# CROSS- CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

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# Abstract

The paper researches how cross-cultural experiences resulting from encounters trigger reflections that can lead to cultural and personal self-awareness which ultimately influences the perception of oneself. Given the increased global mobility, those encounters between socio-cultural backgrounds are more frequent every day which has an effect on the formation of "transnational identities". There are multiple factors that come into play when those encounters take place and which were considered in the reflective approach to those experiences. The method used to approach the project is autoethnography and the main gathering of empirical data, which is in coherence with the intrinsic subjectivity of each researcher, was a five day trip to North Macedonia. The analysis departs from the individual reflection of the experiences, based on the field notes and journals, structured under four main topics and each divided into micro reflections and meta discussions. The theoretical framework under which the reflections were considered is constructed from different theories in the social psychology domain. The narrative reflections are a combination of those theories and methodologies in form of journals. The aim of the project is to get an understanding through self-reflection of how the sociocultural environments affect the behaviour, perception and feelings. The results of the analysis were that the reflection is an ongoing open-ended process in which, the narrations will establish routines of meaning-makings that will potentially condition the future experiences. The pre-wired embodiments influence the positioning one assumes due to the complex response. This process is influenced and influenced the individual subjective and meaning-making patterns that stem from the individual sociocultural background and are represented in form of narrations.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization is not a new phenomenon but it has speeded up dramatically in the twentieth century due to the modern communication and the opportunities interconnections carry with. Workers from different countries are frequently communicating thanks to the free trade agreements and the cooperative economies. At the same time as information is being transported effortlessly around the world within seconds, the number of people traveling thousands of kilometers by plane to other countries is also increasing. Each year millions of people travel from one country to another due to work opportunities because the distances are no longer as restrictive as they once were. There are different reasons for the migration and movement across boarders (Bourdreau, 2022).

Whatever opinion one has on the current development, it is undeniable that it brings along new unprecedented situations that raise important questions and issues (Bourdreau, 2022). The research area of this project is cross-cultural mobility and its effects on the aspect of identity formation relating to the dynamic between oneself and "culture" and the perception of that. This duality between self-perception and identification and sociocultural environment is another topic that emerges with the rise of globalisation.

The world migration report from 2022 estimates "that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates too 3,6 percent of the global population." (Migration,2022) and the numbers have been increasing over the last 5 decades by 128 million (Migration,2022). Migration is only one of many increasing examples of cross-cultural mobility in which people enter a, for them unknown socio-cultural environment, which increments the chances of experiencing cross-cultural encounters. The project departs from the understanding that reflecting on the experiences ones has when interacting in an unfamiliar environment is influenced by the individual self and conditions the perception one has of oneself, and the relation to one's own sociocultural background.

The different socio-cultural environments with their own culturally-rooted discourses create knowledge and shape the views of "reality" which influence each person's subjectivity and meaning-making patterns. Therefore, the subjective meaning-making process variate between different socio-cultural environments

due to the fact that they all differ in their knowledge, understandings, and perspectives; there is no neutral or true reality only subjective interpretation (Shulman, 2011). Considering that, the biases and subjectivities of the researchers were made as transparent as possible.

The project departs from the understanding that stepping out of the comfort zone and going into unfamiliar contexts, increases the experiences that may lead, through reflection, to cultural self-awareness. By cultural self-awareness, the idea of how culture shapes the perception and development of one is implied. The trip to North Macedonia was the departure point of those reflections.

The main focus of the project is us, as subjects, how can we learn how to be self-introspective in order to reflect upon cross-cultural encounters and gain knowledge of how to unfold and understand subjectivities. The focus is set on the reflection aspect and the subjective processes that happen within one person, in this case, us, throughout these encounters and how the individual feels depending on the relationship to the context-dependent "other".

Due to our understanding of subjectivities as strongly individualistic and the tendency to generalise in the psychology domain for scientific validation, we, as a group, decided to base our project on autoethnographic methodology. The project has the intention to avoid a positivistic approach and to move away from the traditional scientific knowledge production and validation. Instead, it is centred around the idea of maintaining the individual subjectivity in form of narrative analysis and autoethnographic research.

As above stated, we will base our reflections on our past experiences and meaning-making process given the fact that our focus was inspired by our international background. Furthermore, our interest emerged since we have encountered cross-cultural experiences in the first person which made us reflect on our own cultural background. Through sharing, discussing, and comparing we noticed that what we experienced and how we handle and relate to these experiences differs already between us as a group.

Uncountable feelings arise by going to live abroad: at the beginning, we were the embodiment of our culture; and we found ourselves embedded into the notion of it. Suddenly, we felt that the presence of culture, whether it was the one belonging to one subject or to the "other" and connotations of a certain way were following every encounter.

For instance, If I am German, I get associated with being correct and organised and people often justify my needs and actions, removing my individuality, with that stereotyped understanding.

## 1.1 Problem formulation

Through the questioning of the problem formulation, the project aims towards giving a closer understanding of the relation between meaning-making and experiences and how this influence personal interactions and ways of relating to oneself.

The problem formulation is: How does reflection regarding cultural experiences affect the self-perception with focus on cultural identification?

Initial research questions:

- Which process of reflection and cultural awareness emerged during an autoethnographically study and how are they embossed by each individual embodied culture?
- When we feel like our gestures and interactions get an unknown reaction in different cultural contexts, how does that make us feel regarding our own position?
- Does it trigger a negative attitude towards the other culture, own meaning-making?
- How do others' reactions influence one's perception of self?

The purpose of the writing is to raise awareness of the relation between one's behaviour, feelings, and perceptions as the "subjective" aspect of experiences and the socio-cultural environments. Additionally, basing the analysis on individual experiences and reflective narrations, identification could be allowed which could potentially lead to the readers self-reflecting as well.

The project falls into the field of social, personality, and cultural psychology as it attempts to delve into a closer understanding of the relations between the individual meaning-making and the experiences and how those have an effect on the personal interactions and subjective ways of relating to ourselves. It portrays a contemporary problem that affects individuals' subjectivities but is strongly in connection to the sociocultural environment. To raise awareness of that connection is therefore relevant.

## 2. Methodology

The following chapter serves as guidance to the reader through our methodologies and chronological development of the project with the focus on our approach to the collection of empirical data.

### 2.1 Researchers and researcher's position

Us, Simona, Sara, and Emma as researchers of the project are through the chosen method of research focus as much on the researcher as the individual research subject of the investigation. We are doing an investigation on our own experience in North Macedonia and how the reflections lead to self-awareness which is the project object. This means that the researcher (us) is the subject and through them, we get to self-awareness which is the object of subjective processes, so the researcher is the subject and the object at the same time.

Our position as researchers aiming towards the approach to situated knowledge by placing ourselves in the events rather than outside is inspired by Donnas Haraway's idea of modest witness (Blaise et al., 2017). The departure point for arguing and reasoning for such positioning is different in the sense that Haraway

was oriented towards science and dealing with gender and race but the post-structuralist, methodologist approach with a focus on discourse and lived experiences is equally fitting to our project and understanding of the creation of "scientific knowledge". By placing oneself in the observation, it allows the possibility of focusing on the ones/aspects that are invisibilised by others. The following connects to our position in the project in the sense that we are not basing our reflections on external judgments but subjecting the experiences to our own.

When we reflect on our dichotic position in Macedonia, we are aware that it was not only Macedonia exercising an influence on us but also us as a collective and three individuals influencing the context with our acting.

Being both Humanities and Psychology students we considered, after excessive reflection that the most responsible way to conduct a psychological research project would be to position ourselves as subjects and objects gaining therefore a closure to individual narratives and subjectivities that would through any other methodology become nuanced. Our sensitivity regarding the creation of a "scientific" research project about subjects led to us deciding to have autoethnography as our main methodology.

The first interest was in the research field of cross-cultural body language. The motivation was mainly centred around our own experience of cross-cultural encounters and how those lead to misunderstandings due to, between others, body language. Our previous interpretative premise was that the bigger the cultural difference is, the higher and more likely is the potential misunderstandings due to different body language. Acknowledging that we would not be able to research any other perception than our own we were drawn to the question of how the individual self-perception was influenced by this clash of two cultures. With the motivation of distancing the objective scientific research methods, of how to approach the research topic without falling into the trap of orientalism, eurocentrism, or "western, white science" we centred the research around our own personal experience and reflections.

Inspired by our search for encounters that triggered reflections about our perception of ourselves with the focus on cultural roots, we traveled to Skopje, North Macedonia from the twenty-first until the twenty-fourth of March. This decision was based on our understanding that having a knowledge of the social behavioural norms enables us to adapt our behaviour to avoid encounters. Noth Macedonia was an option determined also by safety and financial reasons. There we stayed with Peter, a young Macedonian man that accepted us as guests through the app of Couchsurfing and showed us the city. This trip became one of the basic sources of collection of empirical data. This was done through individual notetaking on different self-decided occasions.

We were aware of our role as researchers which influenced the experience we made, in the sense that we to some extent were wearing the lenses of wanting to collect empirical data. We were split between carrying around a notebook and taking the time after anything that made us reflect to write that reflection

and thoughts down, experience and be in the moment and anchor the writing more in a memory work line or combine both in the way that notes are taken in the moment of the occurrence, but the deeper written reflection is done afterward. We decided to each approach it however it resulted more useful for us and to leave the biggest part of the discussion for when we are back.

This first notetaking process was the first step in collecting and working with empirical data. Equally relevant are our past experiences, cultural backgrounds, and perceptions that condition our meaning-making processes and which we define as, our subjectivities. From those initial notes, we individually wrote our first journal reflecting on the experiences and micro-interactions and our feeling in such. Even though this first journal was written alone without the influence of the other group members, they were part of the previous discussions when exchanging doing the stay. It needs to be taken into account that a part of our individual subjectivity was influencing each other's thoughts and outcome of this their experience by the different positions and perspectives.  by the in question was also the origin of those feelings, so we subjected the process to autoethnographic lenses.

## 2.2 Autoethnography

In the following, an understanding of autoethnography as a method is presented (Hven, 2004).

Autoethnography focuses on the role of the researcher as fundamental in the production of knowledge that comes from subjective psychological processes and experiences (Hven, 2004).

In this regard autoethnography proposes a middle way that connects notions of subjectivity and objectivity and sees them as both parts of the same process of learning – in which the subject is in relation to the world and the subjective reasons for action upon lived experience are at the centre of psychology. Autoethnography focuses on self-observation, introspection with the goal of sharing knowledge about the subjective processes of the human being in the world (Hven, 2004).

To better describe the concept of autoethnography we followed a text from the author Camille Hven in which she summarizes four ways of applying the psychological to the ethnographical which results in 4 elements that make research auto ethnographical: I/Self, Lived experience, Vulnerability, Open endlessness and Narrative writing.

- *The I/Self*, in which the researchers as protagonists make visible their subjectivity and focus on being active participants and observers of their own psychological doings.
- *Lived experience* of the researcher which is a fundamental part of the researcher's understandings, and this can refer to it as a source for knowledge.
- *Vulnerability* refers to what parts of the researchers' subjectivity are made accessible to the subject of the research and in different or same proportions to the person who accessing those writings.

- *Open endlessness* indicates the consciousness of the endlessness of auto ethnographical processes, which are not defined by the end of the report, but it is an ongoing process of introspection and reflection.
- N*arrative writing* which displays in the writing style of the research and as way for the researchers to unfold their experiences (Hven, 2004).

Our trip to Macedonia was a conclusive autoethnographic experience in the project work: we focused on self-observation and reflection as individuals but also shared impressions as a group. We became aware of our position as "investigators" therefore we decided to flow with our "methods" and content of the data, letting the trip and our subjective psychological processes mold our experiences and situations.

## 2.3 Phenomenology

In connection to autoethnography is phenomenology given that our take on autoethnography is phenomenological. This means that when we think of our self-reflective approach to experiences, we perceive them as part of an ongoing process. Phenomenology (Schiff, 2017) is the understanding of human experiences that go beyond the narrow frame of single moments in time but rather the connectedness of human experiences. Life is seen as a dynamic process, that encompasses historical and cultural facts, the political situation, language, and the power of voice from a specific point of view. Concretely, life is configured by narrative. To understand the narrative and the meaning-making of an experience, the impact of a situation and the whole life as an ongoing process has to be conceived not the single event as isolated. This understanding is crucial for working with our autoethnographic experiences.

After we wrote the first journal and decided to shift away from the narrowed focus of body language, we researched about theories, existing studies, and concepts revolving around the research area.

The shift was due to the experience we made by gathering the empirical data in North Macedonia, but It was not possible to distinguish the origin of body language from its socio-cultural context. The experience and our perception of them were the outcomes of all present factors so it would be selective and uncomplete to single out one. Furthermore, body language is a production of the meaning-making process of the environment it is produced in.

Reading more about the topic led to us relating certain experiences, both from the trip to Macedonia as well as our past to those writings which also triggered certain reflections and discussions. After that progress, we decided to develop a net or lenses that combined and took all that into consideration for writing a second journal that unplanned resulted more generalising and method oriented.

The lenses are described in the following as departing from the theoretical application and combination of how operational concepts are converted in our journal writing. The empirical data applied for writing the second journal were the initial notes from Macedonia, our reflection of those, and the "knowledge" that

has been acquired regarding the theories, methods, subject, and our personal and individual lifelong subjectivities. The empirical data is therefore multiple and in the following, its gathering will attend to be presented. As researchers but also research subjects, our individual subjective knowledge about ourselves, our experiences and our meaning-making patterns are intrinsic to us since before the project formation. Nevertheless, our notion regarding our self-awareness and self-perception has experienced changes and evolutions since the increased interest in the topic that unconditionally led to reflection and through our trip to north Macedonia. As mentioned, we took fieldnotes from encounters that triggered reactions on each individually. From there the first journal was written in which, individually we subjected those reactions to reflections based on our prior investigations around the topic and our group discussions. This first journal and first written reflective step could be considered an acquisition of self-understanding of how cultural experiences influence our self-perception. In that step is where autoethnography can be seen the strongest. Chronologically, the theoretical research came afterward. The lenses that were applied for writing the second journal, which differs from the first one in multiple aspects are a combination of the theories, methodologies, concept definition, and the ongoing reflection that has been taking place since and that affected the self-perception from which that second reflection departs. The theory will be fed into the written analysis and reflection so that it blends with the fieldwork. How the theories apply and will be used as described above on a generic level, will be picked up again during the analysis.

## 2.4 Memory work

A strong method is memory work due to the combination of experiences with past occurrences or even reflecting on a trip as memorial work. Lia and Katerina Bryant explain the emergence of memory work as a feminist methodology for social transformation in which women wrote in third person in relation to a theme or question such as sexualisation of the body (Lia Bryant, 2019). It has also been used in connection with autoethnography on many occasions "memory work, while used collectively with individuals or by a researcher as autoethnography, cannot be simply categorized as a collective and/or individual method. As a collective method, individual members are writing and also analysing memories individually and constructing knowledge about themselves and the social world. In this sense, while a collective method, memory work is also an individual method"(Lia Bryant, 2019, p. 529). The way that memory work is conducted as a methodological approach is by identifying a theme, writing in a detailed way the memories that one relates with such, analysing the memory as if it was a literature writing, discussing it with the group that leads to new memories and rewriting old and lastly examining both memories and analysis of them to relevant social theories. The method employed in our project is inspired by the traditional understanding of memory work but in combination with autoethnography. Our main sources of experiences that are subjected to analysis are the ones made in North Macedonia where field notes were taken. The memory work comes into play when connecting feelings, perceptions, and those experiences to previous encounters. The anchor around a defined topic or question is also apparent. Additionally, given that the individuals reflecting, and the researchers are the same, us, the individuality is maintained in the

metareflections. Nevertheless, even though the method argues that writing in third person allows a distance from the memory that leaves space for emotional and sensorial emergence, we decided to do journaling and reflecting in first person as it made the narration more natural. This connection between narration and memory work is drawn through Bruner's approach to narrating life (Bruner, 1987).

## 2.5 Narrative psychology

The last step of the work with the empirical data was its analysis. This step will further be explained in its section but the similarities between experiences in the journals enabled the identification of four main topics from which we individually reflected from a micro interactive to a meta-discussion level. The introspection was guided by a combination of our subjectivities, the prior discussions, the prior self-perceptions, the theoretical frame, the method, and so on.

The analysis and journals are presented in form of narration. Bruner approaches narrative psychology in his article called telling stories by underlining how language does not only construct the narration in the semantical aspect but further on also in the stylistic and pragmatic (Bruner, 1987). By narrative looking into the thoughts, he does not refer to the ones that make an argument logical but rather the ones constructing stories. Bruner's approach to narrating life is described in the following: "you will ask whether the narrative forms and the language that goes with them in our four subjects are not simply expressions of their inner states, ways of talk that are required by the nature of those internal states. Perhaps so. […] I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future" (Bruner, 1987, p. 708). The way that narratives create recipes for structuring experiences and meaning-making is how subjectivities are created. Our empirical data, therefore, evolved through the development of the project by reflecting on it and will always be a part of this ongoing introspection. Nevertheless, it was composed of the experience in Macedonia, the notes and journals stemming from it, our subjective past experiences, and our "academic" theoretical knowledge.

# 3. Terms and concepts

The following chapter intends to clarify the terms in this specific research case. The purpose of explaining these terms does not include categorizing or limiting their definition; by categorizing "knowledge" you exercise power by controlling the content.

## 3.1 Culture

We will use the cultural understanding of the personality formation defined by Henry A. Murray and Clyde Kluckhohn: "EVERYMAN is in certain respects. 1. like all other men, 2. like some other men, 3. like no other man (Kluckhohn, 1950, as referenced by (Panarchy, 2021)).

The personality formation claims that all men have things in common because we are humans (homo sapiens). These common grounds are biological enduements which serves a foundation to a variety of commonalities. Another common heritage is that humans are social animals living in interdependence with other members of their society. Every man is "like some other men" means that they have things in common like similarities from the same socio-cultural groups; the values in these groups shape the individuals' social experience. But similarities are not only found within the same cultural environment as a country but also within the same age, gender, social class, and many others. The commonalities between humans are to some extent based on culturally rooted discourses that conform to social norms and sense-making processes. Finally, the quote "like no other" means that each person possess individual and specific characteristics. "More exactly, the ultimate uniqueness of each personality is the product of countless and successive interactions between the maturing constitution and different environing situations from birth onward" (Kluckhohn, 1950). We are different from one another because we have subjective individual grounds.

Many theories dealing with personality development regard social-cultural environment as a fragment of the individual's personality development. It is important to underline this understanding but the resemblance is also important to consider. This process of adopting habits from the socio-cultural environment is called *embodied culture* because it influences the perspective as much as the body language implying the way of walking and talking (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). The influence works in both directions, meaning that the subject is influenced by the socio-cultural environment but at the same time impacts with its presence. Culture is not fixed but constantly developing and changing with time and circumstances (Clammer, 2012).

For this project, we are going to use the term culture as a mix of these understandings; culture is a collective way of perceiving a reality not fixed but constantly evolving. The process of sense-making applies for everyone but is a part of a common discourse in connection to other people, making it possible to communicate with each other. Culture is in part the way to establish this main discourse within a social group. Journal literature often describes a connection to a person's culture, or at least, how each individual thinks about its socio-cultural background.

## 3.2 Self-awareness

Self-awareness describes the way the individuals understand who they are. Self-understanding demands reflection on experiences and dispositions leading to a higher personal self-awareness. The process takes place with a certain sensitivity towards the impact of one's own experiences and dispositions (Lu & Wan, 2018). Cultural awareness develops through the intention of reflecting on the thoughts. Cultural awareness happens when attention and reflection lie on the relation of the individual's experience with its culture. By being culturally self-aware, the individual it can consciously consider the cultural influence (Lu & Wan, 2018).

We will apply this understanding in our project to visualize the development of awareness following an experience. The experience we made in North Macedonia has developed through reflections, and we became aware of different perspectives within the process.

## 3.3 Behavior

The term behavior is attached to the classic understanding mainly influenced by B. F. Skinner's theory of behaviorism. Skinner regarded behavior as a neuropsychological response to stimulus. He studied reason and how the response might be controlled (Baum, 2011).

We are going to use behavior to describe the conscious and unconscious acts in any kind of situation. It does not have to be a direct action; being silent and dressing are considered an act. In contradiction to Skinner, we are going to include the acting subjects' understanding of their behavior and what it entails regarding their understanding. There is a meaning and interpretation behind any action the subject performs. We understand behavior not only as of the act itself but mainly as the subjective interpretation and perception we have of it.

# 4. Theory

The following chapter presents the theoretical section of the project report. The theories that construct the theoretical framework are presented first in a descriptive scientific way for a later comparison and specific explanation of their applicability and limitations in our research area. The theory will be presented by first objectively describing it, further on explaining how it will be used in the analysis as well as its limitations and strengths.

## 4.1. Cultural self-awareness

The first theory is the cultural self-awareness theory from Chieh Lu and Ching Wan (Lu & Wan, 2018) which constitutes the main descriptive character of the theoretical frame narrating the shared departure point combined with a case study.

Chieh Lu and Ching Wan are two social psychologists that presented the theory in the article "Cultural Self-Awareness as Awareness of Culture's Influence on the Self: Implications for Cultural Identification and Well-

Being" published in the Personality and Social psychology Bulletin. Given the expertise of the authors and the specialization of the theme the theory belongs to the personality, social and cultural psychology domain. Our departure point of the research project is strongly connected with the cultural self-awareness theory that focuses on the implications of being aware of the influence culture and cultural identification have on the self. The explanation of the term cultural self-awareness is explained as the awareness regarding how culture has influenced the self (Lu & Wan, 2018). In relation to that, personal self-awareness is the awareness of how the own experiences and personality influence oneself. The theory underlines that a higher level of awareness can potentially lead to a heightened importance of one's sense of self which could contribute to the tendency of behaving supposably more authentically instead of acting in accordance with social approval or external standard (Lu & Wan, 2018). The theory includes also the aspect of personal self-awareness as complimentary to cultural self-awareness. This first one is focused on reflecting on one's experience in the process of self-understanding and the second one is on cultural experiences. Through case studies, the theory predicts that the higher the level of awareness, the higher the cultural identification, feeling of belonging, and behavioural authenticity which ultimately leads to a higher degree of wellbeing. The premise of the theory states that culture influences values and beliefs, belonging to groups, and social relationships; that influence usually happens on the unconscious level. An example when those influences resemble more apparent is when individuals encounter cross-cultural experiences that rigger a reflection about those in a cultural frame. "Cultural self-awareness is seen as the individual metacognitive understanding of how culture influences the self, the personal understanding of the link between oneself and cultural experience" (Lu & Wan, 2018, p. 823).

The departure point is that "regardless of how the experience is that makes one aware of the existing cultural differences, it draws attention to individual cultural membership and also inspires thoughtful consideration of how such cultural experiences have shaped oneself"(Lu & Wan, 2018, p. 824). Cultural self-awareness is concerned with individuals' sense-making of culture rather than the clarity of cultural knowledge, how individuals make sense of culture on a personal and individual level. Therefore, it underlines that the knowledge about culture does not have to be fixed or established but rather flexible and subjective.

It connects to our project on multiple levels, but we are disregarding the results of the connection between awareness and wellbeing and focusing on the shared understanding of influence. The results of the cultural or personal self-awareness of ourselves and our perception of ourselves are not taken into consideration but put into subject of our empirical examination.

Our premise that problematises the research area is that a level of reflection regarding meaning-making, behaviour, and experiences, leads to a certain level of understanding of oneself and it influences one's own perception. That dual relation between experiencing and reflecting resulting in the self-awareness influencing the self-perception is shared both in our research area as well as in the cultural awareness

theory by Chieh Lu and Ching Wan. The descriptive applicability of the theory in the project's theoretical frames is anchored on the shared understanding of how reflections related to the influences of experiences on individuals affect the self-perception of the subject. Another aspect in which the cultural self-awareness theory applies to our use of theory is by "conceptualising" the relation between culture and the level of knowledge that is required from individuals when considering cultural experiences. If by cultural self-awareness the understanding of how individuals make sense of the cultural experiences is in focus, having a clear comprehension of culture not needed but rather establishing an individual relation and perception of the environment. That understanding is what defines culture in the meaning-making aspect both in the theory as well as in the project. The relation can be taken a step further by establishing that individuals interpret experiences through some learned patterns of meaning-making but also, it is through experiencing that those new ways of meaning-making are shaped. There are some enacting ways of meaning-making processes but when you experience and work with your experiences you also create your own meaning-making processes (Lu & Wan, 2018).

In the theory, the findings conclude that a level of cultural self-awareness leads to positive outcomes due to an increased sense of belonging and cultural identification that ultimately increases the individual well-being. Even though, as previously mentioned, this result is something that does not apply in this project, the concept of a sense of belonging could be left as an open possibility in combination with the positioning theory. Regarding the limits of the theory, it must be made very clear that this theory constitutes the descriptive part of the theoretical frames conceptualising the problem area and not assuming the applicability of the results. Our initial rejection of the those is on our own experiences prior to the trip with the reflection and our critical approach to the theory.

## 4.2. Positioning theory

In the following, the positioning theory is unfolded as well as its use, relevance, and limits in the project (McVee et al., 2019). The following theory was published in the social behaviour journal and written by scholars from the psychology department. Nevertheless, the development of the theory and the different streams also include aspects of the domain of linguistics, sociology, philosophy, feminist post-structuralism, and mainly social psychology. The theory has a performative character in the project. Given the performative nature of the theory in the project, a closer understanding of its applicability will be provided in the analysis strategy in connection with the methodological section.

In the theory, Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré describe positioning as the discursive production of selves where position refers to the "discursive production of a diversity of selves. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (McVee et al., 2019, p. 381). "That understanding underlines how, when assuming one position, this affects how the individual sees the world

because different things become relevant. The subject is seen as not fixed like the idea of role implies, but with the ability to think of itself as choosing subject in conversations according to the narrative forms that are familiar and bring together the subjective experience. "[…] permit us to think of ourselves as a choosing subject, locating ourselves in conversations according to those narrative forms with which we are familiar and bringing to those narratives our own subjective lived histories through which we have learnt metaphors, characters, and plot"(McVee et al., 2019, p. 382). This aspect relates to the other theories as sharing the idea of the subject's active agency in relation to narrative construction.

The focus of the theory is on understanding how psychological phenomena are produced in discourse. Its starting point is the idea that the constant flow of everyday life in which humans take part, is fragmented through discourse into distinct episodes that constitute the basic elements of the bibliographic and social world. "Not only what we do but also what we can do is restricted by rights, duties, and obligations we acquire, assume or which are imposed upon us in the concrete social contexts of everyday life (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999, p. 4 as referenced in (McVee et al., 2019, p. 389))." This means that discourses are created through symbols and systems of symbols that can be words, images, or other acts. People are familiar with those and count on them for narrating and creating meaning. They are based on moral orders that are intrinsic in social interactions where the moral position of the participants, including their duties, rights, lived experiences, and so on are taken into consideration and influence the narration and discourses that are being constructed. Those moral orders regarding rights and duties don't have to be or can be local or personal (McVee et al., 2019).

In the theory, positioning is described as a meditational social activity. By that what is understood is a way to identify and theorize around how moral orders influence actions by creating, reproducing, or implying rights as well as duties. This means that individuals are assigned both and the theory aims to delve into the culturally situated practices focusing on the inherent power dynamics that result from positioning in interactions and that are dependent on individual agency and action in coherence with socially imposed norms.

Additional to the performative character of the positioning theory, this also carries the weight that positions the research field and project in the domain of psychology given the locating researchers in the field. This evolves around how we as researchers and subjects position ourselves, position each other, how we are positioned by people we encounter, and how we position the people we encounter. Positioning as well as self-positioning is discursive, meditational and strongly in connection with agency and acting underlining the relative free choice of individuals.  As the theory describes, positioning is a "cluster of rights and duties to perform certain actions (Harré and Moghaddam (2003a pp 5-6) as referenced in (McVee et al., 2019, p. 389) " but it is also those that "may also play into existing storylines that constrain the way that people position themselves". This, in connection to how discourses, narratives, and positions are also culturally rooted can lead to clashing positions because once one feels part of different discourses or the

agency for positioning oversteps the external being positioned. "Stand in multiple or contradictory positions, or to negotiate a new position by "refusing" the position" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 53.) as referenced in (McVee et al., 2019, p. 382)). Given additionally the fact that narratives are constantly unfolding and where discourses entail one or multiple positions within the same storyline this clash can happen in cross-cultural encounters. Following the shift from body language and developing an understanding of embodiment of culture, positioning is present not only in spoken interactions but also in "other symbolic representations and actions as means of positioning"(McVee et al., 2019, p. 388). Nevertheless, through the use of words and people's choice in that they locate themselves and others ("It is with words that we ascribe rights and claim them for ourselves and place duties on others").

How the positioning theory applies in the current project is by the reflection of how the meaning-making processes, the reflection on experiences, and the behaviour of certain interactions are guided by the positioning and can be drawn on main discourses. We will use it, given the performative character, to analyse the fieldnotes with particular attention to expressions referring to other behaviours, expectations, and expressions of thought that may refer to the positioning of others. By those, the way we position others towards you but also us to ourselves become apparent. The thoughts in the journals are discursive elements. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that it is not our intention or aim to grasp and delve into the discourse, not the main existing ones nor our own but rather acknowledging that positioning is embedded in discourses. Our analysis is not a discourse analysis, but we acknowledge the fact that we as subjects are part of multiple discourses and those might vary when traveling to North Macedonia or changing behavioural settings.

## 4.3 Narrative psychology

This theory can be seen in connection with narrative psychology (Brockmeier, 2014; Schiff, 2017) and how individual narratives and positioning within discourses shape and imply different meanings to words and "roles". As Brockmeier explains narrative identity permits subjects to actively choose how they take part in social encounters by constituting their representation to others through their narrations. By telling about themselves individuals don't only define their identities but also enact and perform them. Additionally, narrative psychology sees narration as the psychological processes founded on personal experiences and personal context and considers how life is experienced and interpreted by evaluating what people reveal in their concrete telling. Narratives connect to our project because it is through them that we express the meaning we make to others for ourselves in the social context are in. Schiff describes life as a dynamic process in which the contexts are the ones determining to make experiences meaningful. Additionally, the author theorises that the notion of life is constructed through narrative practices and that narratives provide recipes for persons to navigate experiences. The position, roles, and our individual culture that includes labels such as gender, familiar position, etc as well as the subjective meaning-making, narrative, and individuality are both considered in narrative psychology when creating discourses and narrative

interactions and in the positioning theory when positioning oneself in narrations and being positioned by discourses. We connect positioning theory and narrative psychology in our individual journal from North Macedonia, where our writings reflect our position and subjectivities.

Narrative psychology is present in our project, as given the autoethnographic method of research, construct the analysis. They are present and influential in all the stages of the project. When we narrate, our narrations come from the point of life that we are in, and in connection to cultural self-awareness, reflection leads to developing impermanent levels of cultural and personal self-awareness. Additionally, by narrating and reflecting, meaning-making patterns connected to new or old pre-wired embodiments are developed that make narrations and reflections an ongoing process with constant rethinking (Schiff, 2017).

## 4.4 Embodiment of culture

The last theory relates to embodiment of culture and was developed by Dov C. and Angela K. in their article "the hard embodiment of culture" (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). In his article belonging to the domain of social psychology the authors underline how, the way that subjects act and behave with their body is a literal way by which they are "carrying" culture. This happens in a reactive way meaning that when a subject act, the pre-established embodiments trigger basic body reactions and behaviors which are related to cognitive reactions that could lead to more complex representations. In the theory, the relation between how culture is embodied is presented as culture being present in form of language, scripts, rituals, and so on therefore it becomes apparent in certain behaviors as for example how we talk, eat or walk. More concretely, given the fact that body language, therefore, is embedded in culture, the way that subjects behave has a meaning assigned to it that incitants a state of being with intrinsic moral codes, values, etc, and personal position in the situation. Mauss came up with the term "techniques of the body" where he emphasizes how all humans have similar bodies but very different ways of using them given the fact that the body is a key element for cultural transmission and in each different culture, people present their circumstances through body language in a different way.

Certain body comportments could lead to different reactions and interpretation because the predisposition of those connections are not arbitrary and also vary through cultures, but by creating the cultural frame of certain schemas and rules, people are allowed to interpret physical states under the same patterns. Some cultures tend toward a more particularistic behaviour and pre-wired embodiments while others towards more universalistic. And people who find themselves between those two frames are likely to switch around and elaborate on the basic affective reactions that vary between those. As previously described, there are schematically three steps between the comportment to the complex representation. When those steps are often repeated so that they become intrinsic routine, the second step of basic reactions may be omitted because the pre-wired embodiment is deeply embedded in culture. There is also the existence of totem embodiment in which the connection between comportment and representation is not established and

where body language is used on a symbolic level without inherent meaning other than the one established within that culture.

In conclusion, culture is presented as encoded in our body, often on an unconscious level, and it pushes people towards certain behaviours that guide towards specific psychological mindsets and a certain outlook of the world (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). In connection to our project, we consider the establishment of how body language and behaviour are embedded, enacted, and embodied in culture important given the trip to north Macedonia constituting our experimental part where the focus was on that embodiment. We, as strangers, carry with us a certain culture that is embodied in our behaviour and that became apparent during the trip and through our positioning. Given that rooted embodiment, finding ourselves in an unfamiliar context made us more aware of our own costumes and pre-wired embodiments that stem from our subjective cultural frame and helped us reflect upon those enactments of embeddedness. The dynamics between the environment and our embodied self (-context) started to become discernible. We will use embodiment of culture in the project as an interconnection between the socio-cultural background and the behaviour of an individual in a broader sense. We make a connection to the idea of embodiment of culture in our project by taking it a step further and understanding the embedded, embodied, enacted, and effectiveness of culture in general actions of humans, their experiences and interactions not narrowed down to body comportments.

## 4.5 Metadiscussion

The sequential section draws upon the distinction between theories in specific conceptualisations through a metatheoretical discussion of the epistemological chapter. The main difference is the character that both theories acquire in the theoretical frame, the positioning theory as performative and the cultural self-awareness as explanatory. Another discussion point between theories is the conceptual approach to the subject and culture in the theories. In positioning theory, both appear as constructed and embedded in discourses. in cultural self-awareness, the ontology is the effects of the cultural self-awareness that comes when one, through reflection regarding cultural experience, develops. The epistemology is the research through case studies and reflection on experiences where the awareness regarding the cultural aspect of those experiences is increased or lowered like in cross-cultural encounters. This active agency of subjects is portrayed in all theories. Cultural self-awareness portrayed individuals an "active and reflexive role in negotiating their self in the cultural context (Lu & Wan, 2018, p. 835)" by considering the "metacognitive component of the self-process pertaining to cultural experiences". this allowance to actively choose and define through narratives is also connected with the positioning theory where there is a degree of agency for choosing the position that one assumes or that one places others. The influence of subjectivities is underlined because the "positions [are] in accordance with their own lived narrative experience—including beliefs, emotions, and subjective histories "as well as a knowledge of social structures (including roles) with their attendant rights, obligations, and expectations" (McVee et al., 2019, p. 382).

Relating to culture, in positioning theory it is understood as interwoven in discourse and in self-awareness theory as constructed by individuals as their perception in relation to themselves. The similarity can be claimed given the sociocultural nature of the creation of discourses as drawing back to initial conceptualising cultural knowledge of the norms. The concept of sense of belonging that is part of the explanatory, but not applicable section of the cultural self-awareness theory can be connected to the positioning theory. This connection stems from a potential and hypothetical relation that is based on the idea that self-positioning can happen in the search for longing to be. In unfamiliar discourse, the position that is adapted is more uncertain but in a recognizable discourse or interaction, having a sense of belonging facilitates the positioning.

# 5. ANALYSIS

## 5.1 Introduction and analytical strategy

The following section is the analysis of the empirical data that comes from the journals and reflections originating from the trip to North Macedonia and in combination with the theoretical framework. The analysis is approached by presenting our experiences focused on the micro-interactions in Skopje and developing from there a meta reflection in which those are blended with the theory. It is structured in a chronological way. The departure point of the analysis, where the empirical data can find its roots are the journals. In the first journal which was written just after our arrival back in Denmark from North Macedonia, the reflections are closer to the actual happenings and encounters while in the second journal, after those first impressions have been subject of an ongoing discussion and reflection, are more elevated to a metadiscussion level in which they have become generalized and validified by theory and conceptualization. From the six journals in total, we found four topics that were present in all of them and therefore composed experiences or interactions that triggered thoughts in the three of us. The themes came together after we each reflected on the experiences in Macedonia and not the other way round. We are aware that the reflections do not only fit under one headline only but are as much broader and in connection with the other thoughts.

The positioning theory is present in the meta-reflections of each individual through expressions of thought regarding personal actions or the ones from other people. Expectations, duties, rights, and behaviours are embedded in those thoughts and narratives and very much guided by the role we each assume and feel positioned in at any point. ["It is with words that we ascribe rights and claim them for ourselves and place duties on others" (…) "how people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others. Not only what we do but also what we can do is restricted by rights, duties, and obligations we acquire, assume or which are imposed upon us in the concrete social contexts of everyday life (McVee et al., 2019, p. 388)".]. The aspect of cultural embodiment relates to individual patterns of interpretation of some

gestures like eye contact and closeness and the equivalent reactions that are expected to some comportments ["In pre-wired embodiments, body comportment triggers basic, evolutionarily prepared affective and cognitive reactions that subsequently prime more complex representations" (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009, p. 1278)]. Cultural self-awareness theory is present in the aim of trying to reflect on how those perceptions make us feel in relation to our "cultural background" [Cultural self-awareness concerns individuals' sense-making of cultural experience instead of their clarity of cultural knowledge" (Lu & Wan, 2018, p. 824)]. Phenomenology is the umbrella term that guides the reflecting as an ongoing process not narrowing and dissociating experiences. In the first journal, the focus was more on autoethnographic reflection drawing on our past that construct our subjectivities and in regard to the specific experiences in North Macedonia (Schiff, 2017). This second reflection can be understood more as inspired by memory work and that departs from a level of self-consciousness and aims towards a deeper notion of self-awareness (Blaise et al., 2017). Additionally, in the study, the narrations constitute the analysis as part of the autoethnographic approach to the subject. In connection to that is narrative psychology which represents the individual subjective meaning-making process, interpreting, reflecting, and writing (Schiff, 2017). When we refer to terms such as culture, our socio-cultural background, our pre-wired embodiments embodied culture, what is meant is the individual, subjective cultural frame where not only nationality is considered but also the socio-cultural environment in different stages of life, family, experiences and the own feeling/notion of cultural relation. The theories connect with each other due to how the meaning-making process of positioning is embodied in culture.

The following topics are on the one hand our relation to Peter, secondly our perception of the environment in Skopje, next to the internal group dynamics, and lastly our experience as isolated from the group. Each topic presents the micro reflections as group reflections and the macro reflections as individual given the higher degree of subjective differentiation that takes place in the metadiscussion.

## 5.2 PETER

Our closest person in Macedonia was our couch surfing host Peter and therefore there were multiple occasions and micro-interactions that made us all three reflect on ourselves and our relation to him. In the following, we are going to present some of the occasions that triggered such thoughts. Peters' generous behaviour towards us went further than hosting us for free in his house for the whole duration of the trip. We aimed towards staying at a girls' place first because it made us feel safer given the unfamiliarity but after some time of not getting any answers, we came across Peter's profile. Staying at his place and cohabiting made him inevitably the biggest source of experience and closure we gained with the Macedonian people.

### 5.2.1 Micro-reflection

Meeting Peter and through the outstanding interactions we had with him we realised how respectful and thoughtful he behaved towards us. One experience was the first night when we arrived at the apartment, we sat down on the couch talking about the coming days and what to do in Skopje. We as a group (Simona, Sara, and Emma) were sitting on the couch while he was standing up. When he noticed that the conversation would take long, he took a chair and placed himself in front of us. Even though there would have been a place for him on the couch he avoided squeezing in between and maybe accidentally interrupting the personal space of not knowing each other.

Peter ended up sleeping on the couch leaving his room and bed to us. That added up to our initial suspicious feeling of why a guy could be hosting three girls for a long time without knowing them. When Sara got ill and was sleeping in his bed, he avoided going into his own room to get a jacket from his closet. Instead, he did a lot of effort of describing the jacket and the place to Simona so she could go and get it for him. This kind of Peter's behaviour illustrated in the two upper examples showed us that he actually was really thoughtful of not making us uncomfortable and by showing that he cared about what made us comfortable, we gained more trust towards him getting more open in interaction with him. Nevertheless, this reflection regarding his behaviour is our interpretation that is based on our embodied cultural patterns that affect the meaning-making (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Due to our subjective cultural awareness, we interpret the respect for personal space by leaving some distance with strangers as a sign of being thoughtful and not overstepping (Lu & Wan, 2018). That is how, due to our pre-wired embodiments, we placed Peter in a discourse and narrative of a thoughtful, respectful host. That positioning involved our position as the guest that felt the need to live up and give back, a position that came with feelings of rights and responsibilities which will be further elaborated in the metareflection.

During the day he organized many different activities with us around the city, picked us up with the car and took us out. This example illustrated how, additionally to the respect, his actions made us place him in a narrative that portrayed him as invested but also relaxed and caring. This attitude towards us could have been that he to some extent placed himself as responsible for showing us the city. This responsibility can come due to the unequal power relation in Macedonia, him as an expert of the city and us as completely unknown. In general, by him assuming this role of caring, investment, and trust but communicating and behaving in a not pushing way, made it easy for us to rely on him and develop a certain "dependency".

He was telling us about his responsibility at work and private life, that he liked to play music together with finds hosting parties in his apartment. He introduced us to some friends and the singer of the band he saw seemed to know him. The fact that he had friends that knew him for a longer period of time who had nothing to do with us, and who liked spending time with him, was a very positive outsider judgment. Due to our initial mistrust and subjective cultural background, getting to know more about Peter's personal life

made him seem closer and easier to relate to which removes him from the narrative of sceptical mistrust to a more trustful closeness (Lu & Wan, 2018).

### 5.2.2 Meta-reflection:

Sara: When we reflect on our relation with Peter it is clear to say that he made our stay very comfortable and enjoyable. The hard part was "knowing the terms of the relationship". The idea behind the concept of couch surfing is that you are taken in by a host for free. This removes these established give and take dynamics as well as the personality of it which is both things that I am not used to and complicated my notion of acting. More concretely, I was torn between wanting to give back all the time for what he was doing and not "overstepping" his kindness and thinking that I would do the same and trying to behave as "natural" as possible. In Peter's case, we weren't paying, so this service discourse was removed but also the friendship, and personal relationship acts as well because on the one we were strangers, and on the other, there was no certainty at all that we were going to meet at any point again. Our attempt to try to equal that relation was by making sure he knew that he was welcomed in our places, paying for beer, groceries, and so on. Having grown up in a very sharing and giving environment as is intrinsic in Spanish culture and in my family, understanding and relating to Peter's behaviour in that aspect made it easier to take in all his kindness (Lu & Wan, 2018). Nevertheless, on the other hand, I don't particularly enjoy people that I know going out of their way for me and I certainly do not like strangers to do so. In strangers' cases, I am used to this give and take equality that we are surrounded by in the capitalised system where everything has turned into paid service. Therefore, the patterns of the relation and the comportments, expected and required are anchored in that guest-host discourse. Embodying a capitalistic but generous culture in a completely undefined situation and relation placed me in a behavioural conflict (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Therefore, my position towards Peter was very uncertain. On the one hand, his actions, which were understandable and interpreted through my pre-wired embodiments and subjective sociocultural background, created the narrative of trust, closeness, giving, and generosity. I could understand where he was coming from, but I still felt in a position of having to give back a lot and respond to his open-handedness. On the other hand, given the capitalistic sociocultural context that I am used to that shape many pre-wired complex representations, I felt uncomfortable taking so much in, developing a feeling of reliability through which I positioned myself in a role full of duties (Lu & Wan, 2018)(Schiff, 2017).

Another big aspect of my relation to Peter was gender. I myself am at a point where multiple overstepping encounters from boys in social situations have led to a big loss of faith in the male gender as unconditionally/unbiased good to women. So, on an unconscious level, I was in many cases just waiting for him to "fuck up" or make a move on any of us that hinted towards these second-hand intentions (McVee et al., 2019). As previously explained, we slept in his bedroom where they were some (probably sexual)

handcuffs on the counter. I remember seeing them and kind of getting a feeling of "ah so that's what's wrong with him as a sexually interested male" so to say but also finding it funny and regretting it to judge his personality on a socially accepted sexual private preference. Finding myself reflecting on his behaviour and having expectations towards him that are merely anchored in my, due to experiences that shape my narratives around young men, is a sign of the multiple time that I was positioning him in gender discourses where he was navigating and repositioning himself as a Macedonian young male (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009; McVee et al., 2019). Additionally, I have been active and involved in feminist activism for some time which makes me more sensitive to some gendered expressions. At some point, we had a conversation, brought up by Peter about the unequal relations in Macedonia between women and men and his friends where there is a lot of obvious toxicity and physical abuse. He was talking about it in a very rejecting and negative way but also as describing and accepting their normality even if recognizing its wrongness. That narrative, even if expected of me by people, is not taken for granted and that combined with his respectful behaviour towards us as strangers and also women made me feel completely comfortable and reassured by him as a male. Nevertheless, it was clearly another aspect, having to navigate between gender positions and him unconsciously facing gender expectations.

Emma: Peter did so much more for us than what I expected from a stranger. I remember that he unconditionally made me uncomfortable because I had the feeling of exploiting his kindness without giving anything back. I feel guilty thinking about when he invited us to dinner or when he offered to drive us around to different places, especially when he got up very early to drive us to the bus station. After a short time, we began to rely upon assuming he would be there for us anytime. In my sense-making process guided by embodied culture, I connected Peters's altruistic behavior to a positive feeling. My position was the opposite: a receiving guest. Regarding the embodied cultural discourse, I placed Peter as a generous host and placed myself as the receiver with an expectation to equalize the relation by paying back (McVee et al., 2019). I have noticed this shame of receiving too much a couple of times, especially when I went to Columbia where people 'moved mountains' for me even though they knew me very little. I notice that I want to do many things on my own and don't like to be dependent on others. I think has to do with my childhood where I sometimes felt ashamed to ask for things. My mom was unpleased when I asked my grandmother if she could pick me up from the station; she rather wanted me to take the bus and walk (1 hour in total) even though my grandma said that she would be happy to pick me up. It was pointed out that I was spoiled, and my mother called me a "prinzeschen" (English: *little princess*) in a pejorative way. Reflecting on these memories and connecting them with the current experience made me think that my shame about the position of receiving too much without giving equally back is cultural embodied. This highlights the different socio-cultural embodiment between the two subjects, Simona having a different embodied understanding of her responsibility in her receiver position towards Peter (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Through this reflection I gained more cultural consciousness acknowledging the differences in my embodied culture around the understanding of the receiving and giving positions (Lu &

Wan, 2018). This made me think: maybe I'm not that good at receiving because I am not as good at giving. I was a bit unsure about this phenomenon when I talked about it with a friend of a similar socio-cultural background. We discussed and concluded that it in some way is true: we do not give with the same self-evidence and perseverance as noticed in other cultures, but we don't expect to receive much either, and if we do, we are aware of debt. I would say that an attitude of expectation and attitude are very negative traits in my socio-cultural background. Through the reflections on the newly gained consciousness about a cultural embodied behavior I gained self-awareness about the giving and receiving behavior in my socio-cultural embodied behavior established from norms and values (Lu & Wan, 2018), (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). I remember that when I was talking about it with a friend, I was feeling very confident about the way I learned to go around receiving and giving. I remember having this thought "oh I like this is a good way", probably because this was the way that came the most "natural" for me in connection to the embodied behavior adopted from my culture. I am aware that this feeling is subjective and that probably everybody feels better within their socio-cultural behavior setting. This might be the reason why misconceptions often emerge when different socio-cultural habits meet, and they do not necessarily understand the habit from the other cultural perspective.

Concludingly, we can say that we each perceived Peter's behaviour and relation towards us in a very similar way but interpreted our reactions and responded to his kindness in different ways (Lu & Wan, 2018). The similarities are for example based on the fact that we all shared the same guest position and positioned him as a giving receiver (McVee et al., 2019). The differences here were based on the interpretation through the embodied culture (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). We shared a similar navigation between gender expectations and positions as us three being women and him male. That level of self-awareness resulting from the reflections differs mostly on our positioning in the relation to him. The positioning that entails different duties and rights is deeply motivated by our different embodied socio-cultural backgrounds as well as our past experiences that to a high degree condition our subjective meaning-making.

## 5.3 Skopje

When we decided to travel to Skopje one of the main reasons was the fact that we did not know anything about Macedonia. Therefore, our prejudgments and adjustments of actions would not be conditioned so much towards a specific adaptation process. By this topic, we refer to our encounters and reflections departing from the city life, environment, and general conditions of the city that appeared more superficial without a deeper interaction. By those, our feelings towards the street animals, state of the infrastructures, arrival at the airport, etc are meant.

### 5.3.1 Micro-reflection

When we were driving from the airport one of the things that called our attention was that the place was notably poorer in contrast to Denmark. The houses were small, old and in bad condition, especially in the countryside. Also, when entering the center of Skopje there were a lot of homeless dogs and cats in the street. When walking through Skopje we got the impression of it being a more chilled and social environment in comparison to Copenhagen. People were genuinely nice to us, making big efforts to establish a conversation in English or making each other understandable and us feel welcomed. The discourse between natives and strangers became apparent to us as people assumed the duty to make an effort to us in order to get an understanding (Schiff, 2017). It was also clear to see that there are many things that government or state-wise were not working completely. It was visible that it is a poorer country because for example the streets had wholes or were completely ripped apart which gave the city a less structured atmosphere and more human.

Simona: The first person that we met was a taxi driver taking us to the city centre.  did not speak much English and despite the normally struggled encounter he was communicating with us effortlessly about little things such as the weather. On this regard we appreciated his company, and I looked forward to interacting with him therefore I asked him if the temperature was warm and in the effort of making myself understandable, the man did not understand my question.  While driving he was guiding us through the city pointing at buildings and important streets, being very aware of our position as tourists there. I felt really taken care of, I thought he was really caring, I appreciated the attention to such a small detail as our position and it made a lot the difference in the moment that we shared with him along the ride. I felt easiness in being there with him and I did not even know him, but he made it super easy as it is for me in my birthplace. Everyone is aware of each other positionalities and people mind these and consider these and the impact, influence/affect they have in our lives.  The kindness and openness among strangers were surrounding us.  Every human encounter was depicted by an intense but simple interaction through which there was a constant eye contact which made me feel very peaceful and gave me a lot of trust, I felt considered, welcomed and accepted just by the way they embraced the eye contact with a stranger that anyways was worthy and human and valued as such.

### 5.3.2 Meta-reflection

Sara: On multiple occasions, I can consider that I felt more welcomed, at home, and closer to Spain in Skopje than in Denmark where I have been living for a considerably longer time. This street life culture for me is a basic in Spanish culture, a centre of social activities and daily routine, and a big missing part in Denmark was strongly latent in Skopje as an opposition (Lu & Wan, 2018). Relating the feeling of home and well-being to street and social life is very culturally rooted in my Spanish background and social daily environment there. Additionally, those cultural differences from Spain to Denmark have made me feel certain rejective emotions towards Denmark which made my opinion about Skopje completely biased. I believe this initial rejection of structure and order and attractiveness or relatability, which I also associate

with more human, to the opposite comes from the duality in which I grew up. Being Spanish but going to a German school and being raised in a Spanish context by a German institution made me aware of those differences. My happier times are associated with those moments where I felt less restricted by rules and mostly outside of school and that's why this still existing dualism is reinforced nowadays in Denmark. I associate those rules in behaviour and correctness as limiting (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Nevertheless, in the German institutions, things worked perfectly, and it was easy to rely on others to assume their part of the responsibility. Therefore, I can relate more to unstructured ways of living their lives as appeared in Macedonia, given my embodiment of culture, cultural self, and pre-wired embodiments, but still appreciate governments and systems that function like the Danish one. Another aspect that increased my welcomed feeling and well-being in Macedonia was people's body language. By interacting in a more expressive way and looking at you personally in the eyes, taking time for you instead of rushing or putting a fake service smile on, I felt closer to them. In Spain, we use body language a lot to express feelings and to reinforce words through comportments and those have established reactions, responses, and interpretations that make the communicative process and message easier (Lu & Wan, 2018). My pre-wired embodiments emerging from my Spanish socio-cultural background are anchored on a basic and cognitive reaction to body language such as smile, eye contact, or head nodding (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Further on the more complex representations and interpretations of norms and feelings point towards a higher degree of closeness that's how I felt in a position of welcoming (McVee et al., 2019).

Additionally, the excitement and joy of going on a trip mostly positions me in a narrative where I appreciate everything in the new place more and possibly conceive it as better (Schiff, 2017). The position you are in when you get to a new place very much affects the attitude from which you perceive it (McVee et al., 2019). On different occasions, because of being guest and my cultural background, I found myself romanticising the problems people face in Skopje and how they find the enjoyment and escape from those in going out. Imperfections made Macedonia more human and relatable than the perfect-looking Denmark when both countries have their negative and positive aspects (Lu & Wan, 2018). Arriving as a group of friends for a short period of time in north Macedonia, we positioned ourselves in a discourse where we romanticised the foreign (McVee et al., 2019). The excitement in combination with the position of strangers conditioned our narrative of Skopje. Additionally, getting the impression that Macedonia filled in the missing aspects from Denmark of Spain shaped my discourse around the city from a nostalgic position. Finding similarities between Spain and Macedonia in the imperfections, a comparison that is strongly conditioned by the lack of similarity in that aspect between Spain a Denmark, shaped my pre-wired own embodiment in which I associate imperfection with humanness and home (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009).

Emma: The environment of Skopje stood out to me as very poor and in contrast to Germany and especially Denmark. Even though I was aware of it, we never talked about it or spelled out loud this obvious

difference. The conversation within the group was more about the positive things when comparing it to what Sara and Simona described from their homes in Spain. This might resemble a feeling of guilt living in a wealthier country where the government and the healthcare system work. When perceiving Skopje, I positioned the citizens in relation to me as unprivileged or even poor and, in contrast, my position as a privileged one (McVee et al., 2019). I am placing the citizens in the discourse of unprivileged/poor because my standards are culturally embodied.  This means that what I perceive as normal/rich/privileged is based on the norms from the socio-cultural context ((Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). This made me feel compassion for the people I met; a way to cope with that was by romanticizing it and focusing on the positive things. When Peter told us about the government and that people left their pets on the streets, and when he described the conflict between neighboring Albania, I felt uncomfortable. If somebody from my own socio-cultural environment talked about people from Albania in a similar manner, I would have perceived them as being racist. Simply by knowing the often-negative discourse around Muslims in Germany I am very sensitive towards criticism towards them, independent of their validity (McVee et al., 2019).  But with Peter, I didn't want to point that out, and I said to myself that I didn't know enough about it anyway; maybe there would have been reasons (experiences) for him to judge Albanians this way.  Even though I have opinion on racism and might judge others for saying things I consider racist, I do not judge them the same way because of their different socio-cultural position.  I am sensitive towards issues related to the historical background of Germans (the holocaust) and the very recent immigration from the middle east in 2015. As a German, I often get associated with the crimes of the second world war and its consequences and being aware of that is embodied in my thinking as much as wanting to demonstrate the opposite.  Thus, my socio-cultural position and interpretation of other socio-cultural settings has a crutail influence on how I position others and perceive their behaviour (McVee et al., 2019).

The reflection emphasizes the embodied culture's influence on positioning (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009), (McVee et al., 2019). This gets clear through the embodied stigmas around the position I put on Peter. My socio-cultural "privileged" background judges his opinion in the context of his "unprivileged" position.

Simona: Throughout the whole time in Skopje, I was struggling trying to understand how to behave and how to be those days in Skopje in a respectful way. The theoretical framework provides us an understanding of why those struggles were happening and where they come from. The position that I felt the most impacting my way of being in Skopje and being with the people in every encounter, whether it was with Peter, with strangers, or with the environment around me was the one of privileged. Several times: in the taxi, in the square, at the market, when I encountered subjectivities, I was compelled to feel in debt towards them because of my privileged position. Though, I feel ashamed for that because it was an unspoken language that says, "I am superior to you". The notion of privilege implies conceiving the "other" as unprivileged, assuming that the person in front of you is unequal to you, based on cultural embodied

subjective differences. Inspired by Cultural Awareness theory and Hard Embodiment we can understand that these interactions are formed by how the surroundings were influencing us by – in this case remembering my cultural background and at the same we were influenced by the surroundings as a product of the awareness we created new positions in which we put the surroundings.

The notion of privilege entails an understanding of the self that is far away from the socio-cultural reality that maybe this has lived in. In other cases, it implies conceptions of hierarchies that are visible and sensible to all the elements involved and they are a result of a dichotomic structure embedded into our conceptual world and therefore into our lives.

As mentioned, we did not have a lot of knowledge about north-Macedonia beforehand, meaning that the impressions and reflection on the social environment were based on connecting our impressions to similarities from our own socio-cultural background (Lu & Wan, 2018). The interpretation of the environment is based on each subject's connections to their own embodied culture and its meaning-making process of the impressions of the socio-cultural environment of Skopje (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). The cultural embodied differences were more salient than our positioning but still influencing each other as shaping discourses such as romanticising, nostalgic, or excitement (McVee et al., 2019).

## 5.4 Group situation

The following section is inspired by reflections triggered by our internal group dynamics where the fact of being friends from different backgrounds, researchers, and travelling in an unfamiliar context made our differences and similarities latent. The situations that happened in Skopje where we as subjects put ourselves in such a situation had never been faced by any of us before.

### 5.4.1 Micro-reflection

We all have been friends before starting to write the project together which is why we know each other before and had already an established relation and group dynamics between us. When we went to Skopje it happened that one could be torn between the established group and one's role in the group and what one's own decency was requiring. The selected situations have been often only perceived by one individual and gone unnoticed by the others.

### 5.4.2 Macro-reflection

Emma: The individual is sometimes torn between the role one in a group (in this case with Sara and Simona) and what the embodied culture dictates. Depending on what is the strongest, you chose to act upon what you feel most required. It happened early on the trip when I still knew little about North Macedonia and I chose to adapt myself to the group dynamics. We were asked to step back from the grass because it was not allowed to step on it. I remember I had a feeling of uncomfortableness about spreading the bag's

jackets all over the public space because it seemed disrespectful to me, but I didn't want to ruin it for the others and to be received as an uptight moralizing kind of person, which is why I decided to sit down with them anyway. When we were asked to leave the grass, I felt very ashamed of having broken the rules and assumed that they might think that we were careless and disrespectful kids. Here it becomes apparent how I positioned myself as a tourist in a new place; my embodied culture contains being respectful (McVee et al., 2019). The position I associated myself with (within the group) was a rather different one, more self-confident and "cool" which is why I decided to sit down with the group in the first place. Here my socio-culture view is contradicting the group positions at play. Negotiating the different positions requiring different actions from me, and that made me feel uncomfortable. When the man was instructing us to leave the grass, I changed positions from the first one as a part of a group where I saw the need to sit together as friends, towards the guest tourist position where I should respect the rules in an unknown environment.

Sara: The fact that the three of us traveled for research purposes but are friends made the dynamics between us and the general approach to the trip different and uncertain. Our differences in those regards did not appear during the trip for the first time but appeared enhanced by the unfamiliar context and the need to decide as a group and not as individuals. Our group dynamics and discourses in which we were acting were strongly conditioned by the different positions we each assumed on different occasions between each other (McVee et al., 2019). Conditions of being sick, not having the possibility to private time and space, or having routine habits guided those positioning for ourselves and the other two. Nevertheless, we shared the discourse of being strangers in Macedonia and behaving in a considerate way towards others. We are used to a position of autonomy and independence that was interrupted by the conditions and exchanged for a strong dependency between each other (McVee et al., 2019).

Something I reflected upon prior to my arrival to Skopje was brought up by Emma at the airport and plane and it is related to past experiences I have had with cross-cultural behaviour norms that are projected in body language in Denmark. If we categorize Emma's and my differences in behaviours given our culture, we both clash in certain situations. The fact that we, therefore, have different behaviour standards for some situations has made me aware of my behaviour and the little actions that can catch people's attention in Danish contexts. This clash and awareness come due to differences in pre-wired embodiments (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). Those pre-wired embodiments are produced by embodiments of culture and therefore relate and come from different socio-cultural backgrounds. In my case, when speaking with a certain volume or behaving in a certain way, I am used to and expect certain responses and interpretations to those behaviours given how deeply that interpretative process is in me. Nevertheless, that cannot be applied in a different context, Denmark, where those pre-wired embodiments do not correspond. When I employ higher volume in Spain for example, I can expect an interpretation of excitement. Nevertheless, Emma's basic cognitive reaction is of disrespect towards the environment and

complex interpretation would be her uncomforted. When we traveled to North Macedonia, the unfamiliarity of the setting made me/us unsure regarding what he socially accepted behaviour is. Therefore, I was missing that notion that allows me to adapt and adjust my behaviour to integrate into society or to have the choice to. The discourse in which we both anchored our pre-wired embodiments and reactions on was uncertain (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009).

I believe that having been made aware on several occasions that my social behaviour is not too well seen in Denmark as it is normalised in Spain, I feel like I have made that also a personality trait of mine, meaning that I position myself in the discourse and role of rule-breaker with the rights and duties this entails (McVee et al., 2019). My narrative around my actions in comparison with Emma's narrative around my actions makes my behaviour look as unacceptable which triggers a reaction in me for being positioned in such a narrative (Schiff, 2017). By this, I mean that I lose the perception of when I am unconsciously "breaking the rules" because I see this behaviour as normal and reasonable or when it is an act of acting out my Spanish personality to underline my social standards. Having been told on many occasions, and having related that to my nationality, makes me assume and act out as a "rebellion" against "Danishness" that makes me feel judged about my Spanish behaviour as superior-inferior due to geographical placing and enhances my "Spanish nationality". Additionally, being positioned in the discourse of behaving as "Spanish" removes my individuality and subjectivity from my actions and places me in a position of representing or being a nationality, which affects my relation towards Spain and makes me culturally self-aware (Schiff, 2017).

Simona: Concerning the group dynamics, I was more aware of myself as a consequence of my social setting living in Denmark for three years. The position that I covered within my group was mainly concerning the culture that I recognize as the one that I come from and that now has become the "italianness". Mostly the perception that I have on my cultural experienced sums up the theories mainly focusing on the hard embodiment which displays my cognitive understandings wire the perception that I have on my own cultural being: when I find myself in social situations and I must show excitement or joy or anger or sadness, instinctively I do not react because of socio cultural notions that I have internalized about my own subjectivity.

In this section our differences are accentuated because of how we position ourselves as embodying a culture and acting and reacting accordingly (Lu & Wan, 2018). The existing clashing points were when the sociocultural background was more salient than the position given that this second was in many cases the same, a group of girl-researchers and friends.

## 5.5 Walking Alone
An influencing factor in our experiences was that we traveled as a group where we knew each other and could rely on. In order to try to move away from our "influencing understanding" that the experiences one

makes when facing those situations alone are different, we took a morning apart. The following sections are mostly based on the impressions and encounters occurring that morning.

### 5.5.1 Micro-reflection

Another pattern that provoked awareness was the feeling and thoughts that occurred when walking alone outside, separated from the group. Just by walking on the street, we got more self-aware of how others might perceive us. This led to each one of us trying to be more likable and friendly when walking alone, for example, smiling more and having a more open body language.

### 5.5.2 Meta-reflection

Sara: Becoming aware of our differences in perceptions and assuming positions when we traveled alone and in a group, we decided to take one morning apart and do individual experiences. We split next to what looked like the weekly or daily neighbourhood food market. I remember taking the first walk and while doing so I was paying much attention to the details and trying to make eye contact with the people that were selling to smile at them. What mostly made me feel weird or like a stranger was the impossibility to communicate in the same language and through that starting a conversation with people or understand what they were talking about between themselves. Therefore, I decided to embrace my outsider position, even though focusing on trying extra hard to behave correctly and start a conversation from that departure point (McVee et al., 2019). I took out my camera, which made me feel and always does, very weird and violent, and I started approaching the people in the stands and asking if I could take a picture of them. By embracing my outsider, stranger position I was putting myself very much in that discourse of tourists that places the approached people in the position of natives that might condition their behaviour due to some interpretative rights or obligations. I notice how I overemphasised the body language, how hard I smiled, and how little I constructed sentences in English, as basic and easy as possible. This overemphasis on certain actions comes from my pre-wired embodiments in which I understand smile as kindness and closeness which were the feelings I tried to share (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). They were all super smiley and friendly and I felt like they came from a very genuine place, for example, a woman tried to ask me if I wasn't cold and every time, I passed she either smiled, waved, or blew me a kiss.

A position I remember having on multiple occasions was one motivated by the similarities between Macedonia and Turkey and Skopje reminding me so much of Istanbul. The way I interacted with people in the market was similar. While living in Istanbul the language barrier problems and the alternatives that I used were the same. Therefore, the, in my understanding more, neutral or global pre-wired embodiments are used more such as the emphasis on a smile to unfold in an uncertain cultural context due to similar positioning (Lu & Wan, 2018). The situation of being in a market or in a small shop where food is sold is something that I encountered a lot in Istanbul and where I can see myself behaving and expecting the same in Skopje. I remember both in the dessert shop and in the food market I felt confident that if I naively asked and showed interest in one specific product, I was going to get it offered to try without having to buy it.

That is something that I have experienced mostly in Turkey but also in prior trips to Africa and where I developed this embodied expectation or reaction that comes with when me as a tourist position myself as interested in one specific thing that is been sold. Nevertheless, it is that intrinsic expectation of that offering reaction, which indeed happened, that I was not aware of myself.

Emma: I remember that I was wearing ripped jeans when walking on the street on the way to the supermarket. I bought them because I thought that they looked "cool" and made me confident. When I was alone, I felt uncomfortable because I was the only one with holes in my pants and I didn't want to draw this kind of attention. Ripped jeans signals a careless attitude, and I was feeling uncomfortable wearing them because they could be perceived as provocative. This understanding of the meaning of ripped jeans and how others are perceiving is connected to embodied culture because the sense-making of ripped jeans arise from my socio-cultural context and because of the lack of information from the North Macedonian culture reproduced in an unfamiliar habitat (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009).

Noticing that I remember that often when I was buying clothes, I have been adapting to other people I like and feeling very cool when I am walking close in a group but not as much when I am alone. Applying the theory of positioning, I position myself in the context of North Macedonia as an outsider tourist/guest who is subordinated in an unfamiliar country; therefore, a feeling of being less confident when I am alone emerges, and I want to go unnoticed or rather adapt to the others (McVee et al., 2019) . Being a respectful stranger is in contrast to my cultural embodied interpretation of what I am transmitting through my appearance (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009). In a group, it is easier because at some point I come to know the people; I know how to act, how to dress and how to behave and thus perceived. In the environment of North Macedonia, I didn't know how my behavior was interpreted which is why I wanted to adapt to what everybody else was wearing.

Simona: While I was walking alone, I had some struggles with my reasons of being there and walking there in the first place. I was grateful of getting to know Macedonia and Macedonia getting to know me, but I could feel guilt and shame towards the people and the country that I was romanticizing because it reminded me of my birthplace unfortunately, I was there as a researcher . My reasons to be there were not completely selfish but supposedly objective and with some moral attributes such as knowledge creation. In addition to that I embodied also factors that did not allow me to feel comfortable in the relationship to the people I was engaging with: I felt my privileged position that I was reminded of constantly by looking at anything. I spoke the language of development, "English".  As a counter result of the reflections while being alone I enacted as much as possible my position of researcher, I tried not to find anything to say about them because I would have written about it in the project. We separated to do better "research practises". Was I walking and wondering what my position as researcher could have been put in practise, without hurting anyone by being inappropriate because of my power position. I enjoyed very much the people in the streets.

When being separate from the group we developed a higher degree of awareness around our position as a guest/visitors/tourists and how others might perceive us. The awareness level increased by being perceived as an alone standing individual when we did not have anybody from the known environment to relate to (Lu & Wan, 2018). According to that we often changed our behaviour to get perceived in a positive way or to fit into the environment. When being aware of the stranger's position by us and the environment that is placed in such discourse by our presence, the pre-wired embodiments become uncertain and we and the rest assume a more careful position in the communicative sphere (McVee et al., 2019).

## 5.6 Analysis conclusion

The conclusions of the analysis are multifold and most crucially open-ended. This is given the fact that they are based on self-reflections that are always subjected to an ongoing process due to their influence by experiences. Taking up the chronological evolution it can be said that the first journal that was written just after the trip to Macedonia allowed us to approach a level of self-understanding anchored on micro-interactions. After the discussion of our theoretical framework, the second journal gained a more meta reflective level where theories were applied which helps to put names and find" scientific psychological" explanations for my emotions (Lu & Wan, 2018), and the self-perceptive aim was self-awareness.

Conclusively, basing the reflection on the comparison with the first journal and the gained input towards the experience, the broader understanding that we acquired is anchored in the categorization through theoretical and established knowledge. What is meant by this, is that we were able to name the feelings and find a reasonable enough explanation for those that came from cultural and psychological understandings of the subject. Additionally, we came to the impression that, by categorizing and naming complex feelings or impressions regarding the experiences, oneself, and self-perception, it limits those to one aspect. This is what we carefully tried to avoid in the decision-making process of a psychological research project by conducting autoethnography. Nevertheless, we tried to avoid that stronger limitation by including so many views that all set the focus on another influencing aspect. The combination of the theories, concepts, and methodologies formed a net that "helped" to shape and visualise the experiences, behaviors, feelings, and reflections by putting names on the feeling and drawing a line back to their roots.

By applying theories and "elevating" the analysis to a metareflection and method discussion our experience becomes more generalised and validified.

Additionally, we can find multiple differences between ourselves and our differences/similarities in perception depending on the topic. The three aspects of cultural self-awareness, embodiment of culture, and position are always in strong connection (Dov Cohen and Angela K.-Y. Leung, 2009; Lu & Wan, 2018; McVee et al., 2019). When we talk about differences in positioning, for example, those are mostly motivated by the differences that we each have in pre-wired embodiments. It is cultural self-awareness

that conditions the meaning-making process, which affects the embodiment and reaction and therefore results in different positioning. On some occasions such as the relation to Peter as a male and the group dynamics, the cultural differences are more salient than our positioning given the similarities in position. Positioningwise there was a common navigation between gendered expectations but differences in cultural embodiment and reactions to his kindness based on those sociocultural differing backgrounds. Our cultural embodiment became reinforced by our different reactions and interpretations of body language or comportments which unconditionally affected our positioning in those encounters. Positioning is a discursive process, by positioning others we were also positioning ourselves.

It is crucial to underline that those conclusions and level of awareness reached in this analysis and project report are only a step in the ongoing process of self-reflection. The reflection will be affected by other experiences, discussions, knowledge about studies and theories, shifts in meaning-making patterns, and so on (Schiff, 2017). From there the question can be asked, to what extent did that reached (cultural) self-awareness, knowledge about one selves perception, and reflection about the roots of behaviour helped? Why could they be positive or negative? Are they going to influence the daily life or similar experiences? In which direction?

# 6. Discussion

## 6.1 Discussion point 1

The first discussion topic evolves around the importance of narratives and how those were approached by the three of us within the process of the project.

Through the subjective methodology of autoethnography, we were aware that the data collection as much as the outcome would be variating between each researcher. The method of individual note-taking during the trip as well as the first and second journals were mediums to express subjectivities based on the socio-cultural background of each researcher in the different approaches to narrating the experiences and the personal cultural embodied reflections. Because of the conscious decision of not limiting the process of data collection instructions all the reflection steps turned out differently based on, for example, which different details stood out to us. We as subjects certainly influenced the others' reflection process by having developed the project through common discussions and reflections on our experiences. The aspect where the narrative appears to differ from each other is in the meta reflection, here the interpretation of the experience is based on the subject's embodied meaning making. The content of the reflections is related to the individual's socio-cultural background, which gets visible in the meta-reflections. For example, how we each reflected differently on the environment of Skopje walking the same streets and having a similar experience but interpreted them differently and related to them differently due to each embodied culture and experience. Differences are also found in the way of reflecting, meaning how many personal reflections

with connections to the personal background and earlier experiences each individual makes in the journals and meta reflections. How much each of us is trying or willing to answer the personal question of "why am I feeling, what I feel" by connecting it to individual past experience. This is also interconnected with the individual's vulnerability if the subject is willing to share once very personal experiences and reflections on self-awareness within a report and with potential strangers. These personal peculiarities are part of the subjectivity and also meaningful details about the subject itself to take into account when reflecting on the analysis.

## 6.2 Discussion point 2

After having been through the process of reflecting and examining our perception of ourselves, a more developed and argumentative answer can be given to contribute to the discussion of the limitations of the theory. One of the arrival points we reached in the analysis is how this reflection is an open, ongoing process where no ultimate level of self-awareness can be reached. What is therefore the point of reflecting? Does it then ever get to influence any perception we have on culture or ourselves? The fact of being in a constant reflective process constitutes the nature of our subjectivities and by engaging in self-reflection those narrations are constantly rethought and reconsidered. New experiences will affect the meaning-making process of experiences, what is then the point in reflecting and trying to "gain" personal/cultural self-awareness? Narratives are the representation of individual reflections and derive from old subjective meaning-making patterns but at the same time shape new ones. One might argue that going subjecting oneself to reflection leads to a mayor understanding of oneself. The self-awareness is therefore connected to sympathising with one's emotions, behaviours, and perceptions. Reflecting on oneself in situations deriving from cross-cultural experiences can lead to a narrative about them that will influence how those experiences are perceived in the future. In connection to our project, if in Macedonia we felt in a particular way and through reflection get a temporary understanding of it, it could help and facilitate our negotiation when dealing with such feelings or encounters again. This can, in the long run, enable individuals to find comfort in unfamiliar environments and ease interactions. Additionally, some people find console in fixed explanations for their emotions. This means that when experiencing confusion regarding the nature of a feeling or behavior, it is possible through self-reflection to try to trace that feeling back to an explanation in the past. Having then this clarity can be recomforting. Nevertheless, that path to finding the roots of a feeling is a temporary narrative in which the past is being made to fit with the present and influenced by the point in which one finds itself in. Therefore, it is only temporary and very likely to be rethought and changed with the influence of other experiences. What is then the point of getting an understanding and knowledge about feelings and behavioural roots when they are so related to the situation and will be rethought? Picking up the just mentioned aspect of finding comfort in tracing behaviours and feelings back to the past, this reflective practice with a fixed conclusion can result very

limiting and categorizing. It isolates the experiences, both from the present and the past, and narrows them to one narrative when the other factors both for creating that narrative as for narrating it are equally relevant and influential. Is it then ever possible to get clearance through self-reflection? In connection to the findings of the cultural self-awareness theory, reflecting on the influence of culture on ourselves based on "cultural experiences" can contribute to a feeling of rejection and confusion towards one's "own culture". It is mostly the negative or unclear cultural experiences that trigger reactions which, how it occurred in our journals regarding the trip to Macedonia, implies a perception and consideration of oneself as "Spanish, German or Italian". The last point is the connection between reflection and narrations. Reflecting, either written, mentally, or orally, those thoughts are expressed in form of narration. Those narrations create routines that affect the path of embodiments and meaning-making processes. Reflecting on an experience, therefore, means engaging in a narration that will unconsciously at least, influence the perception and interpretation one has and makes in next similar experiences.

Therefore, if reflections create and stem from narrations that are deeply influenced and dependent by the current situation of the subject, is it possible to ever get a level of awareness or understanding about oneself? What does one get from "knowing and understanding" one's feelings and behaviours? What is the point of reflecting if it will be rethought?

## 6.3 Discussion point 3

In most of the meetings, there was one theme that always called for our attention, and which was the reason why we decided to launch this whole project, that is the structural epistemological violence committed by western academia in knowledge production discourses. To further explain, we will refer to our experience of writing the project report according to which we noticed being unbalancing, and as we were stepping into "dangerous territory" if we did not translate every end of the meeting our every topic of discussion in what might be considered "valid or relevant" for academic purposes. On the contrary, our meetings characterized by open discussions and stories coming from past experiences and knowledge about notions that we constantly circumnavigate throughout the whole paper, but we are never provided with the "right" language to further talk about. According to our perspective, we do not feel comfortable stating this topic of relevance as someone's lack, on the contrary we mean to underline the phenomenological importance of structural violence reinforced in academia. On this account, it mirrors our feelings of when we went to Macedonia, and we found ourselves committed to use that experience as "proof or data" of some hypothetical results that afterwards we were pressured into find. Though, we realized that we did not know what kind of data we were looking for – being the topic of our project about our subjectivity in the domain of cultural encounters. Unfortunately, this brings to another case of the thematic we are trying to raise in the above stated chapter, which unfolds doubts and confusion in how we use and "apply" our theories and methods in multiple parts of the report in contrast of how we used them practically in the process of researching. The challenge represents the visible separation between the

subjective reality and the need for objectification and standardization imposed by science, and academia as a representative of such, which is made invisible by institutional discourses of which our subjective reality is imprinted as well. Additionally, such obstacle becomes more overwhelming concerning psychological topics belonging to the humanities domain of study regarding concepts of certain realities such as the subjective one - in this case, not losing access to our notions and understandings of the problem formulation and direction of the project. In fact, the theory and the method chapter played a definitive role in shaping our project report: our thoughts and experiences have become more generalized, and therefore invisible subjective research processes are made visible through the practical knowledge that theories give us of how to mould our paper and our understandings in an academic way which theoretically fits the standards for scientific knowledge production. On the other hand, one might underline the implications of what research format is considered to fit certain requirements as such as "academic" or "scientific" can have on subjectivities, including researchers who are limited in the use of a certain language and therefore they end up reproducing patters epistemological structural violence.

# 7. Conclusion

The project is an autoethnographic reflection of our perception of ourselves during our experiences and encounters in North Macedonia. The two journals that were developed after the trip were written at different points of the process, one based on the field notes with a closer focus on the micro-interactions and the second one after the process of theoretical work which elevated the discussion to a metareflections. The analysis is presented maintaining these two steps which correspond to the path of self-understanding and self-awareness and in form of phenomenological narration. The theories are melded together in the reflection as influencing the perceptions and degrees of self-awareness. The individual subjectivities are intrinsic in the narrations. The pre-wired embodiments, rights, duties, and subjectivities influence the positioning that condition the discourses we are part of and ultimately the personal and cultural self-awareness resulting from those. Relating to the problem formulation, reflecting on cultural experiences helps to develop and understanding of behaviours, feelings and perceptions in connection to pre-embodiments, positions and socio-cultural environments which ultimately affects the cultural identification. By narrating the reflections and delving into our perceptions of ourselves, we are developing routines of meaning-making that will influence the interpretation of further experiences. The reflection is an open and never-ending process that will be developed further with continued discussion and experience.

## 7.1 Perspectivation

The findings of the project relate to our current position in an extended notion than only because they are based on autoethnographic research. Given the globalised state of the world, traveling between borders is

more frequent every day, for example, cross-cultural immigration or exchange students. Not only that, but the cohabiting of multiple "cultures" in one environment or family is also an actual happening. In this manner, raising awareness of the influence culture has on the development of a perception of the self and how those also affect the individual meaning-making patterns, subjective and embodiments is relevant and contemporary. Through this individual reflection and consideration of the relation between self and sociocultural environment, those frequent encounters, navigating between identities, and interactions can be considered also in connection to subjective self-awareness.

As individuals who have been through an active and intensive self-reflecting process, the questions that raise now revolve around the purpose and results of that introspection. Did it increase my well-being as the cultural self-awareness predicted, due to an enhancement of the sense of belonging? Will it condition my next cross-cultural experiences building upon this awareness?

"[…] I think I can tell that I got more aware of myself and why I felt that way about receiving from Peter, and I understand myself a little better in this relation and I might be more conscious about it the next time I feel this way. What I am going to do with this information wherever I'm going to change my own behaviour […] or if I am going to stick to what I have been doing so far, I cannot tell yet. […] I might start integrating more to a different socio-cultural environment […] or I might stick too my "natural" one […] "[1] This confusion is reflected in Emma's second journal, and could potentially resolve it further on. Potential further research could be done in an attempt to answer those questions as well as how to deal with perceptions of oneself that come with self-reflection.

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