**Moving Museum of Motherhood**

**Working as a writer with the community of local mothers**

On Saturday morning, I say goodbye to my husband and two kids and board the train; a three-hour journey to Watford. The little one is still breastfed, and the older one likes lazy Saturdays as he gets extra cartoon time when mum is not home. I am on my long Saturday journeys for seven weeks, spending the day at Watford Palace Theatre, not my family, because it is important to me.

I am a mother, but I am also a writer. And the two roles live inside me and fight for prevalence constantly. Except, in this project, they are in balance. Both are equally important, both appreciated, and crucial for this project's development.

I am working with Moving Stories for the first time. I met director Emma Gersch on Zoom, and it will take weeks of planning and creating before we have that first in-person coffee at Watford Palace Theatre. But we immediately clicked; there was some recognition, understanding, and trust.

When local mothers joined the studio for the eight-week programme, the same happened: immediate trust and understanding. Emma and I created six 2-hour long workshops in which we explored creativity in many different ways. I was touched to see how much these mothers craved some creative time, time just for themselves, where they could be silly and playful and funny and full of passion. We often have to put all these things on one side as we take our mothering duties.

There was a lot of listening and laughter in the room. With their permission, I soaked in the stories and filled up my notebook with notes, ideas, and motives. I worked as a writer in communities before, but never with a group of mothers. It all felt easy; there was a can-do attitude and courage to embark on any task. These women were simply incredible. And my big job was to write a play. A play that would capture the essence of all these experiences and stories told in our theatre studio. After six weeks of gathering ideas, it felt like a mission impossible. How can I do justice to all these women? How can I tell just one story in one play when there is so much here?

I had one more worry. I am a mother, a writer, and - a migrant. I am an awarded and a published writer in Croatia, but since moving to England, my fear that I can not write in a second language has prevented me from seeking opportunities.

And then came – trust. Again.

The women trusted me with their stories. And Emma trusted me as a director.

I felt trust in every message, letting go, being there, and leaving space.

"The Parachute" was born, or its first draft. A story of a young mother who organises a party during which she jumps out of the plane. Will the parachute open? And who is our parachute in daily life?

The most challenging moment for any writer is to send the play into the world. First, when you send it to the director, your first reader. And second, when the play is performed in front of the audience.

For both moments, I felt fear. But fear was replaced with joy, pride and happiness. Emma's voicemail after the first read and audience reactions ensured me that I hit the spot!

The play features a chorus of mothers, created by responses I got from our participants on some of the hardest, intimate questions about motherhood (things that nobody talks about, but we should!). There are also three characters – a young mother, a stepmom who does not want children and a grandma who is also a migrant. I intertwined stories, motives, fears and jokes together. When women read the play, they said they could recognise themselves, and that was all I wanted to hear.

Observing Emma while she was directing the play made me finally understand that what I have written is the essence and the crown of our work; she unlocked hidden stories and relations between characters. The women were nervous, but they were led by gentle yet confident guidance from Emma. They supported each other and stepped on stage with bravery – this was the moment to shine! Seeing them perform, taking ownership and feeling great on stage was the most magical moment I have ever seen.

During this project, I grew as a workshop facilitator and a writer, embarking on new challenges and writing from within the group. Moving Stories and collaboration with Emma showed me how trust and understanding can bring out the best in every artist and how creativity can blossom when we feel appreciated and listened. How nice it is to receive that and create that for others! My practice has changed during this project. I am more brave, playful, confident, and determined that creative opportunities should be accessible to everyone!