Remembering Desirable Futures? Civil Defence Memories and Everyday Life in Sweden and the UK

Marie Cronqvist and Matthew Grant

How do you write the history of people trying to remember how they imagined desirable or undesirable futures? Analysing civil defence as an imaginary involves conceptualising civil defence as a technology, but it also reminds us of the fact that civil defence was above all a way of mapping out a future for states, societies and individuals. As a future-oriented activity—mapping out and rehearsing the future in the present—it was at the same time abstract and firmly rooted in space and time. When people are looking back at their own experiences of Cold War civil defence from the vantage point of the 2000s, a layer of complexity is added because the act of remembering the future is removed, at least in part, from its anchorage in material experience. We now know that the

M. Cronqvist (✉)

Department of Communication and Media, Lund University, Lund, Sweden
e-mail: marie.cronqvist@kom.lu.se

M. Grant

Department of History, University of Essex, Colchester, UK

undesirable future of nuclear war never happened—at least not within the time frame that in the history books is called ‘the Cold War’.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff and Kim 2015) can be used to examine civil defence as remembered. The main focus will not be the memory work of civil defence museums or monuments, but instead oral histories testifying to the entanglement of civil defence in everyday life. Is civil defence viewed as having continued validity, or as essentially defunct as a technology? Can we identify major shifts between how civil defence was experienced during the Cold War and how it is remembered afterwards, and can we use the concepts of extension, embedding or resistance to unpack these possible shifts?

The chapter employs a historical ethnography approach, using primarily oral history sources such as interviews and questionnaires collected between 2006 and 2012 with examples from Sweden and the UK. We will use three lenses or themes in order to discuss the memory work of civil defence: *localities*, *temporalities* and *mediations*. Our approach, contrasted with much scholarship on sociotechnical imaginaries, thus attempts a more ‘bottom-up’ perspective. We aim to provide a refined understanding of *how* civil defence enters memory as a ‘collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed’ vision of a desirable future ‘animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology’ (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 4).

SOCIOTECHNICAL IMAGINARIES AND CIVIL DEFENCE MEMORIES

We believe the sociotechnical imaginaries framework could also be employed when exploring civil defence and everyday life, but any attempt to do this needs to address two potential problems. First, it seems to conceptualise cultural and social change teleologically: technologies are first imagined and then become material. It is a framework, after all, which seeks to explain how technology is understood and circulated by societies and cultures. Secondly, there seems to be a reliance on top-down readings of how technologies are created, circulated and understood: technologies are imagined and circulated by experts and taken up by others within ‘culture’. These two potential problems may, however, best be described as

a tendency in scholarly works that have so far engaged with the framework. As an overarching theory, we argue that the framework *does* leave space for deeper, less clearly defined ways of understanding the cultural and social uptake of the imaginaries discussed. In particular, the phases of *embedding*, *extension* and *resistance* (see Introduction, this volume) can all be seen as contestable spaces in which meanings are made and remade from below.

A focus on memory allows us to explore how sociotechnical imaginaries can be usefully deployed to interpret everyday understandings of civil defence in ways which nuance the two problems discussed above. As Sheila Jasanoff herself puts it, ‘memory work’ allows ‘novel technoscientific constructs to be most readily naturalised when they fall into line with the way things are remembered as being’ (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 339). At a basic level, people’s memories always tend to diverge from any attempt to create neat paths or narratives within the civil defence sociotechnical imaginary. Everyday understandings of civil defence were confused, partial and often idiosyncratic—and so are the memories. This reflects the central, inescapably imaginary nature of civil defence. Civil defence as a *technology* relied on a sense that an imaginable future could be tackled, (hopefully) mastered or (at worst) ameliorated. The nature of the disaster to be tackled, the assumptions about destruction, about human behaviour in the post-attack period, all had to be *imagined* and were so using historical assumptions, culturally informed ideas and insights from the social and psychological sciences.

In rethinking and challenging the problematic teleologies of civil defence sociotechnical imaginaries, we must stress that imaginary scenarios were inflicted by, and mapped onto, the *material* world—the physical geography and built environment—and the materiality of the concrete civil defence technologies that were often only partly visible (physical preparations, bunkers and so on). Jasanoff argues that the proposed framework helps resolve the binary of ‘ideas’ and the ‘material’, but examining civil defence memory highlights that this is not a binary at all, that within memory work the *imaginary* and *material* are always linked, and are indeed mutually constitutive to the process of making meaning. It is particularly important to nuance the framework in this way because it allows us to understand the circular, symbiotic nature of the imaginary and the material. Jasanoff herself makes it clear that the very idea of sociotechnical imaginaries was to examine how ideas became a reality within ‘cultures, institutions, and materialities’. At times,

however, the process can appear rather lineal (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 322–323). The *imaginary* nature of civil defence, and the nature of memory work, means that any linear understanding of the process by which the imaginary is translated into ‘cultures, institutions, and materialities’ is highly problematic. That work of imagination was continual, embedded in memory work and formed alongside interactions with and understandings of the material. It was ‘always already at work in the work’, as Jacques Derrida reminds us in a much-cited quote (Derrida 1986: 71).

One way to think about civil defence and to problematise processes laid out in the sociotechnical imaginaries framework is thus to keep in mind the essential ‘fuzziness’ of everyday life. Real-life situations are always ambiguous, and people make meaning from their different situations in a variety of different ways depending on identity, social position and cultural experience. In this chapter, we have therefore chosen to highlight this complexity by comparing different national, regional and local contexts. The differences arising out of the empirical material are differences both between and within Sweden and the UK. Memory work has the tendency to sort out and (re)narrativise fuzziness, and the process of recounting memory serves to make order out of chaos, creating new (or alternative) frames of interpretation and creating whole new areas of ambiguity.

Historians have long argued that the circulation of dominant cultural discourses within popular culture in the years between the events remembered and the act of remembering shapes individual memory (Abrams 2010; Assman 2011; Confino 1997). Individual memory, therefore, cannot be entirely separated from the narratives circulating within popular culture either at the time of the events experienced or in the time separating those events and the interview encounter in which they are recalled. Scholars working on ‘popular memory’ have long argued that individual memory is indelibly shaped by intervening cultural narratives (Dawson 1994), arguing that for memory to be formed, retained and recalled, the ‘conditions for its expression’ need to exist (Passerini 2003: 238). ‘Popular memory’ can be defined as an attempt to understand how cultural discourses shape the content and form of what is recalled by individuals, the meanings individuals attach to their own memories and the emotions these memories provoke in them (Dawson 1994). As Penny Summerfield puts it, individuals make sense of their experiences by drawing on:

generalized, public versions of the aspects of the lives that they are talking about to construct their own particular, personal accounts. This process of life-story telling is crucial to the construction of the subject – in reproducing the self as a social identity, we necessarily draw upon public renderings. (Summerfield 2004: 68)

If no relevant cultural framework is readily available, individual memory breaks down into narrative incoherence or a lack of remembering. Summerfield's popular memory approach is particularly important for understanding the interrelationship between cultural narratives and individual life circumstances (Summerfield 1998).

Our work maintains the position that people remain agents and are not empty vessels awaiting cultural discourse to pour meaning into their minds. Our comparative analysis illustrates different levels of 'fuzziness' of civil defence memory, and of course the intensely *political* nature of civil defence merely added to this complexity. Our case studies highlight that civil defence memory work perhaps reveals more about acts of defiance or forgetting, conflicts and contradictions than it does about any 'collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed' vision (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 4). Perhaps one way of thinking about the fuzziness of everyday civil defence, and the difficulty in reconstructing the meaning civil defence had during the Cold War, is to examine the emotional dimensions of the topic. Civil defence could be seen as a technology aimed at emotional regulation, an attempt to contain and manage *fear* and to encourage a more intellectual acceptance of *security*. The use of civil defence as a regulatory, or governmental, technology aligns with what William Reddy discussed as the 'emotional regime', the prevailing norm about how to 'feel'. Reddy defined the emotional regime as '[t]he set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and 'emotives' that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime' (Reddy 2001: 129). As such, the concept of emotional regime reminds us of a sociotechnical imaginary, meaning a largely top-down structure. It also reminds us of the approach in some previous influential studies on civil defence, such as Guy Oakes' study on what he calls the 'emotional management' of American civil defence drills (Oakes 2004).

More fruitful for the perspective in this chapter, then, is perhaps Reddy's idea of 'emotional navigation', signifying the process whereby people navigate and negotiate their everyday lives (Reddy 2001). The

multiple experiences of civil defence can be seen as processes not only of collective emotional navigation through the attempt made by national civil defence cultures to impose an ‘emotional regime’ on people but also of individual emotional navigation through the complex emotions that confronting civil defence would have thrown up. Concepts such as Reddy’s ‘emotional navigation’ might then be more in line with the sort of bottom-up approach that is needed to fully round out the sociotechnical imaginaries framework. Moreover, emotion, like memory and civil defence, was not a purely individual matter, and within groups involved in civil defence, Barbara H. Rosenwein’s idea of ‘emotional communities’ is equally useful for this reason, as it reminds us not only of the social role of civil defence but also of the possible co-existence of various emotional communities encompassing the whole scale of reactions to civil defence, from enthusiasm, acceptance and obedience to criticism and active resistance (Rosenwein 2006).

CIVIL DEFENCE MEMORIES IN SWEDEN AND THE UK

In what follows, we will try to anchor this theoretical discussion in civil defence memories from two different national contexts, Sweden and the UK. The Swedish material consists of written responses to a questionnaire on memories of the Cold War, collected in 2006 by the Folklife Archives with the Scania Music Collections at Lund University in collaboration with Marie Cronqvist. The questionnaire generated approximately 80 responses evenly distributed over generation, gender, social class and geography (though mostly from southern Sweden). Since everyday civil defence culture was at the core of the underlying research project, the questionnaire had a special section devoted to memories of civil defence.¹

The British material emanates from an oral history project conducted by Matthew Grant and Lindsey Dodd between 2010 and 2012 with people who had served in the Civil Defence Services in various capacities during the 1950s and 1960s (Grant 2019). In-depth interviews with eleven participants, either on their own or in small groups, were conducted. There were seven men and four women who had been mainly younger recruits who served in the late 1950s and 1960s. As members of the Civil Defence Corps, the Auxiliary Fire Service and administrative staff employed by a local council, they provided a mixture of experiences from within civil defence. The semi-structured interview schedule asked them to reflect on their reasons for joining civil defence, their experiences

within the organisation, their thoughts about the role of civil defence in a war and why they left the service. A central part of the interview was about the ability of civil defence to save lives in a nuclear war. Therefore, we get a sense of how they imagined civil defence as a *technology* even though they did not use the term.

Using these two studies, we examine the memories of civil defence in order to better address the relationship between the imaginary nature of civil defence and the ‘cultures, institutions and materiality’ that made up civil defence as a political and administrative project. In what follows, we focus on three cross-cutting themes that usefully highlight not only the interplay between imaginary and material and between representation and experience but also the highly differentiated ways the ‘technology’ of civil defence can be viewed when looked at from different perspectives. These themes are localities, temporalities and mediations.

LOCALITIES

Much work on sociotechnical imaginaries takes on an explicitly national-historical framework. Ulrike Felt argues that the concept:

sensitizes us to how profoundly technologies are entangled with national technopolitical cultures [...] and how the (non-)development of specific technoscientific projects, on the one hand, and imagined preferred ways of living, value structures, and social order, on the other, are mutually constitutive. (Felt 2015: 104)

Felt focused on the peculiarly *national* response of Austria to new technology, but we can extend her insight both to a comparative dimension and to the wide range of various local contexts within nations. Civil defence, we can see, was understood differently within these local contexts, and our comparative national dimension makes this distinction all the sharper.

A clear pattern emerging from the answers in the Swedish questionnaire is the radically different experiences in rural areas compared to urban ones. Living in the sparsely populated countryside was still the reality for the absolute majority of Swedes in the 1950s and 1960s. ‘You have to remember I lived in the countryside and I had no part in those things’, says one woman, born on the Swedish west coast in the 1930s.²

Other informants also specifically address the lack of civil defence memories and experiences, referring explicitly to their rural upbringing. Nor did the much-discussed civil defence leaflet *Om kriget kommer: Vägledning för Sveriges medborgare* ('If the war comes: Instructions for Swedish citizens'), distributed to all households in Sweden in 1943, 1952 and 1961 (Cronqvist 2012), leave a trace. 'I have no recollections of total defence, shelters or evacuation rehearsals, and no memories of a civil defence leaflet', the same woman writes. The leaflet seems to have disappeared in the daily recycling of paper at the farm, as toilet paper in the outhouse or as material for lightning the fire. In fact, even the Cold War as a time period and concept seems to be quite vague with these informants. These rural postwar experiences indicate that maybe even the Cold War itself was considered an urban phenomenon.

In Sweden's more densely populated areas, the situation seems to have been very different. A typical answer here is the very detailed information from Gertrud, born in the city of Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city: 'We had public shelters in the apartment complex where I lived, and I was a member of the civil defence and had to go through exercises in how you take care of injured people or the mentally challenged'.³ Recollections from informants from later generations indicate similar experiences as parts of their everyday life. School evacuation drills were a common feature of being a child in Stockholm, Gothenburg or Malmö in the 1950s and 1960s, and the world's largest peacetime mass evacuation exercise involving a quarter of a million people was held in Stockholm in 1961. The construction of a series of mass public shelters for up to 10,000 people also defined the everyday cityscape in postwar urban Sweden (Cronqvist 2012, 2015).

The urban–rural divide was experienced very differently in the UK, mainly because civil defence was remarkably absent in urban centres for much of the Cold War (Grant 2011). There were no mass public shelters, and as the country was a central Cold War antagonist, it was perceived that, if war did come, British cities would simply be obliterated. This is perhaps the reason why voluntary civil defence struggled in British cities: a sense that it was fruitless. Real experiences of bombing during the Second World War could be one explanation, experiences that separate the UK from a country like neutral Sweden, which experienced no bombing at all. We can certainly see that urban civil defence became the focus of resistance to the idea that civil defence could work (the idea of civil defence as a technology, as it were). Opposition to civil defence focused

on the idea that it was worthless, and Nicholas Barnett has written about a tense encounter between civil defence volunteers and local protesters in Coventry in 1954 (Barnett 2015). The fact that British cities would be targeted, and that civil defence could not protect people, helped entrench resistance to civil defence and promote the idea that it was a somewhat ridiculous endeavour.

In rural areas, however, voluntary civil defence was in a much healthier state. We can see three reasons for this. First, the volunteers were not in immediate target areas and therefore would be more receptive to the argument that although volunteers would have no impact in urban centres, much would be possible at the perimeter of the zone of destruction. Second, it could be argued that people in rural areas had different ideas of community and neighbourliness, which made them more likely to volunteer. Or, conversely, there was less competition for the leisure time of these people than there was in cities. Third, rural areas were also more conservative and contained more people who would seek leisure satisfaction within a uniformed, quasi-military government-sponsored service. And they were governed by elected local politicians who were much more pro-civil defence than their left-wing counterparts in the city.

One interview story neatly illustrates this divide. Robert volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS) in Cardiff, the major urban centre of Wales and, with its docks and industry, an obvious target. When asked about the usefulness of civil defence, he replied:

People were talking about cities being obliterated and enormous fire storms and so on. And really, thinking back to it, the AFS wouldn't have been able to do very much. Not really. You could've contained the fire around the edge but there's no way you could've –⁴

At this point, Robert abruptly changed the subject, unwilling or unable to let his sentence reach this logical conclusion and admit the redundancy of civil defence. Instead, he went on to deliver a long and detailed anecdote about his AFS unit extinguishing a fire in Ludlow on the unit's way back from a training exercise. The story of defeating a barn fire allowed Robert to regain the composure lost when explaining the difficulties that the AFS would have faced in a nuclear war. It was a well-told story that had clearly been aired regularly. It also helped explain that the AFS was an effective organisation. After he had cast doubt on the usefulness of

the AFS in the context of nuclear war, Robert's story highlighted circumstances where it, and his own service within it, had been effective and worthwhile. Later in the interview, Robert was able to return to the issue of usefulness with more confidence, arguing that 'I think we felt, yes, that we would be able to help, maybe perhaps only on the periphery of something, but we did have the equipment'.⁵ Robert's Ludlow story might not be enough to convince critics of urban civil defence of its utility, but it allowed him to articulate that the voluntary services would have been of 'some' use by presenting a 'real-life' example of usefulness. This memory was a part of Robert's very positive experiences of civil defence. He concluded: '[W]e had a wonderful time. We were very late getting back to Cardiff but we, it was a great, a great Sunday'. In essence, civil defence in its rural setting was remembered positively as being active and manageable in a way urban civil defence could never be.

TEMPORALITIES

There are three interlinked aspects in the discussion of temporalities of civil defence memory in relation to the sociotechnical imaginaries framework: periodisation within the Cold War, a direct sense of being of a 'generation', and the unique impact the threat of nuclear war had on temporalities and the experience of time. Understandings of civil defence shifted over the course of the Cold War, as is to be expected. The interrelationship between the *technology* of civil defence and the political-military nature of the Cold War is vital to understanding the history of civil defence. Civil defence was viewed differently at different points in time, but it was also viewed differently depending on social class, gender and not least generation.

From the point of view of political history, whether the early fears were of a war fought with conventional weapons, atomic bombs or thermonuclear bombs, the civil defence imaginary had to adjust. Even in the thermonuclear era, civil defence was viewed differently in the 1960s, when 'mutually assured destruction' (MAD) was assumed, compared to the 1980s, when there were various debates about nuclear issues, including the possibilities of a 'limited war' and the prospect of a 'nuclear winter'. This changing *political* nature of the Cold War is key to understanding 'resistance' to civil defence. To put it simply, in the UK at least, there was increasing distance between what civil defence experts claimed the 'technology' could achieve (in terms of survival and protection) and what

people believed would be the case (Grant 2010; Stafford 2012), to the extent that the state largely retreated from engaging in public education initiatives after the early 1980s (Preston 2015).

Resistance to the civil defence imaginary, then, could come in multiple forms and must be viewed differently across different periods *within* the Cold War. At its most basic, it could come in the form of denial—conscious or unconscious. One informant answering the Swedish questionnaire misunderstood the entire question about the Cold War, and instead answered by talking about the Second World War, explaining that ‘[a] big part of my childhood was marked by the Second World War’.⁶ For him, the war was the important event, and what followed was less important. Another informant declared her standpoint by sending a very short reply to the questionnaire stating that she refused to answer any questions here because in her home as a child, one was not supposed to talk about ‘the war’. However, it is notable that she did bother to send that short statement, as a way of ‘talking back’ to the questionnaire designer. Wally, a man who actually served in Civil Defence in the UK, was unable to recall any detail of his service, his motivations for joining or indeed the wider purpose of civil defence. He did, however, talk at length about both his experiences during the Second World War and his post-civil defence work volunteering with Army veterans.⁷ Clearly for all these three voices, in their minds, the Second World War was the big event, both in terms of their own life course and emotional experiences and within wider cultural memory.

For others, however, the link between Cold War civil defence and the Second World War was a way of comprehending the subject, of making it more *knowable* and less abstract. In this sense, such memory work could be seen to form part of the process of *embedding*. One participant, Frank, served in the Auxiliary Fire Service arm of civil defence. He was born in 1948 and remembered the wartime generation: ‘We were fortunate enough to have guys who’d been firefighters. Our gaffer, uh, John Reynard, he’d been a firefighter in the war anyway’. Central to this was the sense of expertise of an experienced generation, ‘they carried on in the Auxiliary Fire Service, so we had good people training us, you know, they’d pass their knowledge on’.⁸ Considering all the fundamental differences between Sweden and the UK in the experience of the Second World War and not least of the bombing of civilian targets, the extent to which the war constantly functions as a point of reference is as striking in Sweden as it is in the UK. For a certain generation, it seems to be

impossible to even talk about the Cold War as something other than a prolongation of the Second World War.

To return to the subject of what in the sociotechnical imaginary framework is named *resistance*, in our material, political opposition to civil defence is also visible. But it could also take the form of objecting to civil defence's coercive nature in general and its place within governmental state authority. A vital part of the civil defence 'technology' was its position within the state, and states having the ability to control their population were essential to the idea that civil defence could indeed 'work' and supply a (more) desirable future. Karin, a Swedish nurse born in 1929, remembered: 'When I was 15 or 16, me and my classmates were called by the civil defence to a cottage filled with tear gas. You were supposed to run through that cottage. One of my friends was pregnant and refused to show up. She was collected by the police and was forced to run through the cottage'.⁹ In the UK, much of the resistance to civil defence was along similar lines: that it was a symbol of state power. It is no surprise that many of the most memorable scenes from popular film and television concentrated on this theme, including the police shooting looters in *The War Game* (1965) and armed traffic wardens in *Threads* (1984). In the same vein, 'bunkers' were the preserve of the authorities and denied to the public.

One of the constants of Cold War historiography is the debate about when it started, when it ended and whether it existed at all (see Stephanson 2012; Nehring 2012; Romero 2014). In many ways, the 'Cold War' only becomes a coherent historical event or period in retrospect. Even then, the differences between considering it an event (a 'war') and a period (in which all events and experiences are understood as occurring within the 'Cold War Age', as it were) are elided when civil defence is made the focus of study. Civil defence was both a clear part of the fabric of the Cold War-as-war *and* part of the fabric of everyday life. This is why civil defence is so important to study as the point at which the military conflict enters the realm of ordinary experience. A good example of this comes from a male informant, born in the south of Sweden, who said: 'I was born in 1960 and am one of millions of people in what we can call the "Cold War generation"'. However, as he goes on remembering his childhood, he is in a paradoxical way reluctant to relate this generational experience to real Cold War fears. 'I don't think that, living in Sweden, we thought very much about the world being on the brink of a nuclear war', he says.¹⁰ This is highly revealing of Cold War memory: a

general sense of living through the ‘Cold War’, being part of that ‘generation’, but struggling to pin down any specific experiences or immediate relevance. We could posit that this is typical of respondents who want to ‘forget’ the fear of the Cold War, or who are ‘unable’ to remember it, but it could equally be suggested that this complex and difficult memory work is shaped exactly by the effect of civil defence. Viewed in terms of a sociotechnical imaginary, the memory of a Cold War generation highlights the ‘pastness’ of civil defence and its relative lack of purchase in contemporary life.

Within memory work, however, those recalling civil defence and the threat of nuclear war are re-encountering a past which, for many, had no future. To put it starkly, the Cold War involved large numbers of people imagining that there *was no future*, that historical time was not an open horizon (Grant 2016). The social, cultural and psychological impact of this imaginative labour has yet to be fully explored, yet the histories of civil defence, the global peace movements, and political and diplomatic notions of nuclear deterrence are scarcely possible without the fundamental notion that the end of humanity, of time, had to be confronted (see Andersson 2012; Connelly et al. 2012). Of course, civil defence was both an attempt to avoid such an apocalyptic catastrophe, instead imagining a more desirable future, and a way of rationalising it. But the fact that individuals struggle to adequately remember this process, to bridge that temporal gap, highlights the need to understand the civil defence imaginary in more nuanced, textured ways. In this sense, it is perhaps useful to bear in mind that within Cold War generations, memory work involves the participants attempting to reconstruct different ‘planes of historicity’ (Koselleck 2004: 9–25), and one of the contributions a study of civil defence can make to rethinking sociotechnical imaginaries as a field of analysis is to provide a more nuanced questioning of how ‘the future’ part of ‘desirable futures’ was understood.

Central to this aspect of memory work is the remembering of ways civil defence was rationalised and how people *coped* with the threat of nuclear wars. A number of the Swedish informants, especially those born in the 1920s and 1930s, remember their teenage years as a period of non-engagement in politics and global issues. One aspect of this was preoccupation with the ‘everyday’, with growing up, child-rearing and other aspects of the intimate sphere, all of which kept people’s minds busy and relegated foreign policy to the fringes of concern. But the comments also reveal a form of critique of the Cold War mindset imposed from

above. Commenting on the civil defence leaflet 'If War Comes', one person remembers: 'I kept [it] in a special place. But I guess it was mostly to show my children the value of keeping things in order at home'.¹¹

Memories of child experiences of evacuation drills are also visible in the answers to the Swedish questionnaire, and often these memories are narrativised precisely along the lines of what Jasanoff and Kim call resistance or a form of distancing from the bizarre daily life of adults. One woman, born in 1932, remembers watching the adults evacuating. 'As children we stood and giggled when the fat ladies ran. We found it hilarious', she remembers.¹² Another informant, born in 1936, is even more explicit in his criticism. He remembers civil defence in the 1950s as something he and his friends considered more as a joke than a serious matter. "'Wash yourselves in ordinary soap and water" seems to have been the standard answer to any question', he remembers, and he also recalls that he read civil defence brochures 'without any enthusiasm'. The Cold War did not have much effect on his life or feelings at all, he concludes.¹³

In a similar way, three women were interviewed as a group about their experiences working in Coventry's Civil Defence Headquarters in the 1950s and 1960s. They had very different memories of the nuclear threat and expressed very different emotional responses to questions, something that threatened to disrupt the interview entirely. The emotional tenor of the interview, and the inter-subjective encounter, was 'saved' by discussing the small details of daily office life, especially its more domestic aspects: the coffee breaks, the co-workers, even the large bath which was available for them to use.¹⁴ The interview encounter asked them to place themselves at a certain moment of historical time, and to attempt to recover their emotional responses. This is enormously difficult, not to say impossible. The fact that it led to quotidian memories of the everyday is far from meaningless in Cold War terms, however. It highlighted the role of such memories in securing people in narratives of the past which were more recoverable, and more comforting, than discussing the nuclear threat.

MEDIATIONS

Cold War civil defence memory work, it could be argued, is particularly open to the entanglement of popular culture in people's recollections. As it was experienced largely as an imaginary, it naturally meant that people relied on existing narratives and images to make sense of it at the time, and to make sense of their memories of it subsequently. The lack of

cultural value attributed to civil defence in the years following the Cold War would have only deepened the sense that it was hard to remember. Put simply, the mediated nature of memories highlights that the memory of civil defence is at the same time creating and reflecting cultural expressions. This means that any hard divide between ideas/materiality or even structure/agency are impossible or perhaps even meaningless. We argue that the attention to mediated memories problematises, or even dissolves, potential hard binaries in the sociotechnical imaginaries framework—a dissolution in fact also encouraged by Jasanoff herself in the introduction to the book *Dreamscapes of modernity* (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 29).

It is clear from our oral history sources both the answers to the Swedish questionnaire and the UK interviews—that what people seem to remember about civil defence is often deeply entangled in, supported by and sometimes contradicted by media images, news articles and popular culture. In this way, cultural memory is always already mediated—or even remediated (Erll and Rigney 2009). Therefore, it is fruitless and ahistorical to attempt to completely disaggregate the social experience of the Cold War from popular culture within individual memory; both are indeed central to memory work. Again, this reminds us of the ‘fuzziness’ of both memory and everyday life, and that perhaps the extension–resistance–embedding processes of the sociotechnical imaginaries framework need to be seen as more fluid than the language of ‘turning imagination into social practice’ suggests, perhaps even as anti-linear (Jasanoff and Kim 2015: 323).

Media images are constantly present on different levels in the Swedish material. References to and memories of civil defence and the Cold War in general are often surrounded by recollections of everyday media practices and iconic historic events told by or channelled through the media. One informant remembers sitting by the radio with his father one night, listening to the first atom bomb test at Bikini atoll. Others simply remember parents reading newspapers, listening to radio, watching television and talking with low voices about Korea, Cuba or Vietnam.¹⁵ Margareta from Stockholm recalls evacuation exercises and civil defence drills of the early 1960s; however, big Cold War events were mediated in her everyday life in a completely different way. ‘[T]here was a hero from the Soviet Union, Gagarin who was an astronaut [sic]’, she notes. ‘What an exciting man he was, and handsome too. I put up his picture on the wall in my room’.¹⁶ Another informant, Ingrid, remembers the immediate postwar years as filled with exciting American experiences: chewing

gum, Coca-Cola, nylon stockings, movie stars and ‘the new look’.¹⁷ The generational aspect is also dominant here, as media images of the Cold War as an everyday experience shift. Ida and Nils, both born about twenty years later in the 1970s, mainly associate the Cold War with sport events such as the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games in Moscow and Los Angeles or the iconic World Chess Championships in Reykjavik and elsewhere. ‘[I]t was easier to see the conflict as a hockey game’, Ida writes. She also remembers a nuclear shelter at her school, but it was used as a rehearsal studio for her rock band—enforcing perhaps the ‘underground’ feeling of engaging with youth and subculture in a military space.¹⁸

Even among the UK volunteers who served in civil defence, mediated images were central to their understanding of the nuclear threat and the ability of the civil defence organisation to tackle it. Julian, a volunteer from Cardiff, remembered ‘it was interesting and frightening [...] when you hear about the effect these things had. I mean, you had these films which showed the effect of an atomic blast, where you can see the buildings and then the dust and then the wind and the buildings gone’.¹⁹ Crucially, the filmed images of the bomb were central to the imaginative gameplay that typified civil defence. ‘And we did an exercise when we were up at Easingwold [the civil defence training centre in the North of England] and they dropped a five-kilotonne bomb on the centre of Reading. How do you deal with it? Which is what we then did. And as I say, there was one bloke who reckoned we should forget about the centre because they’d be gone. And concentrate on the outer part. All the rest of us weren’t willing to abandon the people in the middle you know, but having said that, they were probably all dead anyway’.²⁰

One of the interviews was a complex exchange involving three women who worked in the civil defence headquarters of Coventry. They were not volunteers, but paid employees of the local council. They remembered the training films for atomic blasts. Pamela, who left the council to join the police force, remembered:

the police cadets used to come up and borrow them for their training didn’t they, before I joined the police force, and they used to take them back to police headquarters and then bring them back; I can remember they were in a filing cabinet at the end of the office [...]. But then when I was a cadet, I had to watch those films in the basement of police headquarters. Police headquarters in Coventry has got um, a, supposedly,

bomb-proof basement [...]. Yeah, so we used to watch those films down there. Absolutely terrifying.²¹

The discussion of the films led one participant to reveal the depths of her anxiety about nuclear war. Doris said:

The thing I remember mostly about this was I used to get quite worried about the atom bombing. I remember being quite concerned about my parents, what would happen to them because we would go into the air raid shelter, the control place, and my parents would be on their own. And uh, I used to try and persuade people to [...] where I lived it was sort of square houses with great long back gardens, and I used to try to persuade people to build a shelter in the middle of this and fit it out with food, all the things we were supposed to do [...]. I used to try very hard to get them to build a shelter so they could all go into it, but nobody would listen to me.²²

The third member of the group, Barbara, had very a very different memory: 'No, I never saw that training film you were on about, I can't ever really have been worried about anything'.²³

At the level of everyday practice, the civil defence organisation relied on imagination, providing a simulacrum of defence against nuclear war. Images of nuclear war were just as central to civil defence activists as they were for the mass of 'ordinary' people who confronted the Cold War. Lars Nowak has written about the centrality of training films for civil defence in the United States (Nowak 2016), and in the UK, representations of nuclear war were central in ways that illustrate the interrelationship between the imaginary and the material (see Chapter 5 by Bennesved and Sylvest in this volume). Civil defence exercises remind us that civil defence was performative, and that this performative element was intrinsically material. Civil defence activities often involved physical reconstructions of the post-attack city used to demonstrate how civil defence would save lives (Grant 2010). Moreover, Cold War civil defence could be read onto the materiality of urban space, as Coventry was still in the midst of a slow process of reconstruction after the devastating attack suffered during the Second World War. Memory (of a different war), imagination and materiality could not be separated. Jessica Douthwaite, in an important article on the complexity of the memory work undertaken by former civil defence volunteers who attempted to reconstruct how training exercises 'rehearsed' nuclear war, also argues that mediation and materiality

were inseparable. As the rehearsal of a ‘deferred’ nuclear attack was remembered, Douthwaite’s participants were able to reach ‘a historical understanding of mediated consciousness’ (Douthwaite 2019: 199).

CONCLUSION

A key aspect of engaging with the sociotechnical imaginaries framework is investigating the concept’s usability. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the concept when transferred to other fields of analysis? The aim of this chapter has been to explore how the framework can be used to examine a technology that is remembered in a fundamentally altered political-cultural context. The chapter has employed a historical ethnography approach, using primarily oral history sources, interviews and questionnaires collected between 2006 and 2012. We have chosen a comparative approach with examples from the UK and Sweden, revealing both similarities and fundamental differences between the two countries. But also—and perhaps more importantly—we have shown, through our empirical examples from the UK and Sweden respectively, that people’s memories tend to constantly diverge from the neat paths of the civil defence imaginary. Essentially, there was no single way of understanding civil defence at the time and certainly no single way of remembering it decades later. Understandings were, and still are, shaped and reshaped by social and cultural factors such as locations, temporalities and mediations.

But the evidence also highlights that the interlinking of the imaginary and the material led to civil defence being at the same time curiously unrooted in memory and (Cold War) wider society. The chapter serves, then, as a cultural history of the circular feedback-loop implied in the *origins–embedding–extension–resistance* processes. Our case studies highlight some of the difficulties people had in fully grasping civil defence or fully recapturing its meaning. When analysing the course of a sociotechnical imaginary through cultures and societies, more attention has to be paid to the quotidian, messy and partial ways it was understood and sometimes rejected in everyday life.

Our chapter also illustrates that the emotionology of civil defence could not be fully grasped through traditional analyses of top-down ‘emotional management’ but requires complementary ‘bottom-up’ approaches. This cognitive gap between emotion and memory in civil defence history needs further exploration, and we hope the comparison in this chapter of oral histories in Sweden and the UK has served to open up such a discussion.

It could be a function of the operation of memory mentioned above. It could provide clues about the everyday manoeuvring required to adjust to civil defence, to confront the anxiety seemingly inherent in the Cold War nuclear confrontation and to reason out debates about nuclear security, deterrence, protest and disarmament. The ‘emotional navigation’ charted by individuals may have been as much about *not* engaging with nuclear anxiety as anything else, but civil defence as a sociotechnical imaginary certainly asked people to confront that choice even as it sought to provide reassurance. The non-engagement, the refusal to answer questions about civil defence, the complete lack of memories and the misunderstandings—conscious or unconscious—are sometimes also paradoxical statements in themselves. They could at the same time actively resist and confirm the threat of nuclear war. In the words of Carl-Erik, born in a small Swedish town in the early 1930s: ‘My daily life really didn’t change. We humans do have a remarkable ability to blank out the unbearable’.²⁴

The complexity and divergence of everyday life are as familiar to any ethnographer as the multilayered processes of remembering are known to the researcher of historical culture. As the vast and significant scholarship on memory studies keeps reminding us: memories are not merely experienced, but are constantly made and remade in the light of new presents. What this chapter has brought to the table is a discussion of how we may complement or refine the sociotechnical imaginary framework to incorporate at least some elements of the fuzziness of everyday life and how these elements of everyday culture relate to processes of embedding, resistance and extension of civil defence in Sweden, the UK and beyond.

NOTES

1. LUF220 Kalla kriget, Folklivsarkivet (LUF), Lund. The questionnaire was initiated by Marie Cronqvist as a part of the research project ‘The people’s home in the atomic age: Civil defence and the Swedish narrative of community’, financed by the Swedish National Research Council (VR) 2005–2009.
2. LUF 220: Astrid, b. 1937.
3. LUF 220: Gertrud, b. 1927.
4. Interview with Julian and Robert.
5. Interview with Julian and Robert.
6. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Bengt, b. 1935.
7. Interview with Wally.

8. Interview with Frank.
9. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Karin, b. 1929.
10. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Staffan, b. 1960.
11. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Harald, b. 1921.
12. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Lilian, b. 1932.
13. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Thorsten, b. 1936.
14. Interview with Barbara, Doris, and Pamela.
15. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. For example Rune, b. 1933; Gertrud, b. 1927, Ingrid, b. 1934.
16. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Margareta, b. 1950.
17. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Ingrid, b. 1934.
18. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Ida, b. 1974.
19. Interview with Julian and Robert.
20. Interview with Julian and Robert.
21. Interview with Barbara, Doris and Pamela.
22. Interview with Barbara, Doris and Pamela.
23. Interview with Barbara, Doris and Pamela.
24. LUF 220 Kalla kriget. Carl Erik, b. 1931.

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