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CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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Sleepy Smuggles¹

Sarah Fichtner

She crossed and sensed the border with her eyes closed many times, half asleep, on the backseat of her parent's car. She must have been 6 or 7. Hearing the voices of the border guards from a distance (that's how you hear when you are supposed not to hear, when you're actually asleep, right?): 'Open the trunk. ... Could you get out of the car, please? ... Everyone! The child, too.'

'But don't you see, she's fast asleep!' she heard her Mom plead. 'Please don't make me wake her up. I'm so glad that she is FINALLY asleep.' She heard her Mom sigh.

The girl was not really sleeping. She noticed the flashlights outside intruding through her eyelids. She smelled the gasoline evaporating from the turned off engines nearby. Her heart was beating fast, adrenaline rushed through her body, but she was not afraid. She heard her parents' voices, reassuring. They were standing outside, negotiating with the border guards. The guards did not insist on waking her up. They understood. What exactly had they understood? It didn't matter. Everyone played their role. She felt safe. And complicit. They had succeeded, again.

When they reached their friends' house in East Berlin, her parents got out the books and the newest issue of the political magazine 'Der Spiegel' from underneath her seat. The presents had been protected through her seemingly innocent sleep. She felt very proud and everyone was happy.

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.