaps because she topicalises both the (retrospective) temporality and the complex and fantasised interpersonal and singular relationships involved in teaching and learning. My reflections here on my own 'memory stories' (a term coined by the Post-socialist Childhoods Project) arise from and were provoked by joint work but are necessarily forged 'after' it, by me as a singular, geomaterially, and historically positioned subject.

Here, therefore, are some choice samples of what the internet says about the 'Save Soviet Jewry Campaign', corresponding to the murky filaments of feeling and personal history narrated above, much of which was news to me...

On the 'Save Soviet Jewry' Campaign

First, this campaign appears to have been initiated and driven from the USA, beginning in the early 1960s. So, the UK was, really, a minor player. Clearly, the Cold-War politics of US-USSR relations figured prominently both in the US and USSR's governmental responses to why and how the issue of Soviet Jewry was taken up by the US.

Second, the 'Save Soviet Jewry' campaign is tied to the self-image and status of the US Jewish community, including its intersection with other local antiracist struggles. This is indicated in a review for the (US) Jewish Book Council by Bob Goldfarb, in which he claims that 'the struggle to save Soviet Jews in the 1960's marked a decisive shift by many Jewish Americans from African-American civil rights to a specifically Jewish cause' (2011, para. 3 of 4). Discussing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, he continues,

> The success of Congressional lobbying led to AIPAC's immensely influential role as an advocate for Israel on Capitol Hill. And the end of the Soviet Jewry campaign after the fall of the Soviet Union has left the American Jewish establishment in search of another unifying theme for the past two decades (Ibid).

Goldfarb, perhaps subject to a dynamic present in most minority communities, overestimates the political clout of this lobbying group.

His observations are suggestive in relation to the move to Zionism alongside and especially after the Soviet Jewry campaign.

Another revealing comment in a particularly motivated account of the movement comes from a relatively recent article in *The Times of Israel*. Dr. Shaul Keiner, associate professor of sociology and Jewish studies at Vanderbilt University, is quoted as saying that the campaign 'was the height of American Jews' sense of empowerment as American Jews' (Gher-Zand 2019, para. 17 of 29). The overall narrative seems to be that the campaign was a victim of its own success since, once successful (in the sense that Soviet Jews were able to emigrate by the early 1990s), the campaign was forgotten. However, some recent scholarship makes the contradictory claim that Soviet Jews continue to exercise a key cultural and material influence globally (Shneer 2021).

Third, as I dimly discerned, the link between demanding the right to leave the USSR and wish to relocate to Israel was structured into the project from the outset. Those who sought the freedom to leave the Soviet Union were called 'Refuseniks' but also 'Prisoners of Zion' (Gher-Zand 2019, para. 7 of 29). More significantly, the campaign was explicitly mobilised by the Israeli state as a strategy for managing the 'demographic problem' of maintaining a higher proportion of Jewish people in the Israel/Palestine population, according to the history produced by the American Jewish Historical Society. However, other accounts highlight the tensions or disagreements that arose when some of the 'Refuseniks', once granted permission to leave, 'dropped out' or changed destination halfway through their journeys. Instead of carrying on from Vienna to Israel, they elected to go to the US or to other countries (Lazin 2005). Indeed, Goldfarb opens his review of the history written by Gal Beckerman by noting that 'the chair of the Jewish Agency, Arieh Dulzin, declared in 1976, "our first duty is not to save Jews; we must save only those who will go to Israel"' (2011, para. 1 of 4). This argument was, however, overruled by federated Jewish organisations.

Finally, I have vague recollections of other Cold-War figures whose plight penetrated the Jewish community of my childhood. I remember the name Sharansky and the slogan 'Let my people go'; I also remember Yevtushenko's poem 'Babi Yar'. Not quite able to recall the details of these, however, I did not mention them above. More comes back now, of course....

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