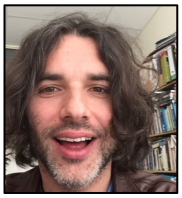
ISSN: 2325-3290 (online)
Dialogic Pedagogy
an International Online Journal

Power, ideology and children: Socialist childhoods in Czechoslovakia



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Abstract
There was not one, singular childhood in socialist Czechoslovakia, but many and diverse, plural, childhoods. Spanning over 40 years (1948–1989), the Czechoslovak communist governance produced diverse conceptualisations of childhoods that remain often invisible, unexplored, and the current analyses are at best sketchy and refer mostly to pedagogical nuances of strong ideological pedagogical struggles. One way to explore such an abundance of historical data in a short journal article is to utilise a somewhat personal narrative of a child. This dialogic approach allows the strong presence of the voice of a child, re-told from an adult's perspective, and it methodologically justifies an approach to thinking and theorising of socialist childhoods through Vaclav Havel's (1985; 1989; 1990) theoretical thinking that has been utilised in philosophy of education previously (see Tesar, 2015e). There are also other examples of complex and thorough analyses of socialist childhoods in other countries (see for example Aydarova et al, 2016), and theoretical thinking about the socialist child as a foreigner to its own land, can be done through Kristeva's lens (Arndt, 2015).

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Introduction

There was not one, singular childhood in socialist Czechoslovakia, but many and diverse, plural, childhoods. Spanning over 40 years (1948–1989)[1], the Czechoslovak communist governance produced diverse conceptualisations of childhoods that remain often invisible, unexplored, and the current analyses are at best sketchy and refer mostly to pedagogical nuances of strong ideological pedagogical struggles. One way to explore such an abundance of historical data in a short journal article is to utilise a somewhat personal narrative of a child. This dialogic approach allows the strong presence of the voice of a child, re-told from an adult's perspective, and it methodologically justifies an approach to thinking and theorising of socialist childhoods through Vaclav Havel's (1985; 1989; 1990) theoretical thinking that has been utilised in philosophy of education previously (see Tesar, 2015e). There are also other examples of complex and thorough analyses of socialist childhoods in other countries (see for example Aydarova et al, 2016), and

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czechoslovak_Socialist_Republic

theoretical thinking about the socialist child as a foreigner to its own land, can be done through Kristeva's lens (Arndt, 2015).

Childhoods in communist Czechoslovakia might be positioned in a time and space of mutual surveillance of all citizens, in public and private spaces. While children and their childhoods were governed by a strong ideology that aimed to shape children subjects' positions, this may lead to sweeping statements and assumptions when compared to childhoods in Western countries. For example, that these children must have been painful, dull and boring, and perhaps sad. There are obvious differences from Western childhoods, such as being indoctrinated by political figures such as Stalin (in the 1950s), Lenin and other political figures, and knowledge about the Communist Party incorporated into their daily lives (Vancura, 1999). However, there is strong evidence that children in communist Czechoslovakia enjoyed their childhoods, and loved the stories that shaped them[2]. Their experiences were perhaps similar to how children experienced their mundane and everyday childhoods in Western countries, albeit through and under the different ideological governance (Tesar, 2014c).

Children in communist Czechoslovakia, perhaps unlike the adults, did not have to whisper while talking about their desires. However, they did have to carefully navigate their bodies and minds as they moved to spaces outside the reach of adults, to share their thoughts and childhood secrets. Such emergence of childhood places and spaces occur across cultures and ideologies, when children produce their own cultures, share their own secrets, and produce what can be referred to as their childhood undergrounds (Knapp & Knapp, 1976; Van Manen & Levering, 1996; Tesar, 2014b). In these times, such uncontrollable and unpredictable children's cultures had the unintended consequence of demonstrating and performing very noticeable cracks that children could create in a system that produced, on the surface, an ideologically smooth unity of all citizens. It is here that these 'childish' subcultures cracked the veneer of the dominant 'adult' culture, offering a space of resistance that could potentially reach beyond their childhoods, as demonstrated in this article[3].

What was prevalent in those times was how citizens of Czechoslovakia excluded themselves from public life to perform their subject positions in private. This could have been perceived as a direct 'opting out' of public participation, and therefore withdrawing into what could be called a private life. For children such an act would reduce the need for interventions by government agencies and educational institutions into their lives. On the surface, this idea seems to portray a less complicated time, where citizens of the state could retreat into the private sphere to ignore so-called socialist political, educational and cultural developments. However, on the other hand, this was a time in which citizens did not know who to trust and who not to talk to. Citizens thus lived 'double lives', one public and one private (see Wertsch, 2002). In the 1970s and 1980s, government agencies allowed, and in a certain sense encouraged, citizens to have public and private identities, tolerating complaints and discontent as long as these remained hidden in the privacy of weekend homes and non-political interest groups and did not become public. In this article these yet unexplored aspects of the production of childhood ideologies and thinking, are uncovered, discussed and conceptualised as childhoods at the intersections of power and ideology.

The power of Childhoods

At the outset of the argument, it is important to highlight the theoretical framework underlying such complex thinking about childhoods as outlined in the prior section. This will then be explored through

[2] For interesting example, see see the article by Ana Marjanovic-Shane in this special issue

[3] Examples do not refer to the extreme organized groups, but to everyday occurances, for example hiding of a Western toy or magazine out of the adults' gaze, and sharing and experiencing this event with a peer group

presentation and analysis of the author's personal diaries and reflections of his childhood experiences in communist Czechoslovakia.

While the thinker, reluctant philosopher, and playwright, Vaclav Havel[4] (1936-2011) did not directly talk about childhoods and education per se, his conceptual thinking has a lot to offer this current positioning (Tesar, 2015b). Havel's (1985) seminal text *Power of the Powerless* discusses power relations, and argues that during the Stalinist period in the 1950s, citizens of Czechoslovakia were governed by what could be perceived as an extreme, brutal, life-threatening, somatic power, that would position all citizens to questioning and thinking about their ability to pursue ideas in relation to their survival. According to Havel, power was centralised by clear force – by the police and military departments of the government, and other power-bearing institutions, towards citizens. In an understanding of a traditional totalitarian society, this was recognisable as something akin to a dictatorship. A somewhat different structure became prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s, after the crush of the Prague spring in the late 1960s. Havel argues that there was a shift in the governance of citizens, from pure and sheer censorship by government institutions, towards a self-censored, re-created and re-invented culture and society, where governing structures lost the need, and partly also the resources, to exercise total governance over all citizens in Czechoslovakia.

What Havel (1985) argues is that society could not be divided merely into those with power and those without, but that power was distributed amongst all citizens, including students and children, as participants in the production of the 'new' communist system, that became reliant on the self-governance of citizens. In such a space, the lines of power became very much non-linear and not necessarily represented by the 'level of power' of groups of citizens, but by each and every citizen who was (knowingly or unknowingly) "both a victim and a supporter of the system" (p. 37) at the same time. It has been argued elsewhere that apart from victims and supporters, all citizens, including children, are (knowingly or unknowingly), according to Tesar (2015c), also rebels of the system (Tesar, 2015c). However, this era represented new relationships between citizens and the government agencies, and the social conditions that all citizens - and children - became subjected to.

What did these childhoods look like under such a strong ideological governance? Children in this era, as part of the public life, were actively involved in learning and reciting poems about political and revolutionary figures like Lenin, listening to the official ideological stories from children's magazines like *Little Bee,* as read by their teachers, and making sense of the illustrations and images that were published and distributed to them. Schools and kindergartens practiced and performed mass exercises called Spartakiad[5] for parents and local communist leaders, and drew and created ideologically driven artwork based on the examples and ideas from the curriculum and teachers. Child subject positions were not easy to govern through these statements in public stories and illustrations. For children, there were far too many colourful Western toys to desire and dream that their parents might be able to acquire for them under specific conditions. Western toys were only available in special stores called 'Tuzex', the only place to buy Lego, Matchbox cars, and Barbies; but only for the children whose parents were allowed to travel to the West. These citizens were required to return all their remaining Western currency back to the state upon their return to Czechoslovakia, as it was not allowed to possess foreign currency. In exchange they received a pretend currency, *bony*, that was valid only in these Tuzex stores, which specialised in such Western goods (Samizdat newspaper, 1989a, 1989b). Citizens and childhoods were governed by the desires for these Western products. In this way, public loyalty to the system was maintained through the promise of materialist advantages and desires. However, this also created a black market within society, which

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A1clav_Havel
[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spartakiad

occurred under the veil of darkness in the passages where speculators secretly sold *bony*, and 'ordinary' citizens could buy the desired goods, for themselves, and for their children (Ash, 1991).

Metaphor, Power and Childhoods

Havel's (1985) work provides us with conceptual insights into communist childhoods in Czechoslovakia. His metaphorical story of a fictitious Greengrocer is central to his analysis of power relations in an ideological setting. The Greengrocer's tale is a narrative of the ordinary, mundane and everyday life experiences of a shopkeeper, who runs a fruit and vegetable store, which Havel uses to demonstrate the complex nature of power relations in a society. The Greengrocer represents the citizen in an ideological setting, who displays a sign proclaiming 'Workers of the world unite', in the window of his shop whenever he is asked to do so. For Havel, this act of placing the sign means that the Greengrocer officially, publicly declares that he accepts the contemporary ideology and its governing system, and that he is ready to live in harmony with it and its structures. There is nothing simple about this act. Havel (1985) argues that this is the message that the greengrocer conveys as he displays the sign: "I, the greengrocer XY, live here, and I know what I must do. I behave in the manner expected of me. I can be depended upon and am beyond reproach. I am obedient and therefore I have the right to be left in peace" (p. 28).

So when the Greengrocer displays the sign, he acts as if he accepts the meaning of the slogan 'Workers of the world unite'. For Havel, the meaning of the Greengrocer's actions lies not in the slogan but in the performative aspect of responding to the request and placing the slogan into the window of his fruit and vegetable shop. This act carries a different message than the semantics of the slogan itself. As the Greengrocer displays the sign, the message conveyed to all citizens and children walking past his store is: 'I am just like you, I play my part in the system, I displayed the sign in my shop just as all of you have done your little parts. You cannot badmouth me, you cannot tell on me, and informers have nothing on me. I am supporting the system, and my public record is clean. My managers know that I have fulfilled my part and that I have obeyed the order.' This is what power means for all citizens in the ideologically governed society.

In this sense, the simple semantics of the slogan that the Greengrocer was actually asked to display allow him to think to himself: 'there is nothing bad, unusual or wrong with the workers from all around the world getting together and uniting'. So as Havel (1985) states, the slogan supports the Greengrocer in

> concealing from himself the low foundations of his obedience, at the same time concealing the low foundations of power. It hides them behind the facade of something high. And that something is ideology … It offers human beings the illusion of an identity, of dignity, and of morality while making it easier for them to part with them (p. 28).

Havel's argument could be conceptualised and interpreted as such that citizens and children living their everyday, mundane, ordinary lives are central to any power relations in the society. As such, everybody is part of the system, even if citizens are on the fringes of the society (and traditional conceptions of power), and are thus often seen and portrayed by these models of power as powerless (Havel, 1985). However, for Havel, all citizens are the victims and the pillars of the system, as they struggle with and at the same time support the ideological governance of the society. And that is regardless of whether they are powerful, or powerless, in the traditional sense of power.

As such, this ideological governance, and system is embedded within the Greengrocer's life – and it can be any subject – whether an adult, or a child. While the Greengrocer's private life grows into what can be perceived as a multiplicity, a diversification – realised through him reaching out for his interests, ideas and friendships, he also very much self-governs himself within acceptable levels of freedom and independence. His private life is outside of the public perception, that ultimately demands and requests from him particular subject positionings. These positionings demand particular discursive positions, that include the self-disciplining subject that can follow orders, and that is ready to conform to other citizens, and can uphold similar, if not the same, ideals as others. The Greengrocer thus must publicly demonstrate that he is united with other citizens, if he really wants to quietly live his private life Havel notes the difference between private and public subject positionings, as citizens separated by a deep abyss, where the purpose of life is to "create new and 'improbable' structures where … the system contrives to force life into its most probable states" (Havel, 1985, p. 29).

The concern is 'what if any other performances of the subject creates a crack in the system – panorama of everyday life?' So, the Greengrocer must be punished if he challenges the everyday panorama, and it is expected that the system must react to such a 'crack' within it. The other citizens must punish the Greengrocer, to display their own public loyalty with the system through 'fixing' this 'crack': "… the power structure, through the agency of those who carry out the sanctions, those anonymous components of the system, will spew the greengrocer from its mouth" (p. 39).

The boundaries between who is in power and who is not are thus shattered and exposed. Shore (1996) calls it "the collapsing of the traditional dichotomy between victim and oppressor" (p. 164). She uses as an example, a scene from Kundera's novel *Joke*, where a young communist is judged for making a statement against the system that he allegedly meant as a joke. Kundera analyses the transformation of the subjectivity of the young communist, from a victim of crime to being a judge. The young communist comes to understand that the way he operates in the system is that he is, as a victim of the system, in the same position as the judges. He is under the influence of the system, he is oppressed by the system, and so are the judges. He realizes that he would do the same, and pass the same sentence on himself, if he were the judge. The boundaries between who is judging and who is accused dissolve, as the self-governance of the person makes him realize that the system needs him to act upon his own behaviour, no matter how insignificant, to maintain the panorama of the everyday public life. It is no longer clear who is the oppressor and who is oppressed (Tesar, 2014c).

The Greengrocer's grandchildren

These conceptions of the Greengrocer as a subject of power in the centre of ideological governance is relevant to children and their childhoods in communist Czechoslovakia. To illustrate the theoretical conceptions of citizens and their subject positionings, this article presents a number of the author's diary and reflective, previously written and unpublished narratives to illustrate Havel's points[6]. Looking back, this is a child growing up in Czechoslovakia, and seeing how his experience relates to the experience of the places and spaces of childhoods, and the complex relationships with his teachers:

> I grew up in a city of grey, faded colours. That is how I remember my childhood in the late 1970s and 1980s in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Around me were grey buildings, dark streets with fading streetlights, and children walking in bleached uniforms and red scarves. I still have a clear vision of propaganda statements printed on red banners, hanging from buildings and columns all around me in the city. A sea of Soviet Union flags flooded the city during celebrations. All children

[6] This is becoming an established way how to look at childhood and history – see recent work by I. Silova, Z. Millei, and N. Piattoeva (Silova, Aydarova, Millei, & Piattoeva, 2016; Silova, Piattoeva & Millei, 2018).

> wore identical clothes and played with the same toys and games. We children were supposed to be all equal, treated the same, and we were all expected to think in the same way about our homeland, but the notion of all the children being equal disappeared quite early for me. Our teachers wanted to know where we came from, who our parents were, and about our working-class heritage. The answers were important to the way we were perceived and treated by the teachers. "Are your parents of the working class?" was a common question teachers asked us. The answer determined what was entered on each child's file, which became an important document and character reference in a child's journey through the socialist education system. Children carried the weight of the history of their parents and families, and despite the happy, peaceful and colourful childhoods promised to us through the socialist education system, the substance of our educational futures was dark and gloomy.

Another reflective narrative relates to the early childhood space, and the reflection on the formation of subjectivities, in public and private discourses, and childhood underground as mentioned above:

> Kindergarten was a special place for me at the age of three. I learnt a lot about myself, others, and about my country. What I learnt and experienced in kindergarten was not practised at home. In kindergarten, our growing bodies were subjected to exercises that resembled military marches and gatherings, specific teacher-guided games were executed, particular songs were selected for us to learn and sing, and we performed certain children's plays and rhymes that we memorized and repeated. The curriculum was supported by a children's magazine, which was filled with stories about children who were, as we were often reminded, just like us, and with tales about how our childhood should look, and how children should behave. We were prepared by our teachers to accept our educational and childhood destinies, and like the children portrayed in children's magazines, to have happy, colourful childhoods and to be excited about the possibilities and potential of socialist society. It was a society where, as the Communist Party leaders proudly stated to citizens through its slogans, life and developments were so advanced that 'tomorrow already exists today'. No child could escape the production of political subjectivities in our education and childhoods.
>
> Apart from grey faded memories of childhood in my kindergarten, I also have fond recollections of a childhood in sunlight and nature. This involved being with my parents and their friends, far away and out of the reach of the educational structures, often outside of the city. I listened to and was read stories unlike anything I had heard in the kindergarten: dark, scary, uncertain tales shared by my grandmother and by other adults. They were unlike what teachers said in the classroom, which was often challenged, as were the stories published in the children's magazines. In this familiar, community environment, children like me were exposed to different kinds of books, read to us by family friends, with many adults listening too. These books looked and felt different, as they did not have colourful, hard copy binding, and I never saw them on a shelf in the classroom. I understood only later on that these stories were samizdat - dissident children's literature. These texts were often very lyrical and spiritual, and at other times very brutal and punitive. They were the only children's stories I remember adults listening to. I recall wondering why adults would want to hear them when they had their own stories that we children were not allowed to hear.
>
> I was also exposed to other narratives in my childhood – stories about other children and their childhoods. Where these other children lived was not far away, just across the border, in a land that we could see from the top of a hill, but never visited. The tales about what the other children

played with, what stories and games they had outside of Czechoslovakia, were shared through whisperings in the kindergarten playground. One time, Mišo, our playground hero, brought an unfamiliar toy to kindergarten and those who were part of his 'circle of friends' were allowed to touch it and play with it. The toy, as we learnt, was based on a Western TV cartoon character. Mišo did not trust everyone to see it, especially not the teachers. He understood that not everyone should be allowed to know about this special toy, particularly not those children who were ready to report any kind of argument or fight between children to our teachers. We never learnt how Mišo had gained the toy, but it was the most exciting toy I had ever seen, and because he had it in his possession, Mišo secured his exulted position amongst the children. His best friends were even allowed to take it home, but such events needed to remain secret, and to stay between the children. No teachers or other adults were allowed to know. These were my first experiences of a childhood underground, of young citizens managing to resist a public discourse that was openly guiding us towards expected educational futures.

The formation of public subject positions was part of a conceptual framework:

When I was in kindergarten, I knew that I would become a Little Spark, and that this would prepare me to become a member of the Pioneer organisation when I was older. Little Sparks were the youngest members of the ideological youth organisation that each child was expected to join. We had uniforms but lacked the badge and red scarves they would get as Pioneers[7] once they pledged their devotion to the Communist Party and socialist homeland. Little Bee, the kindergarten magazine for children, emphasized that I would become a faithful Pioneer in the school system, someone who supports and trusts the Communist Party, a child whose childhood is devoted to the collective work for the benefit of the country, a child that helps to guard our borders against enemies coming from the West. Also, while the magazine Little Bee was widely distributed to kindergartens, it was not the only literature available to me as a child.

Other magazines and literature for children also provided endless opportunities for promoting a desire for other childhoods. The everyday mundane tensions between the hegemonic discourse by official children's literature in the communist Czechoslovakia, such as *Little Bee*, and other resistant discourses, such as the dissident literature as further highlighted below, related to the subversive nature of childhoods. These alternative and 'forbidden' discourses offered seductive glimpses of subjective formations, where apart from the unofficial literature, the signal of foreign Television channels from the West also infiltrated and challenged the official, public sphere, and the 'right' kinds of childhoods considered appropriate for socialist Czechoslovakia (Tesar, 2015d). While it may seem that this article is focused on the simple indoctrination and propaganda that produced childhoods and childhood subjectivities, it also emphasizes the power inherent in these official stories. Power also is at the centre of Giugni's (2006) argument, about how "children use dominant cultural storylines such as goodies and baddies as a vehicle to produce their identities" (p. 97). Children are active in this process, and as I argue in this research "children are savvy power brokers; they are political and moral agents" (Giugni, 2006, p. 106). As another narrative documents:

In my childhood, resistant discourses were not only presented through foreign radio stations, Western TV programmes, or the French children's magazine Pif, but also through my Grandmother. My Grandmother was a great storyteller. She had white hair, a distinctive voice, and witty tales to tell. She read and narrated stories to me that I would never have heard at kindergarten

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_Organization_of_the_Socialist_Youth_Union

or school. My Grandmother's stories created the multi-layered themes that crossed boundaries between countries, ideologies, race and even realities. The truth was not considered in my Grandmother's stories, as the focus was on the story itself, the context and the layers that appeared as the narrative unfolded. The importance was on the characters' actions, and then on how they dealt with the consequences of their behaviours. My Grandmother's stories contributed to the production of the resistant discourse of my childhood, perhaps in a similar way to how other grandparents, uncles and aunties challenge dominant ideologies of education with other children through the tales they told. Whilst the official stories from the magazine Little Bee engaged me in thinking about who I was, and how I was progressing at kindergarten and school, my Grandmother's stories in my childhood were like a safe haven from the ideologically charged texts that were being publically shared with me.

As argued above, children's observations and narratives are the embodiment of Havel's theories:

> I look back at my childhood as a time and space of mutual surveillance. Every citizen watched over or out for another citizen. There was so much distrust in another human being, neighbour, friend. People were scared to look directly at each other. On the streets, or in homes, during the warm summer evenings when all windows were wide open, adults whispered and used quiet voices, as they were worried that they could be heard and that their private lives would be exposed to public scrutiny or judgement, and that this would lead to repercussions. No one knew how many other people listened in on their telephone conversations. Citizens stopped reading Czechoslovak newspapers or watching official TV news, as the same stories were presented over and over. The same tales were broadcast on TV, and school libraries held only a limited supply of books, by the same authors, from the same publishing houses.

The complex relationships with discourse outside of the main framework also shaped the children's perspective on power and painful understandings of the discrepancies between the educational discourse and lived reality:

> Outside of educational settings I also experienced the power of the totalitarian system and how it could impact upon a child. One of the encounters with the technologies of the post- totalitarian government that is deeply embedded in me, was when my family got permission to leave the country for a two-week holiday in the early 1980s to experience the ocean in socialist Yugoslavia[8]. My family was allowed to leave the country as a result of my brother's and my own respiratory problems that were deliberately exaggerated by sympathetic doctors, who recommended that a stay by the ocean would be beneficial for our health. Without this recommendation, getting an exit visa from Czechoslovakia was nearly impossible. It was my first visit to Yugoslavia and the first time I was to see the ocean, as Czechoslovakia is a landlocked country. Driving in the car to the borders, I was thinking of the stories we children shared in the kindergarten and school about the ocean - how it looks, how it feels, how it tastes and what games can be played in it. However, as we were crossing the borders, the special unit of the Czechoslovak border patrol intercepted us and searched our car, our luggage, and us. They took apart the entire car, our suitcases, everything. The moment I have never forgotten was when they took my little plastic children's suitcase, in which I had toys and

[8] In contrast to Socialist Cseckoslovakia, Socialist Yugoslavia was not a part of the Soviet block and was a member of non-allied Third World. In the early 1980s, Socialist Yugoslavia enjoyed many political and economic freedoms that were not available to the countries of the Soviet block (see the article by Ana Marjanovic-Shane in this special issue).

> various little items that I treasured. The woman who took my plastic suitcase was tall, with short blond hair and a green uniform. She got hold of my suitcase despite me not wanting to let it go from my hands. She grabbed it, opened it, and turned it upside down. The toys fell on the examination table and subsequently on the ground. Some of them broke, and some others were taken apart by the examiners. I have never forgotten this moment. I became scared of the person whom I was taught in stories from Little Bee that I should trust.

Citizens lived double lives, one public and one private. In that time, thousands of active participants in the Prague Spring signed collaborations with the secret police and became undercover informers in exchange for social security, comforts and goods. These informers were sometimes neighbors and friends. Everybody could have been somebody not to be trusted. Citizens became reclusive, and escaped more and more into nature and the mountains and the private domain of life (Bren, 2002). The government agencies allowed citizens to have public and private identities, tolerating complaints and discontent as long as they remained hidden and did not become public. Citizens were scared of hidden microphones and cameras, and every question by a stranger was taken as a test. As the Iron Curtain was lifted in 1989 during the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia[9], archives were partly opened and names of collaborators with the system were publicised. Citizens found out the names of their family relatives, friends, neighbors and colleagues who had been informing on them for years. At the same time, the information obtained from these institutions may not necessarily carry the truth that people search for in their quest for understanding the past.

Secrets of Totalitarian Childhoods

The stories of childhoods, perceived through different lenses, provide an interesting opening into the secrets of totalitarian childhoods. Such a lens is offered, for example, through subversive children's literature. The philosopher Egon Bondy wrote children's samizdat – self-published and distributed – stories, that were popular with adults as well. Bondy's stories were originally written as private stories in response to a request from his friend Lopatka and his children, who wanted him to write fairy tales. His stories often referred to the Lopatka children, who became central characters. The Lopatka family lived in the same block of flats in Prague as Bondy, above the pub where he spent a lot of time. Bondy's stories were dark and scary, with such characters as a Dog-eater, the Secret Police Officer, Death and the Cursed School Manager. They were published in 1976 in the samizdat edition as *The True Horror Stories for the Lopatka girls on Three Kings*, and consisted of 15 short stories. These stories were very popular amongst dissidents, as they contested the hegemonic discourse of children's education, through the themes, topics, characters and morals they depicted.

The stories from Bondy's samizdat challenge the traditional roles of the children, adults and fairy-tale creatures that children experienced in the stories encountered in educational institutions. In the story *Sleeping monster*, for example, Bondy (1995) describes the life of a creature that sleeps all day and wakes up just before midnight, looking for anyone who is still up. The sleeping monster hangs on to that person and does not let her or him get up from their chair to go to bed. The story states that "once such a sleeping monster caught Bondy a long time ago, and flies after him wherever he moves" (p. 31). Bondy claims that the only way to resist this monster is to drink either beer or sparkling water. In the story Bondy explains to the children that this is why he drinks so much beer, as he cannot drink sparkling water due to his health condition. The metaphorical layer of this story is that the sleeping monster hanging over the person can be interpreted as the ideological context with its ever-present agencies such as the secret police, and that this leads to a lot of alcohol being consumed as a coping mechanism. For decades, the government agencies

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Velvet_Revolution

suggested to children through the official stories that citizens with long hair who smoke and drink alcohol are potential supporters of the West and are enemies of progress and of peace (Blažek & Pospíšil, 2010). So, through stories such as Bondy's tales, children were able to form new experiences of themselves and of the world around them.

In another story *Pub Secret Police Officer* Bondy describes the main character, the secret police officer, as "the most common scary creature in our country" (Bondy, 1995, p. 20). A ghost floats right under the ceiling in the pubs, hidden in the smoke, and his job is "catching the words" (p. 16). The secret police officer floats around the ceiling as "words are lighter than air" (p. 20), however he has regular hiccups as he busily catches the words because he "does not have time to drink a beer" (p. 20). Children who were exposed to stories about such topics as a policeman listening to what people said in public, were presented with different narratives than those in the literature used in kindergartens and schools.

Perhaps the most intriguing and subversive story in Bondy's samizdat is the tale about Lopatka's children's school education. Whilst in the public discourse school was celebrated as a place where children learnt from teachers, in Bondy's story children at school had their tummies sliced with a knife and filled with useless information. Indoctrinated children were then sent home, to become the agents of ideology, and this ritual was repeated each day while at school. Bondy in this story exposes the ideological nature of education to young children in such a way that was subversive to the public communist education discourse, and these stories became the children's secret education.

The children in the 1970s and 1980s who were read these stories were children of the generation of the Prague Spring of 1968. Their parents had often been students in 1968, who resisted the Soviet invasion that crushed the Prague Spring, whose friends were killed, and walked the country's streets with blood stained flags. As these children became high school and university students, they were the ones who marched the streets of Prague and demanded democracy, and they sparked the so-called Velvet Revolution in 1989. Children in the 1970s and 1980s, who were young people by the end of the 1980s, demanded changes in society and challenged the dominant ideology and oppressive regime, partly perhaps because of their secret education. Perhaps it was the education that occurred in private spaces, not in public, that allowed these children to grow into young people who understood, and felt, social justice, fairness and freedom, as captured in some narratives (Taylor, 2009).

Children were faced with childhoods through texts and poems that dealt with other children's experiences, shaping their childhoods. One such narrative is the story *When I grow up*, which was published under a banner that states 'Hooray to the XV Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia!', in the magazine Little Bee. In it a little girl proclaims: "I'll be wise, I'll be brave and there is a lot of work in our country" (Little Bee, 1976a, p. 7), as she promises to produce a new society through positive attitudes towards work. Similarly, the article *Greetings to the Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* claims that all advancements were produced and built under and by the Communist government, so that happy childhoods could exist and prevail. *Little Bee* portrayed how the children publicly supported the Congress with songs, and with the unity of all, portraying children "running together with dad, mum and the whole homeland" (Little Bee, 1976b, p. 4). The illustrations show happy children running on the grass with colourful flowers, alongside the smiling sun and the factory chimney as symbols of progress, work and happiness. So whilst the Congress cared about childhoods, it also expected, and needed, a certain subjectification from children in return. The political childhood subjectivities, as produced in this public discourse, are portrayed as responsible, hardworking learners, who developed and cared about their relationship with their country, and who gladly followed a predetermined path to become Little Sparks and Pioneers (Tesar, 2015a).

Concluding comments

This article illustrates the complexity of socialist childhoods in Czechoslovakia. Torn between the private and public discourse, represented by official and dissident literature, and supported by a child's voice, there can be no one representation, or singular experience or memory of childhood in these times. The idea of desires, and subjective experiences that challenges the monolithic conception of one socialist childhood, is presented through the narratives that describe particular children's experiences. Havel's framework exemplifies the dominant force that drives the theorization of such conditions, where multitudes of childhoods are produced. Childhoods in communist Czechoslovakia were governed by a strong ideology. However, as Havel's work outlines, the very strength of the ideological governance produced, enabled and also hid multiple subject positions and subjectivities of socialist childhoods.

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