

# Scenes From a Collective Biography of Cold War Childhoods: A Decolonial Ethnodrama

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## Abstract

This article is written as and ethnodrama. Approaching memory work as decolonial practice, we aimed to multiply stories of Cold War childhoods while simultaneously making the politics of collective biography processes explicit. The script is based on nonfictional reality and is expanded by both researched and speculative elements to compose an evocative text and the characters of the drama. Ethnodrama offers a sense of how it was to “be there,” attending to unspoken and embodied knowledges, questioning habits and assumptions, and making visible the hierarchies and power, and the intricacies and coloniality of knowledge production that emerge in research practices.

## Keywords

decolonial, collective biography, memory, Cold War

## Introduction

Memory can be a potential space for decolonial practice (Tlostanova, 2017). Approaching memory work through autoethnography, Dutta (2018) argues that memory is also a space of decolonial politics, offering a “transformative cartography of knowledge flows” that challenges “what it means to produce knowledge, who produces knowledge, and with what agendas” (p. 94). What connects the post-socialist (former second world) to decolonial politics is “the global coloniality of power, of being, of gender, of knowledge, of perception (Mignolo & Escobar, 2009)” (Tlostanova, 2017, p. 17). Stories are key to this new cartography of power, essential for resisting, imagining, and cocreating alternatives; for attending to unspoken and embodied knowledges; and for unraveling habits and assumptions, and making visible the contours of power hierarchies. We would add to this that decolonizing work that focuses on generating personal-political stories is most powerfully pursued collectively. We designed the Recollect/Reconnect research to bring together researchers and artists from both sides of the Iron Curtain to generate and interrogate their memories of childhood and schooling during the Cold War through our adaptation and expansion of collective biography methodology (Millei et al., 2019). We aimed to multiply stories of childhood beyond the usual tropes of authoritarian schools, ideological socialization, product shortages, and so on. Workshop spaces and processes were similarly designed to be decolonial spaces, where hierarchies of power, habit, and academic

practice could be simultaneously challenged and reconfigured, and where research practices could be transformed to minimize carbon producing travel and extractive food production to the extent possible.

We present our work together as workshop facilitators in the form of ethnodrama. Portraying experiences in an ethnodrama allows us to complicate the representation of workshop processes and experiences and to fulfill ethical requirements toward our participants (Saldana, 2011). The script is based on nonfictional and lived reality enriched with both researched, speculative, and some imaginary elements to compose an evocative text also creating the characters of the drama. This approach allows us to think through the moment-to-moment positionings and recalibrations of hierarchies

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\*Mnemo ZIN is a composite name for Zsuzsa Millei (Tampere University), Iveta Silova (Arizona State University), and Nelli Piattoeva (Tampere University). By adopting a collective name, we foreground our entangled, perpetual becoming-with as researchers and human beings who refuse to single out or rank our contributions. Our collective name is inspired by the figure of Mnemosyne from Greek mythology, goddess of memory and mother of the nine Muses. Spanning over almost ten years, our research examines childhood memories through the collective biography method, writing alternative histories and informing our current thinking about (post)socialist and (de)colonial pasts, presents, and futures.

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within our research processes. We begin by considering the extent to which collective biography lends itself toward spaces of decolonial knowledge production and by articulating what we mean by decolonizing knowledge, including creating greener, kinder, and more caring research environments (Burton, 2021).

## Collective Biography as a Decolonial Space

Collective biography and collective memory work as feminist research practices disrupt research conventions that separate researcher and researched, subject and object, science and art, and other established knowledge hierarchies that fail to recognize entanglements and their implications while subjugating affect, emotion, and bodies to elevate reason (Davies & Gannon, 2006; Haug et al., 1987). To some extent then, collective memory work could be considered from its very foundations to be a decolonial research space. However, the politics of collective biography processes are often implied and its dynamics are often taken for granted or even presented as almost utopian (Davies & Gannon, 2006). Here, we turn to the micromoments and micropolitics of method occurring during memory workshops within the intentionally decolonizing paradigm of the Recollect/Reconnect research project.

In the collective biography workshops, we explore and engage with the problems and questions of knowledge production that emerge from the modern-colonial matrix of power—salvation, oppression, control, domination—seeking to discipline knowledge from the sciences, maintaining the dominance of expert knowledge and gaze of expert observers. As facilitators, we seek to decolonize knowledge and being, and unlearn the liberal and socialist versions of modernity and their models of research (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). We instead engage in “networking across the globe, across languages and religions, and across institutions” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 24) “to feel and live beyond competition and hatred” to nourish connections and be kind and caring (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 25). For us, this role also includes dwelling, thinking, and being in the borders. By borders, we mean identity (Escobar, 2007; Tlostanova et al., 2016) and disciplinary divides that separate beings, art/science, epistemological borders of affect/intellect, knowledge borders where dominant narratives exclude the views of children, and ethical borders that require us to acknowledge and take responsibility for the more-than-human companions on our planet. It also requires us to question the borders between researchers as “global networkers” who cross over and critique geopolitical formations, imaginaries, and legacies and the local materialities and environmental qualities of land and urban spaces, and the communities that we come into to do this work. Learning in a decolonial paradigm begins with

“learning to think doing things as a community” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 15). Aligning with collective biography memory work, thinking and doing as community also demands that we include all those people who do not compose the privileged community of the researchers, and those nonhuman or beyond-human parts of community and our engagement with them as sustainably and ethically as we can.

Our five workshops attracted and mixed participants who represented all career stages of academia and spanned the boundaries of science and art, biographies of East and West (a varied combination of being brought up, educated and working in spaces that we term as East and West based on the tripartite division of the world during the Cold War), and different generations (being a child during the Cold War or after the fall of the Berlin Wall). The call for participation was publicly disseminated and attracted researchers and artists with some connection to what we called “cold war childhoods.” We worked with 69 academics and artists from 31 countries and six continents.<sup>1</sup>

Our strategy of creating workshop groups of people with various experiences and biographies aimed to break historical hierarchies between generations, art and science, and knowledge production in which East European scholars are normally expected to provide empirical data and cases, while Western scholars assume the work of theorization, conceptualization, or abstract thinking (Silova et al., 2017). We considered all scholars and artists—regardless of their career stage or geopolitical position—as knowledge producers; however, as researchers came from different epistemological traditions, collective biography workshops became a site of tension as well. These tensions seemed to animate different value-systems of knowledge production and epistemological questions around scientificity, objectivity, neutrality, and universalism, also highlighting the differences of geopolitical thinking and the importance of place-knowledge (Baker, 2013).

Within the intentionally “flattened” workshop spaces, various kinds of borders, power relations, and hierarchies kept reemerging, becoming more visible and felt, and fading away. Epistemological contestations provoked momentary borders to rise among participants, reconfiguring networks and affinities, realigning and demanding responsiveness from the facilitators. Moving into the workshop spaces as facilitators, we have found ourselves continuously challenged and, despite our preparedness, we also felt we were improvising in response to what emerged. We had some practice working with border thinking in our professional and personal lives (Silova et al., 2017) and the workshops gave us new opportunities and challenges to work within the colonial matrix of power marked by global coloniality in its various manifestations, such as Western capitalism and liberalism or socialism. Border thinking helps to recognize that “while we are all in the colonial matrix, not everyone belongs to its memories, feelings, and ways of sensing. Many of us have

been ‘trapped’ in the colonial matrix but do not ‘belong’ to it” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 7). Reinstating and troubling these binaries and associated hierarchies animated the workshops too. Border thinking helps retreating from salvation discourses and practices, multiplying differences where sameness is propagated, and moving away from the subject–object split that maintains Western epistemic privilege. We also “do not place ourselves as detached observers (the myth of modern epistemology) but as involved and embodied in the process we describe” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 6).

We occupied the position of being on the border during the workshops “learning to unlearn” (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012) all that has been imposed on us through our socialization, education, cultural, and social contexts marked by “Western imperial reason” and human domination over nature. Unlearning requires a form of interculturality, transdisciplinarity, and decentering humanity’s apex position that we approach here by working with an international group of scholars and artists, and together with art-based research processes, and kind and caring research environments. We intended to merge border thinking with collective biography to enact a practice of community learning, an open process through which “being” (existence and relational-experiential rationality) and “doing” (agency focussed on integrating wisdom instead of accumulating knowledge) form a way to research as doing and experience (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). Thinking beyond the colonial matrix requires attention to the extractive technologies and practices that underpin much academic work, blinding academics to the planetary implications of their research practices, including travel and food consumption, and the expenditure of research funds affecting the thriving of local and global communities (Hugé et al., 2016).

## Memory Workshops

Our research privileges stories, embodied experience, emotions, affects, and memories. To intentionally create affective atmospheres that would provoke memories, we selected four locations, following the logic of old borders or newly erected walls partitioning the world: Berlin (a divided city during the Cold War), Riga and Helsinki (both serving as Baltic Sea ports located on the borders of Europe), and Mexico City (close to the most recently built wall on the Mexico–U.S. border). An additional workshop opportunity was also available online for people who could not come to those locations. All costs of food and accommodation during the workshops were covered by the project funding. Bursaries helped participants to travel in ways that had the least impact on the environment. In our search for places for workshops, we prioritized centers run by and benefiting minority communities. For the face-to-face workshops, we selected and designed the spaces that we consider to be comfortable

and cozy environments. The aim was to enable participants to spend 3 days together sharing personal stories, decentering what we understood to be the norms of highly competitive and product-oriented academic environments. Relations were created and further nurtured through sharing vegetarian meals from locally sourced and produced ingredients, taking walks together, and sharing accommodation.

## Ethnodrama

Our inspiration to represent the collective biography research in the form of an ethnodrama came from Eva Bendix Petersen’s (2009, 2013) explorations of academic work in the ordinary spaces of universities and academic conferences. Ethnodrama turns ethnographic data into a script through a creative process that simultaneously entails data organization and data analysis (Petersen, 2009; Saldana, 2011). The ethnographic data from which the characters and scenes are composed consist of workshop preparation and workshop notes, research diaries written by the workshop facilitators during the five workshops, participants’ comments and feedback, video recordings and photos about the research process, and our memories of the workshops. Following Petersen (2013), we take data as “always already shaped by an embodied, positioned someone (singular or plural, human or nonhuman)” and acknowledge that “it may also work strongly at the level of affect, where the body, as it were, carries the experience and the know-how that eventually take a textual form” (p. 297). We created eight composite “characters” from a combination of the 69 participants and co-facilitators. Two characters—Zina and Helen—are workshop co-facilitators and are composites of the varying casts of facilitators at the different workshop sites. Georgina, Sophie, Dimitri, Kati, Lukrecia, and Stepan are workshop participants. The eight characters interact through eight scenes at a collective biography workshop, situated in an unnamed European city.

## Crossing Borders

### Scene 1

*(The stage is split horizontally; Helen and Zina are on a higher level. Their part of the stage is spot lit, and the rest is dark. Zina is sitting at a table with a beer and notebook in front of her. Helen walks in the door and Zina jumps up. They hug.)*

Helen: Zina! So good to see you! I can’t believe I’m here.

Zina: At last! I am so tired. Preparing the workshop over the last few weeks has been exhausting. The amount of detail we consider is just mind-blowing. We would have drowned without your articles and advice, they were life-savers!

Helen: The pleasure was all mine! Can't wait to work out the final details but let me first go and grab a beer. It's been a long day!

Zina: Make sure to have a pint, since we need to go through the plan one last time. We must know exactly what to do.

Helen: You are always very prepared. I am sure we will have a fun and productive workshop. Hope the participants are organized too and bring some objects for the exhibition.

## Scene 2

*(Lights go on to the lower and larger part of the stage. Large cushions are scattered over the floor and the light from the adjoining terrace filters warmly through the dark orange curtain. Participants walk in from different directions.)*

Zina *(walks to the centre of the lit stage sipping a coffee)*: Good morning *(to the audience)*, such an inviting place, great to be here and great to meet you in person! Such a difference, meeting online and now here. How was your travel?

Georgina *(rushes forward, with a wide smile on her face)*: It is so great to finally meet you! I am Georgina. I share an apartment with Kati but she left early in the morning to visit the town. How are you?

Zina: There's barely any time for sightseeing. I hope she will be here soon. *(their conversation fades in to the background)*

Helen *(to the arriving participants)*: Have a seat and if you brought any objects, please place them on the table there. We are planning a small exhibition.

Zina: *(turns)* Oh, hi, are you Dimitri? I recognize you from Zoom. Welcome, please make yourself comfortable.

*(Dimitri nods. He walks tentatively around the room as if trying to find the right spot. He kicks the cushions, fixes his hair, sits down on the red carpet, and is occupied with his mobile phone. Lukrecia enters the scene tripping on the cushions.)*

Lukrecia *(Loudly)*: Arghhh, I wish I could still sleep, this trip did not start well, I almost missed my plane but fortunately the flight was delayed. Is there coffee somewhere?

*(Stepan rushes in, juggling pastries and a takeaway coffee, with a large bag swinging from his shoulder. He almost collides with Lukrecia and Zina.)*

Zina: Watch out!

Stepan: *(Rolls his eyes)*. Sorry!

*(A spotlight focuses on the exhibition table. Objects on the table are projected to the back wall—children's toys, schoolbooks, photographs, medals, red neck scarves, etc., and when someone opens a used perfume bottle, the smell spreads to the audience. Participants bring and explore items on the table, and someone places a Nevalyashka Doll on the table and it gives a sound as it swings.)*

Helen: Oh that's so cute *(picks up the doll)*. What is its name?

Georgina: *(Interrupts Helen and handing her a colorful box)* Thank you for having me here and everything you have done for me. This is a candy box from my home country with traditional motifs.

Helen *(surprised)*: Hi, I am Helen, you are too kind, sorry your name is? What kind of candy? *(She starts to open it)*.

Zina *(rushes to Helen and takes the box from her)*: Hello Georgina *again* *(emphasizes the last word)*. Maybe it should be shared with the whole group. We should start the workshop.

*(Zina lifts up a cushion and throws it in frustration) (Participants sit cross-legged on the carpeted floor, supported by cushions. There is a buzz of voices and accents. Some people have printouts of articles, notebooks, or have taken out laptops. Some cluster in little groups and pairs. The room becomes quiet, as people gaze toward Zina and Helen, as if for instruction. Helen is writing a rough schedule for the day on the whiteboard.)*

Zina: Welcome everyone . . . *(raises her voice)* Welcome everyone. We are so excited to host you and share memories on the theme: "Crossing Borders."

*(Helen writes CROSSING BORDERS on the whiteboard)*.

Sophie *(Stands up and looks around as if to check if everyone sees her)*: I am looking forward to learning more about this research. I am so excited about it! Finally, I can bring my experience into research. Did you know that I have been thinking about it for a while? I have some really great ideas about how to take this project forward . . .

Helen: *(Points to the whiteboard)* That's later.

*(It suddenly becomes quiet, the spotlight turns to Georgina who sits on a chair)*

Georgina *(takes out a faded red notebook and a freshly sharpened pencil from her handbag, and whispers to her neighbor solemnly)*: Crossing borders is a gripping theme that shaped many children's lives during the Cold War.



Sophie: Yes, I have read and posted many articles about these experiences.

Helen (*raises her voice to silence Sophie*): About collective biography. Here are some extra copies of my article if anyone needs one.

Kati: That is so great, can I have one? My colleagues were so envious that I came here, they all wanted to learn about collective biography!

Zina: This morning, we will start with the memories. "Crossing Borders." We will work in small groups and share our memories.

Stepan: (*turning to Georgina*): I wonder if we will also discuss the politics of the era and the region? I would be very interested in that.

Helen: (*interrupting Stepan*) Remember, listen carefully, ask questions after each story. Try and make it vivid, focus on a moment, how did you feel in your body (*waving a copy of her article*). It's all in here.

*(Lights are dimmed. Some participants pick up cushions, others hug it or pull it, others put it on their heads, or walks around with it on the stage taking at least two circles, bumping into each other, getting mad and apologizing in silence, and placing the cushion into a circle to sit on).*

### Scene 3

*(Lights come up, a cacophony of overlapping voices. Gradually the sound quietens and resolves to just Zina speaking.)*

Zina: You know, in my memory, I was standing in the window, staring out on the dam in front of our house, thinking about how much I feel tied to my hometown, thinking I would never leave it . . .

Lukrecia (*interrupts*): But this is impossible! Simply impossible! (*Her voice is becoming increasingly louder and more irritated at the same time*). What do you mean when you say that you did not want to leave your hometown? How is it even possible that you had no desire to travel across borders? Everyone in the Soviet Union wanted to leave! Nobody wanted to stay. I know that for sure. I really don't understand what you are talking about. Your memory is simply wrong!

*(Zina looks baffled)*

Helen: I don't think it's fair to say a memory is wrong . . . (*trailing off*)

Zina: Lukrecia, I really felt this way as a child! I loved watching the "Around the World" program on TV that showed different countries and cultures. I loved traveling with my parents visiting historical sites and

relatives in other towns. (*some others are nodding in agreement*). But I really did not feel the urge to leave my home as a child. In fact, I felt safe and comfortable in a small town where I grew up. I didn't even want to go to the capital city when I was accepted to the university! It felt so far and foreign from home.

Lukrecia: (*irritated, raising her voice*). Why don't you just answer my questions? Seriously! Now . . . Where did you grow up? In the Soviet Union. And where do you live now? In the US, right? It is not the same country. Isn't it? Now this is proof that you always wanted to leave, and you finally got what you wanted your whole life. You changed your memory for some reason. But I am curious, Zina, why don't you agree with me? Is it because I am younger? Do you think you know more just because you work in the US and because I was born right around the time socialism collapsed? It does not seem fair . . .

*(Participants stand up one after another lifting their cushions, creating a wall, like a border; they bend to look at what is on the other side as they leave the wall. Finally, Zina arrives at the wall with her cushion and hits it apart with her cushion. Lights go off).*

### Scene 4

*(Lights up on two tables where lunch is served in buffet style. Colorful soup, fresh bread, fruit plates with pineapple, mixed with grapes and apples. Zina stands by the buffet as people help themselves to the food and then leaves to sit on the elevated part of the stage. Stepan turns to her.)*

Stepan: I have just realized that there is no meat on this table.

Zina: We have made lots of considerations about the workshop place, food, and travel. This is our commitment to the planet. This place is run by a small local community of refugees. They cater the food to raise funds. Bon Appétit!

Stepan: This city is famous for kebabs, and I really feel like one—is there time?

Zina: No.

Stepan: We have such a packed day!

*(Stepan fills a second plate with bread and heads to sit with the others)*

Kati: It is so great that they have thought all this through. Getting people here with bursaries, this is so great! I also heard that there was a list of criteria around travelling on land and public transport. We, academics, do not think enough about the environment.

Sophie: Yes, and this biography project. I think it is great to write our own memories, I thought about this before, but I want to be in charge of my own memoirs (*giggles*), then I can guarantee people will not misinterpret it, like this morning. I know what happened, I know why, I researched it long enough. I find it a bit funny that the collective interprets my memory here. It feels strange. What can you know about my childhood, and all these socialist countries were so different! And of course, now with an adult mind, they think they understand socialist childhood, but do they?

Stepan: Actually, I do not get it. We came here and shared childish memories rather than researching big issues, like politics. It was so hard to give comments on memories. These memories speak so little about what happened then in socialism and what memories have to do with research and how things are today in the former Soviet Union. Will we ever get to that during these three days?

*(Dimitri on the lower part of the stage is alone, playing with the Nevalyashka Doll whose clinking sound makes a tune, he is videorecording the doll with his phone camera.)*

Kati: Politics is the context of memories. I liked your memory about crossing borders (*to Stepan*). I did that too, everything in the east looked so grey and we felt observed all the time. I have a memory of my dad getting robbed next to a Soviet hotel while he tried to exchange money so we could pay for our dinner in the international restaurant where only foreigners could eat. They did not accept dollars, imagine that!

Stepan (*offended*): Why does everyone think that the east was grey, and everyone was corrupt? Where is their evidence? I had a great childhood in socialist times. In the summers, we spent a lot of time in the forest collecting berries and mushrooms with my family. But it is beyond me how these personal stories become science.

Lukrecia: I get you, the facilitators seem to be established scholars, you know, like experts, but can they get memories published?

Kati: I have read the articles we were sent. They are great! Surely, we will be able to publish something, but how will we get there? Your experiences from the east are so fascinating! I always felt drawn to those mountains and hills in the Caucasus, huge mountains, lakes, monasteries, forests, like you Stepan describe.

Stepan: (*standing preparing to go back to the lower part of stage*) Good questions, Lukrecia. Are you still hungry? I'll bring more bread.

Sophie: I use autobiography a lot and while earlier this type of method was questioned it is not anymore. But for the life of me I cannot get why Zina and Helen run

the workshops like this. I will keep my critique quiet for now. I have some really great ideas for a paper.

*(Helen and Zina walk off the stage which slowly darkens, the spotlight follows them as they walk into the audience. While they talk, participants on the stage slowly gather the cushions and pile them on top of each other.)*

Helen: The memories the participants shared today sound so factual; there is no life in them. No details, no texture, just information about what happened. I am so disappointed, these are not memories, they are just like "yeah, I did this, I did that." How can we help them write better memories?

Zina: What do you mean? How can memories be better?

Helen: They did not do much to prepare for the workshop; they did not read my article. It is not about what happened and why, it is about how it happened and how the memory is written up.

Zina: Don't you think they got better after rewriting? After we asked them more questions and told in this way our own memories?

Helen: No, not really. They are nothing like in the earlier workshop. Like they did not do their homework. Like they did not listen when we painstakingly explained and discussed during the online preparatory workshops.

*(Dimitri skips down from the stage following them.)*

Zina: What shall we do now? Maybe they will get into it, no? We cannot lecture them; collective biography is not about lecturing. It is about sharing memories and thinking about them together, on equal grounds.

Helen: But what if the memories are not like they should be? I hate to say it but what if we try to explain again tomorrow morning and just show a couple of examples. I am sure it would click as now we have worked on the memories, they have their own, and they could then see how they are not written the way they should be.

Zina: OK, we could try. With PowerPoints?

Helen: Yes, I think it will be the best. Standing in front as teachers. I've done it so many times before.

Zina: Crazy. All that we did not want to do, to recreate this division between experts and novices. We are all researchers and artists here, the same.

Helen: I'll check the projector. (*Lights off*)

## Scene 5

*(Lights up. Everyone is sitting quietly in front of their laptops or with paper and pen. People are immersed silently in writing. Extended time passes with rhythmic movements*

*rippling around the room as different people write, pause to look up as if thinking, sighing heavily as if in a stuck place, or taking a sharp breath as if they have made a breakthrough as they start writing again. One person mutters as they type, another taps their pen noisily between bursts of frenzied writing, another scrabbles in their bag and then blows their nose. Others move away from the irritations. Suddenly birdsong—which could be from outside or from a digital timer—interrupts the silence.)*

Helen (*looking through some papers in her hand*): Does anyone have more questions on ethics?

Lukrecia (*in a very decisive tone*): I want to raise a point. I think you did not consider ethics from the perspective of scholars in the East or younger researchers in precarious working conditions.

Zina: What do you mean? (*in a frustrated and quiet voice*)

Lukrecia: Collective ownership of the memories and the public memory archive are great ideas, but they are not enough. Many people here are established academics with stable jobs and reputations in the West, like you two.

Stepan (*raising his voice*): We are still in the so-called East. We don't have your connections. Your advantages.

Lukrecia (*nodding*): No, we don't.

Stepan: And who benefits? (*Looking at the facilitators*).

Lukrecia: Yes, you benefit most from this research. (*A few more nods around the room*). But people like me—who are just starting, who don't have the connections, like Stepan and others here. Our first language is not English, and we generally get rejected from journals based on our names or locations, “your English needs editing and correction,” we are told (*she imitates a British English accent*). This concern cannot be resolved through a consent form. It is not about anonymization (*she says with a scornful smile*).

Stepan: I was hoping to learn something about publishing here.

Zina: My first language is not English either and I am from the east too. We explained that we can collaborate after the workshops too, that we can write joint publications. We can create writing teams. We can analyze the memories together. The project doesn't end with the workshop and we want to continue working with everyone afterwards; we will plan this further work together here. Does this resolve concerns?

*(Lukrecia starts whispering with Stepan who is sitting next to her, the room otherwise is silent, Lukrecia hides her consent form under the pillow. Zina smiles awkwardly, pretending to be unaffected but she is).*

Helen: I guess, we can now collect all consent forms. Please pass them on to me if you have not done so. We have 30 minutes to finish writing memories.

*(Suddenly Zina looks at her watch. She jumps up from her chair and rushes across the room, bumping the exhibition table on the way. Objects fall off. The Nevalyashka Doll shrieks as it hits the ground. People jump up to help rescue the objects, but now the whole stage starts to move, cushions, objects, tables create a pandemonium.)*

Zina (*rushes down from the stage looking at her watch*):

Gosh, Helen, have you looked at the time, we need to set the table for the coffee break.

Helen: Oh! I have a lot to rewrite but will finish later.

*(Helen follows Zina into the audience)*

Helen: That conversation was tough, and it took time away from memory work.

Zina: But we knew from the beginning that our schedule is open, just a starting point. We can't rush these things, and we should make time for others' concerns.

Helen: I'm upset. I feel we are being accused of something that we are not. We want to do away with the hierarchies. Are we failing?

Zina: I hope not. I feel there is a generational issue here too. The ones born after 1990 have developed suspicion towards us born during the socialist times. They think we have learned to be authoritarian through our education, and want to retain those positions. But what do they know! And you know what, we are using these oldie terms like “collective,” echoing the past and they are all about “I.” Don't you think they might find it threatening, another collective swallowing up their individuality, like in socialist times?

Helen: Yes, how does a story become “collective”? It's so hard to explain. It's about feeling it in your body, your imagination, your senses.

Zina: I get that but I keep wondering about the collective—the different meanings of the term and the collective nature of our work. Are we “collective” enough, too much? Is everyone equal in that so-called collective?

Helen: Lukrecia questions us continuously . . . you know we have university positions, but our knowledge is old fashioned.

Zina: Yeah, we are privileged, with the stability they might never enjoy. But here are fresh pastries from that cute local bakery on the corner and fruits from the market. Since I couldn't decide which pastries to buy, I chose the kinds that our guests are least likely to have tasted before.

Helen: Yum. Let's hope they like them.

Zina: Can you start making coffee? I need to check on the toilet. Someone said we'll soon run out of toilet paper.

Lukrecia (*comes passing by*): When do we come back after the break? We thought of going for a smoke? This is such exhausting work!

Zina: Oh, could you share one with me? We go for a quick one. (*as they leave Zina explains her voice trailing off*) I am a social smoker and never buy cigarettes. I call myself a "parasitic smoker" (*she smiles on her own joke, Lukrecia forces a smile on her face too*).

(*Helen goes up to the stage, she is alone, she packs away the cushions slowly.*)

## Scene 6

(*Lights come up, no cushions on the stage. Sounds of giggling as the lights come up on participants in the middle of a game. People are blindfolded. One of them tries to catch the others who are moving around out of their reach. When a person is caught, they all remove the blindfold and sit on the floor.*)

Kati: How did you find this game? Sophie (*puzzled*) This is not for me. I thought we are here to use our intellect, we come from different disciplines, research traditions, we have a lot to build on and could use this knowledge to do real work and analyze socialist childhood.

Dimitri: It was so much fun! (*he imitates Sophie with a changed tone of voice mockingly*) I am so rational, I am a brainy scholar, why and why and why do we do this? Oh, I cannot close my eyes, I cannot touch others, oh . . . people touch me . . . (*in a divisive tone*) just let yourself fucking be and play, what is all this pretence and preciousness.

Kati: Oh, oh, this is kind of uncalled for, don't you think?

Sophie: Really (*to Dimitri*)? Someone grabbed me by the shoulder too hard! IT WAS SO PAINFUL! I felt like dropping out of the game but for a moment it felt like my younger brother grabbed me to play tag, so I stayed.

(*Dimitri mimics the small brother grabbing and then makes a parody of Sophie's way of speaking.*)

Kati (*turns to Sophie*): I feel you.

Sophie: (*turns to Stepan*) It has taken me long years and much hard work to study in a foreign place in the west, to become a good academic, to have all my colleagues appreciating me coming from the East and we just play here. I just feel like I am not taken seriously again. So frustrating.

Stepan: I enjoyed the game so much! I forgot that I am an academic! My legs are still trembling, my heart is pounding, it is like being a child again!

Sophie: But I understand, I read about this, we supposedly work on our embodied memories now.

Dimitri: (*mocking and squirming*) Memories in the body, memories in the body.

Kati (*to Dimitri*): I like to be with you, you are an artist, so creative, but this feels inappropriate.

Sophie (*to Dimitri*): This is not artistic work, this is pure ridicule and I want you to stop!

Zina (*arrives and interrupts*): Thanks so much for playing with us all. The task now would be to rewrite the memories with more embodied elements. Describe how you felt in the body.

Sophie: I think, Dimitri, you simply just lost your mind, like the painter who lost her painting on the train coming to the workshop.

## Scene 7

(*The stage is leveled. Lights come up. Sounds of water running and plates crashing. Helen and Zina are collecting dirty dishes and trash. Kati rolls her sleeves and starts washing. Stepan takes the dishcloth. Georgina stands with a pencil in her hand. In the corner, the cushions are organized to form a bed.*)

Stepan: Haha, here we are doing the chores. That is a bit unexpected.

Kati: You know, I've got a strange feeling that I've known you all for a long time, like we were friends for a longer period. Even during the online workshops. This project brings so many warm feelings; I want to help the project thrive.

Georgina (*empty stare, moves her pencil nervously between the fingers of her right hand*): Yes, this project brings up complicated feelings. I live on the remnants of my country (*she exhales deeply, her posture momentarily shrinks, but she pulls herself up in a second, fixes her hair*), the word "remnant" telling me to forget it, to divide the past from the present as that country in my memory doesn't exist anymore.

Helen: Oh, I never thought of it this way.

Georgina: (*looks sideways and mumbles to herself in her mother tongue*) But I remain committed to its main ideals—a more equal and just society, internationalism, self-management as a form of basic democracy.

(*Stepan picks up his head from the chores and stares at Georgina interested but somewhat puzzled*)

Kati: Sorry, what did you say, what language did you use there, it sounded fascinating!

Georgina (*ignores Kati's remark, pauses for a minute, then looks back at Helen breathing intensively*): The present situation in our world makes me even more convinced that we need to revive those ideals. I have



fond childhood memories and a feeling of self-confidence derived from the trust in that country. I have a prevailing pleasant feeling, stored in my memories in emotional and embodied ways. It has been—for a lack of a better word—strange to share it with people these last few days.

*(Georgina opens her notebook, starts writing passionately, the sound of her fast-moving pencil coming now from the speakers too is breaking the silence of the room. Helen sits quietly with her hands resting on a closed notebook; she looks wistful.)*

*(Lukrecia and Dimitrie walk by, putting away their cigarettes. They slowly stroll through the kitchen looking around and pick up the last piece of the pastry, leave their cups and trash on the table and sit down and eat in the room while others are trying to tidy up.)*

Lukrecia: After all, I enjoyed these past days, maybe I understand the old folks a little more.

Dimitri: The nightlife in the city has been great!

*(The light dims down and focuses on Zina as she goes to the side of the stage where the cushions are, she waves to Helen who follows her, Zina throws herself on the cushion bed, breaks down in tears, Helen turns around and brings two shot glasses and pours some Latvian Balzams. She brings the candy box as well, but it is empty.)*

*The End*

### Postscript: On Ethnodrama

With this postscript, we are conscious of ethnodramatists' warnings that the script should do the work—as in “show don't tell”—and that an imposition of conventional academic discourse inclined to “tell” the reader how they should think risks subverting the intentions and integrity of ethnodrama. As Petersen (2009) stresses, ethnodrama opens interpretation by inviting multiple and diverse readings, with the intention of “displacing the authority of the author's analysis” (p. 415). However, the processes of script development are often opaque or unstated so in this postscript we reflect on the strategies we developed as we drafted, redrafted, and shared the script with various audiences.

The “scenes” we constructed aimed to portray the workshop dynamics, dichotomies, stereotypes, conflicts, and tensions by condensing observations and embellishing those with some imagination for affective impact. We aimed to convey a sense of how it was to “be there” and how our endeavors to enact a collective, collaborative, and decolonizing research practice for working with memories were realized and compromised as participants and facilitators engaged in affective, relational, and intellectual labor. We developed guiding character notes for each of the

composite characters outlining their different desires, investments, and interests in the workshop and project. Characters were anchored in the multiple borders and dichotomies that framed and emerged through the research encounters, including geopolitical location (East/West), class, gender, age, professional status, and occupations. We recognize how the East/West binary reappears and might even reinforce historical divisions, but we decided to go with these differentiations as they were continuously called into being, troubled, and reinscribed by multiple characters fuelling some of the dynamics emerging during the workshops. For each character, following dramaturgical principles of character development (Saldana, 2011, p. 67), we drafted a distinctive “subtext” to motivate and drive their actions and we aimed to ensure that each character developed as the storyline unfolds. We also followed Saldana (2013) in developing storylines that unfolded through consecutive scenes. Each scene has at least one message, a conflict that characters are involved in, hints of what is likely to happen next, and emotions and rhythms that we wish to emphasize in the various scenes.

Throughout the ethnodrama, we endeavored both to deploy and to undo binaries and characterizations. At times, in line with dramaturgical conventions, we have purposefully exaggerated some characteristics to help us analyze how we have been working through these dichotomies, individually and collectively. A dramaturgical understanding of research as social drama considers that characters (as participant-actors) each have objectives or motivations, experience conflicts or obstacles that block them from achieving their desires, develop strategies and tactics, and express attitudes and emotions and any accounts of experience will be layered by unspoken thoughts that are subtexts to what might be going on at surface level (Saldana, 2013, p. 123). We have drawn on these codes of character as we have developed and refined the scenes. Rather than providing a singular smooth account of collective memory processes, we have constructed the ethnodrama to analyze, represent, and problematize tensions and power dynamics as they play out in the material spaces of workshops.

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## Note

1. <https://coldwarchildhoods.org/research-team-participants/>

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