



Centre for Culture and the Mind



Dear reader,

It has already been eight months since I began the fieldwork for my PhD at CULTMIND. My anthropological research focuses on the city of East Sarajevo, which emerged in the post-war context of Bosnia and Herzegovina following the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and the Bosnian War of the 1990s. Since last June, I have been living in this peculiar city, immersing myself in the everyday lives of its residents and I'm continuously reminded of ethnography's unique ability to bridge the gap between academic knowledge production and lived human experience.

In preparing my research project prior to fieldwork, I undertook several tasks, including an extensive literature review, reflecting on abstract analytical concepts and theories related to post-war transformations, and attending courses and lectures in well-equipped, professional environments at educational institutions in Denmark. At that time, discussing my project felt somewhat like a distant, abstract reality, and I constantly felt something was missing.

I realised what was missing several months later when I moved here. It was the local coffee served by grandmothers at their kitchen tables during interviews, the endless and frustrating paperwork required to secure my student visa, the smell of popcorn and corn sold by street vendors in the central square, the air pollution that made it difficult to breathe during the winter, the jokes about my not eating meat while I politely refused the local meat treats, the nationalist graffiti marking the streets, and, of course, the mundane feeling of boredom I often experienced living in a small city with fewer events and activities than I was used to.

Now, in the midst of my PhD project, I sit in a local café, going through my field notes for inspiration for this newsletter. What emerges, however, is my surprise at how much my understanding has evolved through the day-to-day experiences I've gained during my fieldwork. By foregrounding small, intimate details at the

experiential level, ethnography enables the development of deep insights into complex societal landscapes—without falling into reductive representations or overlooking the diversity of individual experiences.

Accompanying me in my efforts to integrate ethnographic data from everyday experiences with broader theoretical discussions in academia, are various sources, whether directly related to my research or in a more abstract sense. One such example is Stef Jansen's ethnography, [Yearnings in the Meantime \(2015\)](#), conducted just a few meters from my own research site in the neighboring district. Jansen provides a nuanced analysis of how residents of a Sarajevo apartment complex navigate daily life, pursue their aspirations, and confront challenges in the post-war context, shedding light on their relationship with the state and their conceptualizations of "normality". Another deeply influential reference I would recommend, is the Macedonian documentary [Honeyland \(2019\)](#), directed by Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov. This film serves as a powerful reminder of what I am trying to do in my work as an anthropologist—demonstrating how personal stories and individual lives can illuminate broader societal complexities and engage with important contemporary questions.

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Photos by Sofia Poulia.

