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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

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# 12. Transcending the Border: Memory, Objects, and Alternative Memorialisation in Cold-War Childhoods

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By analysing adult-generated childhood memories assembled in the online memory archive of the Reconnect/Recollect project, this chapter looks at the multidimensional function of objects in childhood memories that challenge binary Cold-War, border-centred frameworks traditionally represented in scholarship of the time period. More specifically, it examines the role of objects in both trying to imagine or envision those on the 'other side' of the adult-imposed borders as well as ideas of 'self' as pertinent to this process. The rich spectrum of shared experiences points to the critical importance of childhood memory in decolonising the studies of lived and imagined childhoods in the second half of the past century and thus transgresses these borders to provide a platform for future research on childhood history and memory.

*Under US President James Carter, the United States boycotted the 1980 Olympics. A boy remembers the news that day. He had already fallen in love with Russian novels, especially Dostoyevsky's work and this Tolstoy too. Now this news he watched with his father in the comfort of the family living room. He wondered about the USSR. What was this USSR? He thought, what is life there like? Similar, different? There was so much red on the screen in Moscow. Red was not just a colour, but a culture, or so it*

*seemed. Communism, what was this belief system? Was it so different? It was intriguing to imagine himself in this other place. [...] For unknown reasons, the so-called 'other' fascinated, did not repulse and terrify him [...]. The love of books, already extant, grew exponentially [...] they offered thoughts of distant lands, distant times, and of a world unexplored. ('Love of Books' n.d.)<sup>1</sup>*

Shared by one of the participants of the Reconnect/Recollect project, this testimony might at first glance be considered unexpected or unusual in many ways. As a child growing up in the 1980s United States, this was the memory one of the participants chose to share as part of the effort to remember the pivotal moments of his childhood as contextualised within the broader geopolitical climate. That the memory mentions clear indicators of the Cold-War atmosphere is perhaps not as surprising, given the omnipresent political and media language that permeated public domains on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Peacock 2014; Rawnsley 2016). However, despite the strong ideological content that surrounded the child in the given moment, the response that it evoked in him turned out to be exactly the opposite of division, borders, or antagonism. On the contrary, it was the feelings of interest and curiosity about the 'other side' that emerged as a guiding force behind not only that moment in the participant's childhood but also the signpost for narrating this memory in adult life.

An aspect that ties this memory together with others that exhibit a similar trajectory is the centrality of objects. Namely, in these adult-narrated stories, objects are the prompts that propel participants towards actively seeking knowledge about 'the other' and, in many stories, become the central points of the narratives. This chapter seeks to explore these kind of objects—ones that invite alternative narratives of interconnected experiences that do not fit into the predominant 'East vs. West' paradigm. In doing so, it approaches childhoods that took place in the second half of the twentieth century as interconnected

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1 See <https://coldwarchildhoods.org/memories/> for the online memory archive. When using excerpts from participants' personal memories, I include the title of the memory story from which it was taken. Many memories are written in the third person so as to facilitate their contextualisation.

rather than separate and isolated research spheres. It shows that borders on which the geopolitical world insisted and the associations which saturated the public sphere did not always and necessarily translate into children's worlds, hearts, and minds. Moreover, the interrelationships between autobiographical memories and objects as integral components of those memories accentuate the similarities of human experience in those turbulent times. Such connections ultimately challenge the idea of lived childhoods as pertinent to national boundaries and open up space for further cross-cultural and transnational research on the histories and meanings of childhoods.

Consequently, this chapter aims to address the following questions: What is the significance of everyday objects for the alternative memorialisation of 'the other' that troubles traditional, polarised Cold-War historical accounts? What is the connection between objects and children's idea of 'self' as envisioned through such object-centred memories? Finally, how can adults' recollections contribute to de-colonising the study of childhood and bring together various alternative and contradictory narratives, ideas, and stories that otherwise do not fit into the official, Cold War-dominated research framework?

Two main sections constitute this chapter. The first briefly lays out the approach of memory as a method to understand lived childhood experience, and it also situates the contribution within and as a response to the existing scholarship on lived childhoods in the Cold-War period. The second section starts by delineating alternative narratives of 'the other' and how these might be brought together through the interaction with and meaning ascribed to everyday objects of material culture. It then focuses on the idea of 'self' that also emerged in the process of constructing knowledge of 'the other' in the participants' various cultures. Taken together, these findings have the potential of opening up further possibilities in the wider scholarly effort to decolonise the study of childhood memory, childhood experience, and identity writing.

## Research Approach and Methodology

Within the broader body of English-language scholarship pertaining to the historical periodisation of the Cold-War era (1945–1990), studies on childhood history and childhood experience remain fairly scarce. These works often attend to the relationship between the idea of nurturing patriotic young citizens and its integration into educational programs in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s (Grieve 2018; Hartman 2008; Holt 2014; Kordas 2015). Most anchor their methodological approaches in Western standards of ‘normative’ childhood and pedagogical and developmental principles. On the other hand, rare studies of socialist childhoods tend to adopt a top-down perspective, considering the ways in which the state envisioned and moulded young patriots through education and daily governance to be a kind of ideological indoctrination (Kelly 2007; Kirschenbaum 2013; Peacock 2014). An even smaller body of work compares childhoods across cultures and national boundaries (Bronfenbrenner and Condry 1970), while only a few scholars so far have explored alternative narratives and bottom-up reactions that challenged the socialist, state-crafted image of the child (Aydarova et al. 2016; Peacock 2014; Raleigh 2013; Winkler 2019).

In rethinking these binary frameworks over the past decade, scholars have increasingly turned to memory as a method for ‘de-colonising’ childhood studies. Memory, including in the form of collective biography, offers space to living subjects’ own accounts of daily moments that complicate the bipolar, geopolitically-conditioned narratives (Silova, Piattoeva, Millei 2018). The power and strength of collective memory work comes from the connections and meanings forged between particular fragments of memory rather than from the establishment of a uniform past-present trajectory (Ouma 2020, p. 43). Because such non-linear narration allows for a rich variety of memory snippets, it helps participants to resist reaching for the prevailing Cold-War binaries and, therefore, asserts itself as a tool for studying ‘counter-hegemonic’ memorialisation (Boehmer 2000, p. 756, cited in Silova, Piattoeva and Millei 2018, p. 7). This chapter, by rejecting and de-constructing the border as a methodological starting point

(Mezzandra and Neilson 2013), explores the interconnection between the variety of childhoods as lived on both geopolitical poles.

Memories collected through the Reconnect/Recollect project serve as the main bulk of sources for this study. In 2019, the project held collective memory workshops online and in four different locations: Helsinki, Mexico City, Berlin, and Riga. Attendees included researchers and artists who grew up on both sides of the so-called 'Iron Curtain' during the historical designation of the Cold-War era and the decades after. They shared memories from their childhoods via academic discourse, art (travelling exhibitions, visual art, and performance), and collective (auto)biography. In doing so, participants created dialogue that enabled them to build many bridges across multiple divides (such as East and West, socialist and post-socialist) and to recognise commonalities in the meanings within their lived childhoods. The childhood memories in written format were then archived online and are publicly available through the project website (<https://www.coldwarchildhoods.org>). This chapter's analysis centres on memory stories wherein narrators describe the many ways/visions/imaginings through which they constructed their ideas of those living on the other side of the geopolitical divide. It is concerned with the definition of borders and the cognitive efforts to transgress them.

Many archived memories that present non-binary views of 'the other' or 'the other side' feature objects, such as different types of books, radios, cassettes, televisions, clocks, or pieces of clothing. The observation that these objects in most cases appeared central to the participants' formation of their memory stories prompted this research.<sup>2</sup> This chapter calls attention to the role of objects in memories in general, and in alternative memorialisation in particular. My analysis combines the definitions of objects advanced by Elizabeth Wood (2009a) and Richard Heersmink (2018). Wood (2009a) sees objects as physical things (including those not necessarily intended for consumption by children) that, with engagement over time and in particular contexts,

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2 Memories referring to the post-1990 decades were not included in the research for this chapter as its scope is the period when Cold-War propaganda about the opposing blocs was being actively disseminated in private and public spaces via various mediums.

enable individuals to configure a sense of self (p. 153). Heersmink (2018) extends this definition by emphasising ‘evocative’ objects—those most closely linked to ‘past personal experiences’ that ‘trigger and sometimes constitute’ emotionally imbued autobiographical reflections (p. 1830).

The argument I make is twofold. First, merging these two approaches, I regard the exchange between the narrators and the objects in their stories as ‘experiential transaction[s]’ (Wood 2009a, p. 155) wherein the different ‘intrinsic’ (rather than simply external) meaning of the objects for each participant is what makes these objects ‘evocative’ over time (to Heersmink 2018, p. 1830). In that sense, I make the case that objects serve as ‘technology of memory’ (Wood 2009a, p. 157) insofar as they shape the trajectory of these memory stories: it is precisely through these deeper interactions with artifacts of material culture that the child-subjects forged the relationships of meaning that help us to understand the focal points of the adults’ memory stories. Second, I argue that the engagement with objects conditioned two critical aspects of alternative memorialisation: (1) perceptions of those on ‘the other’ side of the Cold-War imposed borders; and (2) the participants’ ideas of the ‘self’ as contingent upon the process of learning about ‘the other’. These findings stress the significance of objects in memory stories as guideposts that interconnect these two identity markers in memory studies pertaining to childhood experiences.

## Envisioning ‘the Other’ and ‘Self’ Through Objects in Memory Stories

Throughout the workshops that aimed to bring into conversation people who grew up divided by a variety of Cold War-imposed borders, participants were encouraged to think about their own memorable childhood experiences. Each contributor wrote down their initial recollections, then, with the help and questions of others, began to de- and re-construct these memory fragments in more detail. With each new round of writing, participants became more aware of the nuanced context that pieced these memories together. One major theme was, of course, the extent to which the political, economic, cultural, or religious



setting of their lived childhood influenced the shape and mode of memory narration.

Many of those memories, perhaps not surprisingly, contained vivid associations of borders and divisions between the East and West as well as the language of Cold-War propaganda that penetrated children's daily lives in a myriad of ways. One participant, who had grown up in the 1950s United States, for example, remembered his family building a nuclear bomb shelter and his school making students practise 'duck and cover' drills, all of which caused him 'nightmares of nuclear Holocaust' ('The Nuclear Threat' n.d.). Another, who grew up in East Berlin in the 1970s and lived very close to the border wall that divided the city, recalled knowing that she needed to be extra careful not to play in the proximity of the wall where the border-patrol guards were stationed ('Divided Games' n.d.). In another example, the narrator recollected her family's first international trip in 1968 and how, on the way from Hungary to Czechoslovakia, they passed a number of tanks related to the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia: 'She remembers the silence in the car very clearly, the tanks in the rain, and the feeling she had: it was not fear, she could not comprehend what was going on. [...] but it was dark and sad' ('Trabant' n.d.). These memories point to the various dimensions through which the Cold-War political propaganda and binary rhetoric asserted its presence in lived and internalised childhood experiences.

However, upon closer inspection, a substantial number of memories revealed children who questioned, expressed unconformity with, or resisted the Cold-War narratives to which they were constantly exposed, particularly those referring to the 'other side'. Common to many such memory stories is a focus on different kinds of physical objects. For instance, a workshop participant who grew up in the United States remembered the 'Doomsday Clock' poster and immediately associated it with the Cold War ('Doomsday Clock' n.d.). Another began his story with a memory of books by Russian writers, particularly Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, which he possessed and enjoyed reading as a teenager ('Love of Books' n.d.). A rotating globe and a cassette containing Sting's song 'Russians' came to mind for another participant who came of age in the 1980s United States ('Sting Cassette' n.d.). One woman, who grew up in a small industrial town in Kraków,

Poland, remembered her favorite activity: waiting for pen-pal letters from the opposite side of the 'Iron Curtain' ('A Letter from Florida' n.d.). Yet another participant from Poland recalled colourful items of clothing she saw coming from abroad and worn by a girl from 'the other side' ('Material Culture' n.d.). This spectrum enables us to grasp the variety of object types that appear prominently in the stories of the narrators. Specifically, it is through references to these objects that the memory solidified and developed in personal ways that contest the binary representations of 'the other' that were widespread in the public sphere.

### The 'Other'

Throughout the stories, writers employ a certain mode of narration in relation to the objects that catalyse the story development. Their initial interaction with the objects usually included processing through sensory experience. For instance, the participant who enjoyed Russian novels readily commented: 'Something about the *tactile* nature of the books brought a sense of comfort, yet also a sense of disconcertment' (Love of Books n.d., emphasis in original). While looking at the pictures that came with the pen-pal letters from abroad, the Polish narrator of that story vividly recalled the excitement upon touching the pictures' surface: 'Pictures had such a *smooth texture* and they even *shone* gently. They were printed on Kodak paper, with the Kodak logo on the back side. The quality of the photos was stunning to her' ('Letter from Florida' n.d., emphasis in original). For others, the primary sensation associated with the objects was visual, whether looking at the 'Doomsday clock' poster ('Doomsday Clock' n.d.) or gazing in awe at the *colourful clothes* worn by children from the 'other side' ('Material Culture' n.d., emphasis in original). Hearing music was an especially powerful sensation for the participant from the US who recalled that 'The *melody* is set to a theme of Prokofiev, and that's when he really started to become curious' ('Sting Cassette' n.d., emphasis in original). Thus, we see that the memories began their trajectory with reflections on the physical and aesthetic aspects—touch, sight, and sound—of the object itself. The presence of the object

in a given surrounding, coupled with some of its physical properties, introduces a certain idea of 'the other' and allows it to unfold.

As the narratives progress, the external properties and intended practical functions of the object give way to a different and more profound construction of meaning and purpose formed primarily through the particular context of interaction with the object. The encounters with the majority of these objects occurred in a space or setting that displayed or otherwise hinted at the division of the Cold-War worlds, such as the school classroom, family room with television or radio at home, or international summer camp. Nevertheless, participants recognised that engagement with the objects within the network of their social environment aroused feelings of interest, curiosity, and even admiration towards the 'other side'. They did not succumb to the then-common attitudes of hostility or silence towards those people and things on the opposite side of the border. The range of feelings that the participants describe strikes one as enormously rich and, as such, shows the possibilities of object-centred memory study as a method to research the impact of and response to the often unidirectional and politically saturated public narratives and discourse.

For instance, a childhood memory from a participant who grew up in Soviet Armenia but whose parents worked as medical doctors in Algeria revolved around what she called 'Catalogue of the Outside World'. She recalled being told that the presents her parents would bring each time upon their return were 'ordered through catalogues from France'. Whereas the narrator's first contact with these catalogues involved observing all the different articles and 'beautiful peoples' on their vividly coloured thin pages, they are the objects that become the 'mediator' (Wood 2009a, p. 160) of the more complex cognitive process that followed the initial sensory processing of the catalogue's intended function. She would make sure no one was around, then spent hours carefully studying each catalogue, 'secretly looking at the forbidden world'. Although she knew that the world the catalogue represented was 'forbidden' and she could not rationally explain her enchantment with the object—hence the clandestine consumption—these hours of content enjoyment and dissection made the represented 'other' look quite 'attractive' ('Catalogue of the Outside World' n.d.). Similarly, a memory story about a girlhood in Romania describes spending the day

on the Black Sea beach and, after arriving home, ‘flipping the pages of an illustrated children’s book her cousin had brought from a trip to France’ that reminded her of her time at the beach (‘Naked at the Beach’ n.d.). She and her friend could see ‘dark-skinned children living in a tropical rainforest’ in the photographs, but what struck the narrator while looking at them was the similarity between her experience and that of these children: both enjoyed summertime beach excursions while having no clothes on. After dwelling all day on this shared pleasure, she noted that the ‘children from the illustrated book felt closer, like an unspoken presence in the room’. While the illustrated book had ‘exotic’ origins and clearly indicated a very different world, the narrator’s interaction with it—a transaction between the object and the subject in a unique social setting (after a hot day spent at the beach)—was what produced the feelings of similarity with, followed by closeness to and even friendship with the children in the photographs.

In the home setting, the ‘other’ was sometimes as close as behind the button that led to the ‘forbidden’ TV channel. A workshop participant that spent her childhood years in East Germany remembered that, even though she was not supposed to watch the West German channel, she could not resist pressing the button that would take her to the other side full of possibilities: a colourful program of West German cartoons. In fact, she titled and formed the memory narrative around the presence and hidden function of that ‘forbidden’ button:

*Back in the 1980s her family had a TV standing in their living room with several programme buttons. Two of them were marked with coloured dots—those were the two DDR programmes. Her parents told the kids that they were only allowed to watch those two, either the green one or the yellow button/programme. When the girl was at home alone after school one afternoon, she decided to switch to one of the other—forbidden—buttons to see what this was about. And there it was: colourful afternoon West German TV programme! She remembers being totally excited about watching a short cartoon that was shown between different broadcasts (‘Mainzelmännchen’—little dwarfs that barely say more than ‘Good evening’ in a special way). At the same time she felt guilty because she did something that was explicitly forbidden. (‘Forbidden Buttons’ n.d.)*

Other participants recalled situations wherein the objects that prompted contemplation were sent to them or brought to their attention by a representative of the 'other side'. Interaction with these objects initiated a cognitive process which, in turn, created enticing and alluring associations with the unknown. The narrator who grew up in a small Polish industrial town, for instance, wrote of taking part in pen-pal exchange with a campground-owning family in the United States. When she received her first letter from across the ocean in 1986, she did not know a word of English. However, the letter contained three colourful photographs of a family from Florida that showed them gathered together on a pier by the sea. The narrator remembered 'staring at them for hours trying to see every detail of a distant world', absorbing all the colours and facial expressions. To her, the photograph 'looked like a part of a show' ('A Letter From Florida' n.d.). Similar excitement and awe for 'the other side' was felt by another girl from Poland when she participated in an international summer camp and met a camper from Canada. She recalled that, at that time, the 'West' already looked like 'paradise', a feeling that was confirmed in this encounter. The narrator specifically remembered:

*her clothes, so colourful, made of delicate fabric. She had two pairs of corduroy jeans, one violet, one pink. And also she was very active and athletic. She could do side straddle hops etc. Truly a princess for the kids from the Soviet bloc!* ('Material Culture' n.d.)

These examples demonstrate well the variety of feelings associated with 'the other', which ranged from interest and enchantment to wonder and awe. They also show the objects acting as mediators, enabling the transactions that yielded these positive associations. In other words, we can understand the objects in these stories as 'technologies of memory' (Wood 2009a, p. 157) that create cognitive space wherein individuals create meaningful experiences that construct the story of their own childhoods. A closer look at the central narrational points further illuminates the cultivation of these counter-hegemonic visions.

When analysing the function of these objects, it is important to note that not all were everyday objects made particularly for children's consumption. On the contrary, most of the objects featured in these

narratives were those intended to meet general consumer needs and preferences. Objects like shopping catalogues, music cassettes, and books targeted not only the young but also an older population. In fact, one could also argue that some objects, like shopping catalogues or novels, were aimed primarily at adult consumers. Moreover, one notices a distinction with regards to the objects' origins and distribution radius. One group of objects, like books or a globe, were normally found in everyday settings universally and might, then, be said to span or bridge the geopolitical divide. The second group of objects, including particular items of clothing, children's picture books, Kodak-produced photographs, or selected television programs, were produced for a certain region or country and, therefore, might deliberately utilise certain tropes of imagined division.

Regardless of the external function, distribution area, physical characteristics, or target audience of these objects, it is the moments of interaction with them in a given social environment that created what Elizabeth Wood calls the objects' higher, 'intrinsic' meaning (Wood 2009a). This intrinsic value, because it is ascribed through the individual's unique social context, varies from person to person, which means that the experiential transaction is always a different experience for each individual (*ibid.*, p. 155). For instance, one participant remembers the 'Doomsday Clock' poster as an object that incited both fear and curiosity at the same time, but this can by no means act as an indicator of any other subject's experience of the poster; each person's contextualisation of the transactional setting would not correspond to that of any other. Nevertheless, the element that brings these memories together is the persistence of feelings ascribed to 'the other' and the continual significance of these feelings for the permanent place in the participants' memory repertoires. These are the qualities that, in any case, transcend the external properties of the objects and instead make them biographical or, to recall Heersmink's term, 'evocative' (2018, p. 1830). Indeed, the objects are not arbitrarily interwoven through these narratives but instead trigger distinctive emotional activity that serves as a constitutive substance of the memories themselves and the patterns through which they are laid out to form the stories about 'the others'.

## The 'Self'

Learning about 'the other' through objects suggests another major thread that connects these experiences and memories—understanding and learning about 'the self'. Ideas of 'self' as remembered by the participants are characterised by feelings of curiosity, inquisitiveness, and grit. As such, they are important in the analysis of this interactive process. Participants consistently referred to their own desires as children to explore and push the boundaries imposed by the adult world while trying to imagine 'the other'. These were the main elements around which the constitution of 'the self' revolved. Instead of settling for the readily accessible concepts, they recalled actively questioning the uniform and predominantly negative representations of 'the other' in the context of the Cold War and attempting to actively and creatively visualise the lives of those who dwelled on the 'other side' of these real and/or imagined borders. Such recollections from stories discussed throughout this chapter show that the narrators, as a consequence of interacting with objects, construct themselves as people open to new concepts. They think of themselves as capable of seeking knowledge of and consistently and actively envisioning 'the other' in non-hegemonic ways.

The emergence of ideas about 'the self' through imagining 'the other' proceeds in the following way. Initially, children's eagerness to explore those unfamiliar places and people was aroused by their interaction with objects, but knowledge about those places and people was, for some reason, inaccessible or restricted. Some imaginings of 'the other' stayed in the abstract form, such as for those participants who wondered about 'distant lands', what communism and its 'belief system' were like, or if life was 'different' elsewhere. Others, who were able to meet or otherwise catch a glimpse of real people from 'the other side', either in person or through other kinds of objects (from printed pictures, television, or magazines), scrutinised these images which, in turn, became archived in their memories. Since narrators foregrounded these objects in their storytelling, one notices two types of dynamics at play in that regard: active physical contact with the objects through sensory input as well as the cognitive responses that the transaction inspired with regards to 'the other'.

Both produced a myriad of associations and feelings that, in turn, grounded each participant's sense of themselves within their respective environments.

While physical interaction implied an encounter via one of the physical senses (touch, hearing, smell, or sight), the subsequent cognitive processing was critical to the development of participants' own investigative attitude. This manifested both in mental visions of 'the other' as well as an active interest for further knowledge. Such is well illustrated by the narrator who described the motivating effect of Sting's song on a radio cassette: 'He was always curious as to why they were constantly given information that painted a bleak picture [but after listening to the song on the cassette...] He had *no choice* but to investigate' ('Sting Cassette' n.d., emphasis in original). Likewise, the memory story centred on books by Russian authors recalls them as both a source of information and the springboard for additional knowledge pursuit, all of which worked to establish these sentiments as integral to the narrator's own being: 'Their physical presence, the tactile experience of them always brought comfort and questions simultaneously. They served as surrogate teachers, friends, and travelled to places distant, exotic, and mysterious ('Love of Books' n.d.). This particular example exposes well the interdependent nature of relationship between 'self' and 'other', where the seeking of knowledge about 'the other' constitutes the basis for forming ideas of 'self' in adult storytelling.

Memories of self-formation through objects help us to understand children's positions within and across their respective societies, independently of Cold-War geopolitical identifiers. Indeed, narrators repeatedly identified curiosity as the key attribute that enabled them to challenge the scarcity of information and to act on their desire to know. This demonstrates the capacity of children to disturb their environments, even those characterised by a highly controlled influx of politically sensitive, adult-managed information. For example, although one participant from East Germany knew that her parents would not let her go to West Berlin to participate in the music quiz she learned about by secretly listening to a West German radio station, she still 'prepared an argument' for the conversation with them ('Secret Radio' n.d.). Similarly, the girl who watched the West German television program 'hidden' behind the 'forbidden' red button on the



remote control in her East German living room decided to confront her parents about their unwillingness to let her access it. She remembers 'telling her mother that she had watched the cartoon and asked her why she wasn't allowed to watch something nice like that' ('Forbidden Button' n.d.). The objects in these contexts highlight not only the exigency of creating ideas about 'the self' through investigation of the unknown but also the ways in which that process sheds light onto larger social configurations in which children, evidently, were not supposed to partake.

Recognising these properties that abet the creation of ideas related to the 'self' through object-mediated activities is another crucial facet that establishes a clear linkage across these memories from various global settings. Even though the memories are told from the adult point of view, the ways in which participants describe their action against the adults' ideology vis-a-vis their engagement with objects is an important facet of memory stories. The value of these subjective accounts, in fact, points to children's role in troubling the dynamics of the adult and, specifically, the Cold War-partitioned world. Thus, such findings add to the scholarship that strives to reorient the problem of children's agency as an adult-imposed construct by focusing on its implications in children's immediate settings and acknowledging its ability to transgress adult-imposed boundaries (Gallagher 2019; Maza 2020).

These collections of adult-generated memories of childhood have shown the properties of objects as a 'technology of memory' (Wood 2009b, p. 121) that, in the narrators' storytellings, facilitate not only the development of relationships between themselves and adult-designated political 'others' but also realisations about how that quest forged their own ideas of 'self.' In such a setting, objects serve as nodal points in decolonising the history of lived 'Cold-War' childhoods from geopolitically imposed binaries and divisions. It would be too far-reaching to argue that such moments determined the very trajectory of professional and/or personal lives for these participants, but their own recollections highlight the essential role of objects in the construction of the geopolitically situated 'self' both in their memories of childhood and their identity writing in adulthood.

## Conclusion: Troubling the Binary Cold-War Conditioned Narratives

The multilayered insights presented here open up new research frontiers for examining memory as a scientific instrument and a window into histories of childhood, particularly of those whose voices have been silenced or otherwise neglected due to the attention given to hegemonic geopolitical actors and global diplomatic and economic trajectories (Silova et al. 2017). Traditional approaches to childhood history frame growing up during the Cold War as an 'engineering project', designed and managed by the state leadership for the purposes of producing 'ideal' youngsters who will uphold the ideological principles of the nation. This chapter contests such top-down perspectives by acknowledging and validating personal histories that, through childhood memories, do not conform with such authoritarian narratives. Despite the everyday exposure to propaganda that drew clear lines between 'us' and 'them', the narrators of these memories attest to an increasing desire among children to know, understand, and even admire those on the 'other side'. Their voices speak loudly to the gap of historical knowledge that only human research participants can help us address. In such a context, this chapter calls a complication of the concept of real and imaginary borders as the framework which, until recently, has dominated the study of the Cold-War period.

Specifically, analysing objects as the anchors of memory stories reveals their role in prompting interrogations of the unidimensional image of 'the other' rooted in Cold-War rhetoric. Objects' interactive capacities allowed the vision of 'the other' to acquire much more creative, mystical, seductive, and even pleasurable qualities. Objects offered opportunities for bridging the knowledge gap—the limited information offered within the participants' social networks—and, in most cases, inspired further investigation about 'the other.' This, in turn, fuelled the construction of individuals' ideas of 'self' through the process of information-seeking initiated by sentiments of acquisitiveness and wonder.

These recollections affirm the potentials of adult-narrated childhood experiences as research data that re-establish personal

accounts as valuable tools in destabilising collective, politically shaped, and adult-centred history-writing. It argues for the unquestionable importance of childhood as a remembered lived experience despite it being a rarely studied aspect of history itself. This chapter has shown that memories make a strong case for positioning subjective accounts as pillars for decolonising and re-configuring top-down historical accounts that revolve around East-West geopolitical categorisations. Academic research that facilitates such reflections in the form of memory workshops can also provide opportunities, spaces, and useful tools for personal introspection in the ever-present quest for knowledge and identity.

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