

Ethnographic Betrayals

Secrecy, Loyalty, and Sovereignty in the Field

Salih Can Açıksöz

What are the ethics and politics of anthropology in a world defined by the global surge of the populist and far right? How do ethnographers navigate the far-right field under conditions of political violence, state surveillance, and authoritarianism? In this article, I offer my fieldwork and postfieldwork experiences with ultranationalist ex-conscripts from Turkey's Kurdish war as a window into these questions. My experiences demonstrate that anthropology's professional ethical codes and conventions fail to adequately address the complexities of conducting engaged research with research participants whose political convictions diametrically oppose those of the researcher. Here, I frame these complexities around the multilayered and charged notion of betrayal. Betrayal is good to think with, I argue, because it links the psychic and affective dimensions of ethnographic research with the global political climate of our times while also conveying the moral dilemmas and the senses of drama and urgency that saturate such fraught fieldwork situations. Spelling out the emotional, ethical, and political challenges I encountered in the field, I show that ethnographic ethics cannot be reduced to the dyadic relationship between the researcher and the research participants but must instead be situated within the broader structures of power, violence, and sovereignty.

Having taken the red-eye train from Istanbul, we arrived in the capital city of Ankara in the early morning. We huddled in a small patisserie near the plaza where a nationalist demonstration would soon take place under the slogan "Damn Terror, End Landmines." The event was orchestrated by a disabled veterans' organization with strong ties to the Turkish military and ultranationalist paramilitary groups. As six disabled military veterans of Turkey's Kurdish war and I hastily gulped down our portions of *börek* with tea, Yaman, a famous disabled veteran activist and the de facto leader of our group, started chatting with a group of undercover cops sitting at the next table. What had begun as a friendly conversation suddenly turned tense when the cops, who knew Yaman from previous protests, warned him to calm down, or else. "Honorless bastards," Yaman hissed as soon as he was back at our table. "Unlike ours, their loyalty is as fickle as a stray land mine."

Yaman's angry remarks provided a portal into my disabled veteran interlocutors' political universe, a magical realist eco-sphere suffused with a deep sense of betrayal. It was no coincidence that the leitmotif of that day's protest centered on what veterans saw as the material embodiment of the very idea of betrayal—the land mine, a thing so reviled that they referred to it exclusively by the sexualized insult *kahpe*, perfidious whore. It was also not surprising that Yaman compared the police to land mines, implying that they were mercurial traitors. In the judgment of my neofascist interlocutors, the state and every member of society had let them down: the government had stabbed them in the back, and their workplace supervisors were traitors, as were the city bus drivers who questioned their free travel passes. Every single group was in cahoots with some entity or cause: Kurds were terrorists, non-Muslim minorities were fifth columnists,

socialists were renegades, Islamists were pawns of the United States and Israel, politicians were sellouts, and elites were compradors. Even seemingly nationalist figures were not to be trusted: any one of them could be a convert, a crypto-Jew, a hidden Armenian, or a secret terrorist sympathizer. Betrayal and treason were everywhere, and my disabled veteran interlocutors were on a mission to hold accountable all those who had betrayed their homeland and nation.

Where was I, the anthropologist with political views dramatically opposed to those of his informants, located in this theater of betrayal? I asked myself this vexed question constantly throughout my fieldwork with ex-army conscripts who had become ultranationalist political actors after acquiring disabilities in the counterinsurgency war against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerrillas. Like Yaman and other veterans, I also indulged in fantasies of betrayal. But unlike them, I often saw myself as betrayal's subject rather than its object. Mine was not simply the guilt complex of an ethnographer conducting research with anthropology's illiberal "repugnant others" (Harding 1991). As I realized for the umpteenth time during that protest field trip, my research harbored the potential to turn me into a traitor in the eyes of my interlocutors and of the Turkish state, posing a threat to my safety and well-being. I was roused suddenly from these gloomy thoughts when Yaman, full of euphoria at the swirl of political action around us, patted me on the shoulder: "We disabled veterans will fundraise among ourselves to have your book published and then distribute it to the members of parliament so that they learn about our problems." Further distressed, I tried to explain that it was not going to be that kind of book and that they might not like everything I said. But my objections were in vain. Yaman was not interested in

Salih Can Açıksöz is Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (375 Portola Plaza, 341 Haines Hall, Los Angeles, California 90095, USA [aciksoz@ucla.edu]). This paper was submitted 22 IV 21, accepted 14 XI 22, and electronically published 13 XI 24.

what I had to say as he rushed to join the others to boo one of the nationalist speakers whom they accused of secretly collaborating with the PKK.

Over the decade that passed between the end of my fieldwork and the publication of my book chronicling the story of Turkish disabled veterans' ultranationalist politicization (Açıksöz 2019), the political climate that fueled my anxieties of betrayal has become ubiquitous, brought on by a global wave of right-wing populism and a surge of the far right. Although right-wing populist authoritarian leaders such as the likes of Trump in the United States, Erdoğan in Turkey, Modi in India, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orbán in Hungary, and Duterte in the Philippines have scored electoral victories by touting a conspiratorial "us versus them" worldview and turning political opponents into traitors, the political trends of Brexit, Alternative for Germany, and the French National Rally have exploited the popular sense of resentment by scapegoating racialized minorities and immigrants for the macro- and microinstabilities of global neoliberalism, triggering fears of fascism at the heart of Europe (Holmes 2019; Mahmud 2019).

All these political developments set off a wave of soul-searching in the discipline of anthropology, which struggled to respond to that world-historical moment with increasing calls to pay more ethnographic attention to the populist and far right (Bangstad 2017; Gusterson 2017; Pasieka 2017). Although I have no quibble with the gist of such calls, I feel that the discipline at large often falls short of articulating the complexities that such ethnographic attention entails.¹ Here, I frame these complexities around the affectively and politically charged notion of betrayal. Betrayal is good to think with, I argue, because it links the psychic and affective dimensions of ethnographic research with the global political climate of our times while also conveying the moral dilemmas and the senses of drama and urgency that saturate difficult fieldwork situations. Accordingly, I offer here my fieldwork and postfieldwork experiences in Turkey as a window into thinking through how betrayal can help us spell out the practical, psychological, ethicomethodological, and political challenges faced by ethnographers working on state violence and the far right.

More broadly, this article also invites us to ruminate on long-standing debates regarding the ethics and politics of fieldwork in English-language anthropology through the heuristic concept of betrayal. Starting at least as early as Franz Boas's repudiation of anthropologists who used their professional identity as a cover for governmental spying activities (Price 2008), our discipline has been engulfed in debates regarding the multiple but closely interrelated betrayals with which anthropological practice is enmeshed, including the betrayal of the profession, science, public responsibility, the government, or the trust, confidentiality, privacy, and well-being of informants. These debates

intensified in the 1960s, when the rise of anticolonial and anti-racist struggles, radical social movements, Marxist and post-structuralist critiques, and the work of minoritized scholars pushed anthropology to confront its historical embeddedness within colonial structures of power and knowledge and its ongoing complicity with white supremacy, imperialism, and militarism (Asad 1973; Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2020; Gusterson 2007; Starn 1991; Trouillot 2003). The discipline's first ethical code of conduct, "Principles of Professional Responsibility," was codified by the American Anthropological Association (AAA 1971) as a direct result of protest against counterinsurgency research at the height of tensions about the Vietnam War (Sluka 2018). The AAA code of ethics was recently revised in the contexts of the debates surrounding the Human Terrain System, which sought to once again place anthropology in the service of US neocolonial wars by embedding anthropologists in military units in Afghanistan and Iraq (Gusterson 2009). Nevertheless, as many have argued, rather than resolving them, ethics codes and conventions have often concealed the thorny ethical and political questions surrounding anthropological practice (Bourgois 1990).

In texts burdened by the weight of these histories, one frequently encounters the word "betrayal" in the context of accusations, confessions, apologies, scattered remarks, passing references, and metaphors. Although my intention here is not to provide a comprehensive survey of such usage, two recent examples are instructive. The first concerns the University of California, Berkeley's recent decision to unname Kroeber Hall, which houses the Department of Anthropology and was named after Alfred Kroeber, American anthropology's first doctoral recipient. Kroeber's salvage anthropology and his handling of the remains of his informant and friend "Ishi," a survivor of the California genocide and the last known member of the Yahi people, have been subjects of critique for quite some time (Starn 2004), ultimately culminating in the decision to strip Kroeber Hall of its namesake. Written in the middle of the naming controversy, the Berkeley anthropology department's apology letter states: "We are sorry for our department's role, however unintentional, in the final betrayal of Ishi, a man who had already lost all that was dear to him at the hands of Western colonizers and we recognize that the exploitation and betrayal of Native Americans is still commonplace in American society" (cited in Scheper-Hughes 2020). Here, betrayal figures as the betrayal of a befriended informant's trust, a metonymic stand-in for all the betrayals of salvage anthropology and its embeddedness within settler colonialism's regimes of violence.

The second example is of a different kind altogether and appears in an edited collection of ethnographic writing and literary anthropology, *Crumpled Paper Boat* (Pandian and McLean 2017). More than a mere rehash of anthropology's "writing culture" (Clifford and Marcus 1986) moment, which sought to reckon with the questions of power, difference, and representation at a safe remove, the book is saturated through and through with a conscious focus on the intimacy of ethnographic betrayal. "Betrayal is inescapable, in this practice of working with words

1. See Saglam (2021) and Shoshan (2021) for recent insightful discussions of these complexities. See also Jauregui's (2013) discerning reflections on ethical entanglements in ethnographies of policing.

that are not our own,” the Paper Boat Collective writes (Pandian and McLean 2017:14). “Ethnographic writing steals voices, betrays them,” Kathleen Stewart (2017:227) adds in the book’s epilogue. The theme of fidelity surfaces as the authors talk about betraying confidence (Jackson 2017:46) and betraying the people to whom ethnographers are beholden (Jackson 2017:53), ultimately asking, “Don’t we as anthropologists always write through intercessors, whether in the persons of our informants or, less tangibly, in the form of stories, images, atmospheres? And don’t we always court the risk of betraying them or being betrayed by them, a risk that is, arguably, as much endemic to the practice of writing as to the project of anthropology, however conceived?” (McLean 2017:117). In this rendering, betrayal becomes a multifaceted and multidirectional potentiality that pervades ethnographic intimacy, voice, and representation.²

Despite such powerful evocations, there has been very little effort to theorize betrayal as an ethicomethodological, and hence political, issue in anthropology. One exception is feminist ethnographers, who, being well attuned to the psychic dynamics of power and power differences in intimate relations, problematized the fraught possibilities of betrayal inherent in the practices of ethnography. In her classic piece “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?,” Judith Stacey (1988) warned against the potential treacherousness of ethnographic relationships, which may place research subjects at grave risk of betrayal by the ethnographer who turns their lives, loves, and tragedies into data. Critically building on Stacey (1988), Kamala Visweswaran (1994) argued that betrayal could not in fact be disentangled from ethnographic practice. Rather than reading the immanence of betrayal as a symptom of the impossibility of feminist ethnography, however, Visweswaran (1994) saw betrayal as an allegory for feminist ethnographic practice at a moment when feminism was contending with difference within the category of “women.” Coming to terms with the betrayals embedded in ethnographic practice, she argued, could allow for the disclosure of the fictions of solidarity inherent to both feminism and ethnographic representation, as well as the disruption of ethnographic authority.

Drawing from these insights, I ask in this article: What role, if any, does betrayal play in the relations between ethnographers and their research interlocutors or in the production of ethnographic knowledge and affects? What kinds of betrayals dwell within or obtrude into an academic discipline that has for so long sought to institutionalize trust, openness, honesty, and transparency at the center of its governmental self-narratives about professional ethical practice? I address these questions around three interconnected meanings of the term “betrayal”: secrecy versus exposure, loyalty versus disloyalty, and treason.

2. For a text that beautifully illustrates what this multidirectional and multifaceted potential means in practical terms, see Caroline Brettell’s (1993) edited volume, *When They Read What We Write*, which raises the question of what happens when ethnographies are read by “them,” the subjects of ethnography and those who are affiliated or identify with them.

In so doing, I seek to extend the ethicomethodological debates in anthropology beyond a narrow focus on the dyadic relation between the ethnographer and the research interlocutors to allow for a consideration of how ethnographic betrayals are circumscribed by the work of sovereignty, politics, and the law.

Secrets and Exposures

Betray: to disclose or reveal with breach of faith (a secret, or that which should be kept secret); to reveal or disclose against one’s will or intention the existence, identity, real character of (a person or thing desired to be kept secret). (Oxford English Dictionary)

“You know that Rafet is Armenian, right?” Berna Abila, the director of one of the associations for disabled veterans and martyrs’ families I regularly attended, posed this question to me one day like a bolt out of the blue. “His real name is Raffi.” This spontaneous unveiling unnerved me. Raffi/Rafet, a middle-aged disabled veteran who had lost an arm in a military drill in the late 1970s, ran the association’s bureaucratic operations. He stood out for me as a staunch humanist who never indulged in the nationalist jingoism the association’s everyday discourse was steeped in. I had felt an affinity with him from our first meeting and considered him someone I could share my political ideas with openly without fear of consequence. Now he had been exposed as an Armenian at the center of a nationalist hub whose main political activity in those days was to support the witch hunt against public intellectuals who criticized the country’s long-standing Armenian genocide denialism. I was deeply unsettled with the way that Berna Abila had betrayed Raffi’s dangerous secret with this unwelcome revelation. I would soon find out that Raffi’s Armenianness was not in fact a secret in the strict sense of the word when Yaman, the leader of an activist disabled veteran clique I had befriended, disparagingly mentioned it in passing. Still, my feelings of betrayal did not dissipate. Though it was little more than a “public secret” (Taussig 1999), I was determined to keep it. So I refrained from writing about Raffi for many years, until, that is, I learned that he was no longer affiliated with the association.

In her examination of Mexican professional wrestling, Heather Levi (2008:27) describes ethnographic writing as “an act of betrayal” because she must “reveal the secret” that “professional wrestling matches are fixed.” “Everything I have written or published . . . has felt like an act of betrayal,” says Levi (2008:27). Yet ethnographic betrayals are not only about revealing secrets but also about keeping them. For the ethnographer who works on political violence and the far right, more often than not the overriding feeling is the need to keep a lot of them.

Looking back, I see that Raffi and I had a lot in common. We both had secrets. Even if we kept them ever so slightly out in the open, they were secrets all the same—secrets demanded by the historical accumulation of nationalist and state violence against minoritized communities and dissident intellectuals. We both “passed”: he as a nationalist Turk, and I as a naive student hoping

to learn about disabled veterans' lives and political views.³ We both had to be careful in dosing our critiques: our views on the state's counterinsurgency practices, on the militarist and chauvinistic nationalism espoused by the disabled veterans' organizations, and on the paramilitary "deep state" networks these organizations were enmeshed in. In the field, there was no such thing as a neutral ethnographic position, certainly not for an anthropologist like me who researched a world that already claimed him before he began fieldwork. I was either part of the imagined community or a "terrorist" traitor to it.

Because of this precarious positioning in the field, I often caught myself indulging in political fantasies and anxieties of betrayal. I dreaded the thought of what could happen to me if my "secrets" were brought to light. Having grown up in a leftist family with mixed ethnosectarian belongings in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, the heyday of the Kurdish conflict when torture, extrajudicial killings, and "disappearances" were built into the political system, I was already intimately familiar with the spectral force of state violence. Fresh in my memory was the parade of journalists and academics tried, jailed, or murdered for their work on the Kurdish conflict. Right there in the middle of my fieldwork, people were tortured to death or assassinated in broad daylight with relative impunity by ultranationalist paramilitary networks whose key figures I got to meet as they hovered around my interlocutors. Yet in these moments of retrograde daydreaming, what troubled me as much as my own safety was my informants' responses to my "betrayal," how betrayed they would feel should they discover my dissident ideological and political commitments. These imaginary betrayal scenarios and their accompanying feelings of guilt, anxiety, and paranoia weighed like a stone upon my chest.

Although I never lied to my research participants, my secrets remained, it seems, out in the open. In the first days of my fieldwork, an aura of suspicion surrounded my middle-class, non-disabled body and waist-long hair signaling an over-Westernized masculinity. Was I a spy; a member of the Jandarma İstihbarat Teşkilatı (JITEM), the Turkish military's notorious unofficial intelligence agency; or a "terrorist"? As I observed them, my interlocutors gazed back at me. In their attempts to make out my ethnic (and thereby my political) background, my informants asked me repeatedly about my paternal hometown. My car's license plate number was noted down, and my ID card was checked. People told me that they had me checked out, and that I came out "clean." After passing this initial gauntlet, my informants never really probed my political convictions, partly, I think, because they took them for granted. Why would anyone

but a good nationalist be interested in ableist discrimination against disabled veterans, their mistreatment at workplaces, or their struggles with red tape?

My informants' lack of interest in my political position was also due to my infantilization in the field. Although we were the same age, my status as a student and a single man, my overly Westernized masculine comportment, and the fact that I had not completed my compulsory military service—a key rite of passage into heteronormative adult masculinity in Turkey—all led them to profile me as an "inexperienced" youth. On those rare occasions when my dissenting ideas surfaced, such as when I stubbornly declined to sign a petition against Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Turkey at an ultranationalist antimissionary and anti-Christian meeting, I was ridiculed for being "too democrat," which in Turkish political lingo meant that I was left leaning and propeace. When my futile attempts to deconstruct the conspiracy theories surrounding the pope's visit failed, I was reminded of the thin line between friendly ridicule and reproachful sanction and so retreated to the more neutral ground of scientific objectivity, escaping my brush with unacceptability into the position of the detached observer.

What do my trials and tribulations in the far-right field have to say about how the "dynamics of concealment and revelation" (Jones 2014:60), of secrecy and exposure, operate in ethnographic research? Such dynamics are most visibly in play in covert research, a strategy historically popular among ethnographers working on far-right organizations (Fielding 1982; Mitchell 1993; Thompson 1988). Today, covert research is largely discredited in anthropology. The most recent AAA (2012) ethics statement suggests that researchers who "engage in clandestine or secretive research . . . do not satisfy ethical requirements for openness, honesty, transparency and fully informed consent." Regarded by many as deceptive, damaging, polluting, and neglectful of the principle of informed consent (Homan 1980) and having become a rarity due to ethical codes and institutional review board regulations, covert research is nevertheless still defended as a viable and ethical option for ethnographers working on topics like the global organ black market (Scheper-Hughes 2004). In light of such ethicomethodological concern for research in "gray" ethnographic fields, it may be interesting to ask what kinds of researcher positionalities are demanded or excluded by ethnographic work on violence and the far right. The important work of Nitzan Shoshan (2016), a Jewish Israeli citizen who conducted undercover ethnographic fieldwork among German neo-Nazis by taking a fake name and passing as an American, is a particularly telling example. Secrecy surrounding the anthropologist's body, past, and identity may serve as the very precondition of access, safety, and ethnographic knowledge.⁴

3. Passing is of course always a conditional privilege. Questions concerning who can pass as a member of the dominant group, under what conditions, and at what costs all hinge on the pertaining ethnoracialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and ableist matrices of exclusion and on the strategies of passing. For Armenians in Turkey, silently passing is a matter of survival (Cachoian-Schanz 2021). In anthropology, the quandaries of passing (and being out or outed) in the field have been elaborated on especially by queer anthropologists (Goodman 1996).

4. When such secrecy falls within ethical bounds is an ongoing discussion in anthropology. As this article was being revised, the issues of secrecy and exposure once again came to the fore of anthropological debates about the ethics and politics of fieldwork through the heated controversy around Saiba Varma's (2020) book *The Occupied Clinic*. Initially celebrated for its elegant critique of the medical-humanitarian structures undergirding the

The dynamics, fears, and risks surrounding secrecy and exposure shape covert and overt ethnographic encounters alike. Because covert and overt research form a “moral continuum, where the boundaries can become blurred in the doing” (Calvey 2008:908), the distinction between them “is less straightforward than sometimes imagined” (Murphy and Dingwall 2001:342). The cases of two ethnographers, Jessica Marie Falcone (2010) and Meera Sehgal (2009), whose studies with right-wing Hindu nationalists were neither entirely overt nor fully covert but were instead based on “partial disclosure and partial secrecy” (Sehgal 2009:336), are instructive here. Reflecting on how their ethnographic positionalities, in particular their opposition to violent Hindutva ideology, made them exquisitely vulnerable in the field, both scholars defend the ethics of partial concealment. By foreclosing the possibility of full disclosure, ideological incompatibility between the researcher and the researched subverts in the field the normative ethical standards that have been institutionalized outside of it. Sehgal’s (2009:341) case bears an uncanny resemblance to my own in that her fear of being targeted for violence as the result of exposure of her leftist and feminist identity blended with her fear of violent “reprisal for the ‘betrayal of the Hindu nation’” once her research had been published. Her work serves as a powerful reminder as to why questions around secrecy, exposure, and betrayal can never be reduced to the dyadic relationship of ethnographer to research participants but must instead be situated within the larger power structures, violent histories, and sovereign techniques of incitement, prescription, and punishment.

If the dynamics around secrets and exposures are central to anthropological epistemology and methodology (Jones 2014), so is the looming possibility of betrayal. Secrecy can draw ethnographers into the psychic drama of betrayal, where their embodied presence and social relations in the field and the ethnographic knowledge they bring back with them to publish for the academy become charged with negative effects ranging from guilt to paranoia. My discussion thus far has focused on a common form of secrecy in ethnographies of the far right that concerns the question of political loyalty. Loyalty, though, as I discuss in the next section, is seldom monolithic or singular. Anthropologists’ divided loyalties may pose ethical and practical limits on participant observation, at times to the point of amplifying mutual feelings of betrayal.

Divided Loyalties and the Ethical Limits of Anthropology

Betray: to be or prove false to (a trust or him who trusts one); to be disloyal to; to disappoint the hopes or expectations of. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Indian colonial occupation of the Kashmir Valley and awarded the 2021 Edie Turner First Book Prize in Ethnographic Writing, the book was quickly bedeviled with accusations of nondisclosure after an anonymous Twitter account revealed that Varma’s father had been deployed as a top Indian intelligence official in Kashmir in the 1990s.

On the morning of December 16, 2005, an angry crowd gathered in front of the Istanbul courthouse where the world-renowned novelist Orhan Pamuk was on trial for charges brought against him under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code for having insulted Turkishness. “Thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians,” he had said in an interview. Now an ultranationalist amalgam of disabled veterans, martyrs’ families, members of fascist and neofascist political groups, and shadowy political figures with military or paramilitary connections shouted a near-response: “Martyrs never die! The motherland will not be divided.” In a physical threat to Pamuk and his supporters, among whom were members of the European Parliament, a group of protesters confronted the riot police while chanting nationalist slogans denouncing Pamuk and other “traitor” intellectuals. The incident ended only when Pamuk’s car, pelted with eggs, finally broke through the crowd and moved hastily away with a smashed windshield.

During my fieldwork between 2005 and 2008, my disabled veteran informants joined many such protests against public intellectuals, some from among my favorite writers and journalists who had dared to question official nationalist paradigms. Their common targets were intellectuals who were being tried under Article 301, which criminalized them as “insulting Turkishness, Turkey, and Turkish government institutions.” The vaguely defined law allowed the authorities to press charges against anyone who questioned nationalist ideology, official historiography, or militarization. Article 301 was thus a suitable weapon for the kind of ultranationalist lawfare against the perceived “enemies of the state” in which my informants were directly implicated.

I watched the incident in front of the courthouse on live TV in my Istanbul apartment, uneasy and trying to spot my disabled veteran interlocutors among the crowd. I had known about the protest a day in advance because I had received a group text message from Yaman inviting all “patriots” to the protest. Yaman, a veteran with orthopedic arm impairment in his late thirties back then, was the charismatic leader of a small ultranationalist clique of disabled veterans who were among the most loyal participants of these protests. He was a very shrewd and charming person who had a way with words. Although he defined himself as an “action guy,” those veterans critical of his group’s direct-action style of political engagement called him a “spectacle lover,” a politically infantilizing gesture. I preferred to call him “mischievous.”

Yaman and I stood at opposite ends of the political spectrum, yet we bonded upon first meeting. I spent quite a lot of time with Yaman’s crowd, hanging out with them as a male-exclusive group after work or on holidays, in tea gardens or coffeehouses, going to picnics and dinners, and traveling between cities to attend political demonstrations. It was through the close relationship I forged with Yaman and the others that I came to be a part of disabled veterans’ masculine bonding practices of care, intimacy, and activism. As long as the topic did not turn to politics, we had a good rapport. But it unfortunately often did, and it is politics that eventually tore our relationship apart.

The ethical and political tensions were there from the very start. On one level, it was easy to construe them as victims of militarization, ableism, and class inequality. As forcibly conscripted young men, they were placed under military authority, made to endure hardship and humiliation, and turned into unwilling perpetrators of state violence as soldier-subjects of an extended counterinsurgency war. As lower- and working-class men with disabilities, they were stigmatized, marginalized, and subjected to ableist structural and symbolic violence. On another level, however, it was difficult to come to terms with their ultranationalist political activism, which weaponized their suffering in the service of reactionary and harmful political ends. Within this “gray zone” (Levi 1988) where the categories of perpetrator and victim became blurred, I had to constantly navigate the difficult lines between distance and empathy, witnessing and complicity, and the incompatibility between my own political commitments and theirs.

My dilemma came to the breaking point when Yaman’s group stepped in at anti-intellectual demonstrations as central actors. On the one hand, the protests offered me a precious opportunity to closely observe the very political processes I was interested in exploring—processes through which veterans’ gendered and classed disability predicaments hardened into political identities and collective action. On the other hand, I had ample practical, political, and ethical reasons for skipping these highly mediatized spectacles. Attending them would place me under the national spotlight, making my presence in the field hypervisible to parties I diligently tried to avoid: the military and ultranationalist kingpins with paramilitary and “deep state” connections. More importantly, I felt I could not with good conscience join this witch hunt and increase the size of the crowd, even if for mere observational purposes. I could not even be sure that any observational space was available for me there: I wanted to remain an ethnographic witness, not become a bystander, or worse, an “implicated subject” (Rothberg 2019). Forced to choose between my political commitments and my galloping ethnographic curiosity, I reluctantly decided to skip the protests, letting them constitute instead the ethicopolitical limits to my “participant” observation.

I was soon to realize, however, that as long as I walked the tightrope of divided loyalties, these feelings of betrayal and complicity could not be easily quelled. One day, walking into a pricey breakfast café in Istanbul, I encountered one of the intellectuals being protested and found myself dealing with strong feelings of guilty complicity. Guilt for what? Complicity with whom? To whom did I owe my loyalty? The answers were disturbingly unclear. To relieve my guilty political conscience, I felt the urge to express solidarity with her and condemn the protests. Yet I also wanted to redeem my disabled veteran friends by apologetically explaining why their rage was directed at her. Finally, aware of the class base of my research participants’ political resentment, I felt ashamed to have shared in that upper-class breakfast.

My friendly relation with Yaman’s group took a blow from which it would never recover when the Armenian journalist

Hrant Dink, a key target of my research participants’ protests, was assassinated by an ultranationalist youth. The murder was a threshold event that slowly but gradually alienated me from Yaman’s activist circle. Watching the breaking news of the murder on TV, I literally became sick upon seeing Dink’s dead body lying on the sidewalk thinly covered with a white sheet, his dress shoes awkwardly splayed.⁵ I recalled in vivid flashbacks all those fieldwork moments when I had heard Dink’s name mentioned with contempt, above all the many times where Yaman would make fun of Dink’s last name, turning it into the sound of a doorbell in Turkish: Dink-Donk. I stayed away from Yaman’s group for a while. I, too, felt betrayed.⁶ When I met Yaman months later, his attitude toward the late Dink had changed in line with the shift in public discourse that attended the countrywide uproar following his death. Over a hundred thousand people had marched in Dink’s funeral, chanting “We are all Armenians.” “They made him look like a traitor, but it turns out he was a patriot after all,” Yaman told me in a remorseful tone but then immediately spoiled the moment with nationalist clichés: “But I didn’t like the way people chanted ‘We are all Armenians.’ What does that mean? We are all Turks, sons of Turks.” The cold political distance separating us was unbridgeable.

In a recent *Current Anthropology* forum article on the ethical conundrums of conducting ethnography with the far right, Benjamin Teitelbaum (2019) criticizes the most recent revision to the AAA (2012) Statement on Ethics for having demoted anthropologists’ responsibility to their research participants

5. I never met Hrant Dink, but he was a close friend and colleague of many of my closest friends in Turkey. His death became an intimate loss for so many of us precisely because it epitomized unjust death. Dink was raised in an orphanage in a genocide survivor community and worked as an Armenian socialist journalist in a country with a long history of journalists being murdered by unknown assailants and in extrajudicial killings. After enduring years of legal and extralegal intimidation, he was shot in the back outside the building that housed his bilingual Armenian/Turkish newspaper, alone and defenseless. The heart-wrenching, highly mediatized image of the hole in the worn-out sole of his shoe poking out from under the white sheet that covered his body suggested that he came from a working-class background. For me, all these classed and ethnoracialized political dynamics were confounded with a sense of responsibility born of my ethnographic witnessing of the elaboration of the ultranationalist witch hunt against him.

6. Katherine Verdery’s (2018) book *My Life as a Spy* provides an exquisite example of how anthropologists often feel betrayed by their fieldwork interlocutors and friends, sometimes even decades later. Upon reading her secret police file, Verdery discovered that many of her interlocutors and fieldwork friends informed on her during her fieldwork in Ceaușescu’s Romania in the 1970s and 1980s. Verdery later met and discussed her file with those who had informed on her, seeking both to understand their motivations and work through her own feelings of betrayal. Intriguingly, political paranoia and suspicion surrounding secret police files lies at the center of right-wing nationalist narratives of betrayal across postsocialist Eastern Europe (Gökankel 2020), illustrating the entanglements of ethnographic betrayals, state surveillance, and right-wing mobilization of betrayal as a central organizing political trope.

from being “paramount” in their decisions about their research conduct to being “usually primary” (Teitelbaum 2019:416). For Teitelbaum (2019), although the insertion of the qualifier “usually” may open up space for researchers who work among those with political loyalties opposite to their own, it also erodes the scholar-informant solidarity he views as the anthropology’s bedrock ethical commitment. Lamenting the way that “the moral virtue of collaboration, reciprocity, and advocacy fades in the study of oppressive or privileged populations” (Teitelbaum 2019:414, 419), he suggests we should embrace in ethnographies of the far right the “immorality born of a radical devotion to the people studied.” Teitelbaum’s (2019:421) commitment to what he calls “immoral anthropology” and the insights he can garner with it about the “dynamism and complexity” of his Swedish neo-Nazi informants’ lives appears to have led him to view defending them as his “main undertaking as a public commentator.” Although he makes it known that he has “never felt driven to serve as an apologist” (Teitelbaum 2019:420–421) for nationalist ideology, his uncritical loyalty to his informant friends finds its clearest expression when he unburdens himself of the ethnocopolitical secret that he has also never “felt the urge to make a public statement condemning nationalists or their politics.”

It is remarkable to see how Teitelbaum (2019) takes the same problematic I tackle here—the ethical complexities of the scholar-informant relationship as they play out in an ethnography of the far right—yet reaches inverse conclusions. Commentators on Teitelbaum’s (2019) article have already unearthed the problems inherent to his line of argument: his choice of the emic euphemism “radical nationalists” to refer to neo-Nazis (Bangstad 2019), his conflation of solidarity and intimacy (Bell 2019), and, most perilously, his reduction of the many ethical complexities ethnographic practice entails to a single ethical mandate of “scholar-informant solidarity” (Scheper-Hughes 2019). Echoing Scheper-Hughes’s (2019) point, what concerns me most about Teitelbaum’s (2019) ethicomethodological conclusions is the question of what happens when a liberal-minded ethnographer fails to confront the thorny issue of divided loyalties. Putting loyalty to his informants above taking a political stance on them because of a moralistic attachment to the (somewhat obsolete) liberal ethical guidelines of the discipline of anthropology, Teitelbaum (2019) ends up embracing the possibility of becoming or being seen as a *de facto* public relations representative for neo-Nazi groups. And he does that in the name of staying true to the trust, friendship, reciprocal service, and rapport he has built with his research participants, despite finding it ultimately “reckless” (Teitelbaum 2019:421). Rather than running the risk of ethnographic betrayal, he prefers to hunker down deep in the cocoon of professional ethics whence the right-winged butterfly of immoral anthropology emerges.

Like Teitelbaum (2019), I also established trust-based intimate relations with people whose politics I did not like or condone. Even after all these years, I continue to feel a devout sense of obligation to both my research participants and my role as ethnographic witness and a commitment to empathetically illustrate their social suffering at the nexus of militarism, ableism,

class inequality, bureaucratic indifference, and neoliberal policies. Unlike Teitelbaum (2019), however, I also feel the “urge” to denounce my disabled veteran interlocutors’ political actions, even as I chronicle the processes and formations within which these actions become joyful, meaningful, or practical. Structured into the ethnographic encounter by the divided loyalties of the ethnographer, such competing and vexed feelings are not in fact morally, politically, or methodologically irreconcilable, even if they do stand in strained tension with one another. Their coexistence may, however, place the ethnographer in a place so precarious that they, too, end up a traitor, an especially salient risk in research contexts of political violence and state repression where “betrayal” features as the organizing trope of sovereignty, political belonging, and violence. To better understand these dynamics, we will have to throw the liberal configuration of a dyadic relationship between ethnographer and informant into question and examine how betrayal is produced through juridical practices of sovereignty that constantly array a “them” (traitors) against an “us” (loyal subjects).

The Anthropologist as a Traitor

Betray: to give up to, or place in the power of an enemy, by treachery or disloyalty. (Oxford English Dictionary)

“We, as academics and researchers working on and/or in Turkey, declare that we will not be a party to this massacre by remaining silent and demand an immediate end to the violence perpetrated by the state” (Academics for Peace 2016). This was how the last paragraph of the popularly dubbed peace petition, “We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime,” read. Prepared by a group of academics in January 2016, the petition responded to the mounting violence and humanitarian crisis in the Kurdish cities of southeastern Turkey that resulted from the collapse of peace negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK in the summer of 2015. As Kurdish youth militia and state security forces clashed over sovereignty in urban quarters, entire neighborhoods were cordoned off by use of military blockade and destroyed under heavy shelling by the state, and access to emergency medical care, food, and water was prevented, leaving behind a death toll of some 2,000 people (OHCHR 2017). I was enraged and depressed beyond words, both as a citizen of Turkey and as an anthropologist who had listened firsthand to disabled veterans’ accounts of the horrific acts perpetrated by their military units and had documented the conflict’s impact on soldiers’ bodies and minds and the country’s political culture. I did not think twice about signing the petition and becoming one of the 1,128 “academics for peace” calling on the state to end military operations and return to the peace table.

The petition sent shock waves across the political spectrum. As public support boosted the total number of signatories and the country’s leading trade union and professional organizations endorsed it, President Erdoğan’s government launched a witch hunt against its signatories. Erdoğan himself made one public statement after another accusing the signatories of being

traitors and terrorists. The state-controlled media published signatories' names and photographs under the headline "Treason Statement." Through government-orchestrated propaganda, the peace academics were branded as the most recent incarnations in a long line of internal enemies of the Turkish nation-state.

This dreadful campaign quickly spiraled into a judicial and extrajudicial harassment campaign and one of the largest academic purges in world history. Criminalized through political discourse and law, signatories' campus office doors were marked with red crosses, and they were threatened by the country's leading crime boss, who with total impunity publicly swore an oath to shed their blood and take a shower in it. House raids and prolonged detentions followed. Almost all signatories were placed under criminal investigation, over 600 academics were charged under antiterror laws for disseminating terrorist propaganda on behalf of the PKK, and almost all of these were found guilty and received prison sentences of between 15 months and three years. Four hundred and five academics were dismissed from their posts and banned from public service for life, and many more were forced to resign or leave the country under conditions of exile. By the time the campaign against them came to an end in a July 2019 Constitutional Court ruling that the signatories' rights of expression had been violated, most of the signatories had lost their civil freedoms and livelihoods irreparably. As a US-based academic, I was among the relatively privileged. Yet there was a specific loss in wait for me. Criticizing the state's counterinsurgency practices meant my banishment from the field. My fieldwork "friends" were my friends no more.

How does an ethnographer become the enemy of his own "informants," about whom he deeply cares? This is a question that has preoccupied me as a peace-petition signatory, especially since learning that the prosecutor's collective indictment against me and my cosignatories also included charges under the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which makes it illegal to insult Turkey, the Turkish nation, or Turkish government institutions. Public intellectuals like the assassinated Hrant Dink and the woman I met in the upscale Istanbul café had become targets of my informants' aggressive protests as a direct result of being tried and rendered as traitors under this law. Now, I—the ethnographer-cum-"terrorist"—had also been turned into a scapegoated object of disabled veterans' hatred for having spoken out against the cycle of militarized violence that had originally injured them but which they clung to as its fallen heroes. It chilled me to the bone to read the head of an association of disabled veterans and martyrs' families telling the media that "the [missing] arms and legs of disabled veterans will call traitor academics to account." The anxieties of betrayal that had been weighing on me since the early days of my fieldwork had now been actualized by the hand of the state.

In perhaps the most elaborate autoethnographic reflection on a researcher's banishment from the field on account of ethnographic betrayal, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000:136) defines the anthropologist as a "new species of traitor and friend." Her story of betrayal is set in rural Ireland, where she conducted fieldwork in the 1970s. Originally published in 1979, *Saints,*

Scholars, and Schizophrenics (Scheper-Hughes 2001 [1979]) became an instant hit in anthropology, garnering Scheper-Hughes the prestigious Margaret Mead Award bestowed by the Society for Applied Anthropology. But the book also generated an angry response from the villagers at her fieldwork site, An Clochán, pseudonymized as Ballybran in the book. Upon reading it, An Clochán residents—a rather unconventional bunch to serve as anthropological subjects, what with their English literacy and tight connections to urban and diasporic networks—became furious about Scheper-Hughes's (2001 [1979]) ethnographic representation of their lives, clearly expressing their sentiments when Scheper-Hughes returned to the village in 1999 with hopes of reconciliation. In a traumatic encounter, which Scheper-Hughes (2000:137) described as an instance where "unrepentant meets unforgiving," she was ostracized and forced to end her trip abruptly, leaving the village unreconciled amid thinly veiled threats.

The power dynamics and the ethical dilemmas constituting Scheper-Hughes's ethnographic betrayal and mine are somewhat different. The betrayal relationship described by Scheper-Hughes is a dyadic one, involving the anthropologist and her informants, whereas in my case, it is a tripartite one that lays bare the presence of the state in the field, both as a political entity and a political fantasy. Scheper-Hughes's interlocutors at An Clochán felt that she had betrayed them both because she had made their intimate secrets textually available to the world and because she had downplayed the positive aspects of village life to highlight the psychic toll rural Irish social relations took on villagers at the time. In my case, I guess that my informants would not much mind how I represent them as individuals; it is the way I represent the war and their politics they would take issue with. I say I guess because unlike Scheper-Hughes, with the exception of a short trip to see my crypto-Armenian disabled veteran friend, Raffi/Rafet, I never went back to the field to confront the consequences of my "betrayal." In the increasingly volatile and politically violent setting that is Turkey today, I could not risk the kind of reencounter that Scheper-Hughes dared. My informants were not villagers but hypervisible nationalist icons and actors. I was not an American anthropologist traveling to the economic backwaters of Europe to conduct research in a village hard-hit by the capitalist transformation of the countryside, but a "native" anthropologist facing political risks to carry out research on the political activism of disabled veterans of a counterinsurgency war. It was only in 2014, six years after finishing up my fieldwork, when a PhD student in anthropology who was both an ex-professional soldier and a disabled veteran contacted me to praise my work that I seriously considered going back.⁷ I was emboldened by his remarks, as

7. None of my disabled veteran interlocutors in the field had graduated beyond middle school, and none of them could read in English. That made my work practically inaccessible to them. Although Yaman and his group may have been aware of my publications, they never let on to me, making the latent possibility of betrayal even murkier and more layered. My work had only appeared in Turkish in an academic edited

well as by the peace negotiations with the PKK and the politically liberal climate, which made it possible for alternative discourses about the war and its victims to find their way into public discourse. Yet before I could act on the idea of a return to the field and my “friends,” the war resumed, the peace petition was signed, and my “traitor” status was produced and verified by law. My ethnographic betrayal was complete.

Conclusion

Anthropological debates over the ethics and politics of ethnography carry the historical weight of the ways our discipline has been implicated in colonialism, genocide, imperialism, and white supremacy. Calls for horizontal, dialogical, activist, abolitionist, and decolonizing modes of engagement with research participants have been put forward as redress to the historically accumulated injustices that anthropologists have also contributed through their ethnographic practices.⁸ Yet as invaluable as they are, the ethicomethodological closures that such ethnographic modalities provide do not speak to the complexities of conducting ethnography with the far right.⁹

Here, I have highlighted these complexities by sharing the emotional, social, and political complexities of my (post)fieldwork experiences with wounded far-right subjects under conditions of counterinsurgency, political violence, and authoritarianism. Although I was first drawn to my research with Turkish disabled veterans out of an ethicopolitical desire to understand and speak against the interrelated dynamics of militarized violence and ultranationalist politics, from the early days of my fieldwork, the incompatibility between my political convictions and those of my interlocutors fueled in me a hazy but painful sense of betrayal. This feeling was amplified by the political climate of secrecy, surveillance, and terror in which my fieldwork took place. That subjective sense of betrayal eventually found an overt public-political form through the legal and extralegal operations of the Turkish state. When academics, including me, were publicly pilloried as traitors for our critique of chauvinistic militarism, attracting the political ire of my research participants, what had originally drawn me to my research subjects ended in severing my ties with the field.

Although I argue here that betrayal may turn out to be unavoidable in certain ethnographic contexts, I do not advocate that we betray our research participants by misrepresenting or harming them—or by rendering them vulnerable or exposed through our ethnographic practices. What I suggest instead is

that in ethnographies of the far right, a politically engaged scholar with a vision of “antifascist anthropology” (Mahmud 2019) may be unable to escape—indeed, may even be obliged to shoulder—betrayal, both as a psychosocial experience and a politicomoral fantasy. This immanent potential for betrayal demands a careful assessment of how we, in a political climate increasingly characterized by right-wing populist and far-right movements, imagine the ethics of anthropological practice.

My call to think through the affectively and politically charged notion of betrayal also invites us to think about the ethics and politics of ethnography beyond the dyadic relationship between the ethnographer and research interlocutors to consider how structures of sovereignty impinge on fieldwork relations, intimacies, and ethics. Here, I see my methodological intervention in some ways paralleling that of Audra Simpson (2014) in her work on Mohawk nationhood and citizenship across the borders of the United States and Canada. “Sovereignty matters, as a methodological issue in and of itself, but such mattering also engenders . . . ethnographic forms,” Simpson (2007:72) writes. Aligning herself with the Mohawks’ refusal to participate in the settler-colonial states’ political orders, Simpson (2007, 2014) conceptualizes the particular form her ethnographic project took as one of refusal. In a context where the structures of settler colonialism and their disavowal turn ethnographic writing and representation into contested terrains of sovereignty, Simpson’s notion of refusal entails an ethnographic calculus of what the audience needs to know and what the ethnographer refuses to write to protect the concerns of the community.

Despite the obvious differences between Simpson’s and my ethnographic context and politics of knowledge, I find Simpson’s elaboration on refusal akin to my own thinking about betrayal in two important ways. First, she situates ethnographic ethics and methodology, as I do, in direct relation to the structures of sovereignty within which the anthropologist operates—in my case, the structures of sovereignty that bar the anthropologist from operating altogether. Second, she tells her ethnographic story, as I do, through the language her interlocutors themselves use to understand and change their political universe. Yet unlike what I propose here, Simpson deliberately repurposes refusal as an epistemological gesture of solidarity and resistance against anthropology’s implication in regimes of settler colonialism. In contrast, I hijack betrayal to harness the negativity of ethnographic guilt, anxiety, and paranoia to questions about the very limits and possibilities of anthropological inquiry, ethics, and positionality in far-right worlds and beyond.

What kinds of ethnographic forms surface when the ethnographer comes face-to-face with the “sovereign prerogative” (Hansen and Stepputat 2005) to declare traitors, internal enemies, and terrorists? Underlining “the ever-present dark side of [ethnographic] intimacy” (Thiranagama and Kelly 2011:3), betrayal proposes an anxious ethnographer who, under the shadow of the punitive and retaliatory measures of authoritarian states and other claimants to sovereignty, must research and write while being haunted by secrets, divided loyalties, and sovereignty matters. My nonmetaphorical trials and tribulations as a

volume and in *Agos*, the minority newspaper founded by Hrant Dink, a calculated decision on my part given that dissident academics from Turkey remain relatively free from political persecution from the state as long as their works and public discourse do not reach the wider Turkish public.

8. I particularly have in mind the works of Berry et al. (2017), Gordon (1997), Hale (2001), Harrison (1997), Jobson (2020), Mora (2017), Simpson (2014), and Speed (2006).

9. For a similar argument, see Middleton and Shoshan (2019).

truly “vulnerable observer” (Behar 1997), an anthropologist-cum-traitor and “terrorist,” highlight the need to tackle head-on the kinds of betrayals that ethnographers risk in and through fieldwork and writing.

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Comments

Erol Saglam

Istanbul Medeniyet University, D100 Karayolu, 98 Kadikoy, Istanbul, Turkey (erol.saglam@medeniyet.edu.tr). 13 III 24

Salih Can Açıksöz’s article is a timely discussion pertinently focusing on the disjunctures we increasingly have to maneuver across ethnographic praxis with anthropology’s “repugnant others.” Açıksöz opens up and frankly engages with his own experience of ethnographic betrayals as well as its ramifications for the “ethics and politics of anthropology in a world defined by the global surge of the populist and far right” that we observe across the globe. The insights he brings forward are concretely situated within the political contestations of contemporary Turkey, but they reverberate very well with other contexts too, given the rise of anthropological studies on radical right groups in the global North and on social groups supporting the populist authoritarian groups in the global South.

Betrayal, no doubt, is not a simple unilinear concept for which anthropologists can be easily trained. Before reading Açıksöz’s piece, for instance, betrayal for me emerged more or less as a quality of anthropological praxis, which configured the anthropologist as the more powerful agent of a dyadic relationality. Only through anthropologists’ capacity to dissimulate could one think of betrayal in the field—a unidirectional move that was ingrained in the unequal power dynamics within which anthropologists observed, collected data, and ultimately framed their interlocutors’ representation. Inherent in anthropological genealogy’s prioritization of the researcher vis-à-vis the research subjects, this ability to withhold information or to project mis-

leading cues, for me, was the modality of betrayal. And yet, Açıksöz’s argument reveals multiple layers of betrayal with each intricately related to one another but hints at different socio-political dynamics at play: secrecy versus exposure, loyalty versus disloyalty, and treason. The author rightfully underlines how betrayal is not unilinear, often conceived as a relationality emanating from the researcher toward their interlocutors, and reminds us that our interlocutors are agents in their own right and may very well portray us in a particular light, leading sometimes to the involvement of politicojuridical institutions.

Some of these dynamics are familiar to many who had to work with communities that, for some reason or another, employ tactics of dissimulation, secrecy, or discretion. Anthropologists in such research settings are bound to tread a fine line balancing their research objectives to grasp the local relations in their totality and their ethical commitments to “do no harm.” My ethnographic experience in contemporary Turkey involved similar functions since my Turkish nationalist interlocutors spoke an archaic variety of Greek, called Romeyka, discreetly among themselves. Any analytic endeavor to render the discreet persistence of Romeyka among Turkish nationalists, no doubt, ran the risk of “exposing” the community to the inquisitive eyes of the state, which had long suspected cultural heterogeneity to be a marker of disloyalty. The research process itself, however, taught me how “exposure” was not possible, since the existence of Romeyka is widely known even when it is not publicly articulated. The productive questions arising from such tensions (exposure vs. discretion), as hinted by Açıksöz, increasingly became a part of analytic and ethical pathways.

Some other aspects Açıksöz pinpoints, however, underline how ethnographic relationality is not binary but involves multiple other dynamics. The involvement of the media, the law, bureaucracies, and the state across his rapport with his interlocutors underline how relationalities are always mediated and incessantly amended. This complication of relations has the capacity to differentially charge the degrees of betrayal: researchers’ decision to withhold information about themselves because of the potential political repercussions of opposing nationalist state policies, as hinted by the author, is significantly different from withholding information with regard to anthropologists’ privileged access to oppressed groups through complicity in state violence, as widely discussed in the recent case of Saiba Varma’s (2020) work in Kashmir. Betrayal, Açıksöz hints, is far from simple concept.

Damien Stankiewicz

Department of Anthropology, Temple University, 1115 Polett Walk, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122, USA (damien@temple.edu). 25 I 24

Salih Can Açıksöz gathers for us, in this eloquent and deeply thoughtful research article, so many articulations of anthropological antinomies: in striving to convey truth, ethnography

conceals. While committing to an inclusive humanism, we exclude and other. In seeking to nuance and complicate, we categorize and oversimplify. Açıksöz's exegesis of the heuristic of betrayal allows him to demonstrate, and to emphasize, how imbricated and "multidirectional" these contradictions are—anthropology and especially its fieldwork methodology do not just comprise a series of tensions or contradictions but also truth and secrecy. Sympathy and antipathy are often better evoked as two sides of a coin, or an ouroboros-like union of opposites, in which we are all always already entangled and implicated—the "ever-present dark side of [ethnographic] intimacy," as Açıksöz concludes, borrowing from Thiranagama and Kelly (2011).

Betrayal, for Açıksöz, is "good to think with" because it is not only immediate, as Açıksöz demonstrates in describing the strategic management, and eventual dissolution, of his relationships in the field, but also yoked to large-scale ethical problems, moral regimes, and global political contexts that many worry teeter toward outright fascism. In this way, Açıksöz uses betrayal as a compass-like instrument for navigating the ethical dilemmas of a not fully transparent ethnography of extremism with a needle that at once pulls toward long-standing anthropological commitments to openness and "witnessing" but also toward the exigency to understand, and to some degree to expose, the dangers of extremisms built upon "scapegoating racialized minorities and immigrants," xenophobia, and fomenting violence.

Açıksöz's betrayal trope seems homologous with transgression, as Foucault (1977 [1966]) discussed it in an essay (in Bouchard's 1977 translation):

Transgression is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces. Rather, their relationship takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust. Perhaps it is like a flash of lightning in the night which, from the beginning of time, gives a dense and black intensity to the night it denies.

Ethnographic moments (and accumulations) of betrayal, as transgression, light up and define the shifting contours of ethnography in our contemporary global political context. When Açıksöz writes of the specific moments and encounters in which he feels he betrays his disabled veteran interlocutors—by obscuring his leftist upbringing and identifications, for example—he provides something like lightning flashes that illuminate the edges between "distance and empathy, witnessing and complicity." Part of the important contribution of Açıksöz's article is its broad yet careful synthesis of the ways that various scholars have sought to think through this electrical storm, to discern what we can see when the sky becomes suddenly briefly illuminated. So many of us today, in disparate ethnographic contexts, find ourselves staring at the sky and holding umbrellas.

Informed by my own experiences conducting fieldwork among far-right partisans in France, I empathize with Açıksöz's inclination to defer these ethical questions to the betrayal heuristic. Indeed, the thorniness of these issues leads me thus far to merely synthesize Açıksöz's synthesis, in a recursive equivoca-

tion, which perhaps tells us much about the deepness of these issues and the ambivalence that they inspire. But while we can circle around the incommensurability of empathy and racism, witnessing and complicity, and various other dichotomies that Açıksöz and other scholars have identified, Açıksöz himself suggests that conciliation or resolution may simply not (currently) be possible when ethnography is characterized by the novel competing obligations and moral commitments of far-right ethnographic encounters:

I continue to feel a devout sense of obligation to both my research participants and my role as ethnographic witness and a commitment to empathetically illustrate their social suffering . . . However, I also feel the "urge" to denounce my disabled veteran interlocutors' political actions, even as I chronicle the processes and formations within which these actions become joyful, meaningful, or practical. Structured into the ethnographic encounter by the divided loyalties of the ethnographer, such competing and vexed feelings are not in fact morally, politically, or methodologically irreconcilable, even if they do stand in strained tension with one another.

In these sentences, we sense a "both/and" formulation that resolves little but leaves open the possibility of conducting fieldwork in quite stormy conditions. Açıksöz was ultimately compelled to abandon his fieldwork for reasons both "political-moral" and practical, but had Erdoğan not pursued his blacklist, Açıksöz might still be in conversation with his interlocutors. These are the contingencies, compromises, and precarities of ethnography among the far right.

Açıksöz, following Simpson (2007), suggests sovereignty as an alternative trope through which we might reframe these "contested terrains." I interpret this worthwhile intervention, in its emphasis on refusal, as an indictment of the pervasiveness of nationalist identitarian logic; it also cautions against a "sovereign prerogative" (Hansen and Stepputat 2005) that may entice us to think, especially when it comes to our national politics and others' national politics, compartmentally. Is it we who (also) feel compelled to cordon off "traitors, internal enemies, and terrorists" from what Mazzarella (2019) terms our "liberal settlement"? But rather than asserting that ethnographic ethics may themselves map onto nationalist borderings and world-making, I would argue that we would do better with a non-territorial trope, or no trope at all. Indeed, I would suggest that no concept or theory-word can resolve our discomfort and unsettledness at these tensions. I might instead propose that we further contemplate our need for moral closure or resolution, especially as it relates (as I suspect it does) to our tacit assumptions that politics—especially in our world on the edge—are, or must be, Manichean and zero-sum.

In contemplating science and religion, Stanley Tambiah (1994:129) wrote, "To declare that two phenomena seem incommensurable in our present state of knowledge does not automatically put you in the relativist camp or deny the possibility of measurement at some future time." Sitting with incommensurability may be a little like "staying with the trouble,"

in Haraway's (2016) turn of phrase, nudging us toward refining our ethics through closer attention to hybridities and entanglements. But no book title will do the trick either. For now, there is no well-lit path forward, only lightning.

Umut Yildirim

Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies,
Chemin Eugène Rigot 2, 1211 Genève, Switzerland
(umut.yildirim@graduateinstitute.ch). 5 II 24

Counterinsurgency is a politics of persuasion, argues Laleh Khalili (2013), in which knowledge becomes a central tool of asymmetric warfare in the service of the maintenance of sovereignty. Anthropology has been viewed as a form of knowledge that is "useful" to counterinsurgency both for the geopolitical capture, mapping, and organization of populations into dangerous human "terrains" to be occupied and for persuading the public of the political necessity of waging counterterrorist wars. The figure of the academic-cum-terrorist is the thorny part of this economy of persuasion. Increasingly commonplace since counterterrorism became part of the Reagan regime's low-intensity conflict doctrine in the 1980s, intellectuals who oppose low-intensity wars are regularly excluded from mainstream public discourse as monstrous figures, traitors betraying the moral codes and trust of the sovereign public. The "betraying intellectual" (Zulaika 2019:17–18) is imprisoned in a discourse of terrorism and its "implications of essential Evil, taboo, and a logic of contagion" that together elicit "a form of thinking that is closer to the mental world of medieval witchcraft and inquisitorial nonsense." By embodying the necessary tropic template for the ultimate traitor and denying the possibility of complex forms of academic subjectivity, the academic-cum-terrorist adds the new dimension of the ultimate traitor to the ideological justifications of the waging of a just counterinsurgency war, discursively creating "the very thing it abominates" (Zulaika 2019:18).

Salih Can Açıksöz's fieldwork-based autoethnographic reflections on ethnographic betrayal allow us a glimpse into just such a complex form of academic subjectivity. His research with Turkey's disabled ethnonationalist community takes a dangerous turn after he and thousands of academic signatories to a public petition calling for a peaceful settlement to the 40-year armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are declared terrorists by the Turkish president and subjected to an unprecedented government crackdown. Outed as a traitor by the state, Açıksöz's already fraught attachment to his interlocutors as a result of his radically different political beliefs and his guilt-ridden journey into their lives comes to a razor's edge end. His oppositional stance on the war made suddenly visible by the fist of sovereign power creates a dyadic ethical relationship. Outed, his "betrayal [is] complete," translating as a loss of all possibility of access to the field. Traces

are left behind, including this reflection on positionality. When the state nonconsensually terminates his already turbulent attachment to the field, the space of access is narrowed down to a form of productive rumination on the constitutive conditions that led to the publication of his first book. These affective traces allow him to let go of that anxiety-producing and self-effacing yet meaningful fieldwork experience. It is with such traces in mind that I read this article as an expression of ethnographic grief.

What do we lose when we lose the field? What is it that we lose when we are barred from accessing the field that has created the very core of our anthropological existence? In reading Açıksöz's evocative text, I am reminded of Judith Butler's (2004) work on the shaping of grief experience by social, cultural, historical, and political factors. In her treatment, Butler (2004) draws our attention to both the primary vulnerability of the self in relation to others and to our fundamental dependence on others. State sovereignty attempts to subsume these facts and flows of life, thus denying the fundamental relationality in which we are constituted and dispossessed by others. Açıksöz demonstrates convincingly that such ethnographic relationality is cruelly crisscrossed by state sovereign violence and counterterrorism, distorting the content we study and warping the ethnographic journey itself with blind openings, detours, dead ends, and premature endings. In repudiating insular and sanitized ethical research guidelines, we grow in relational self-mastery within the negative space of sovereign counterinsurgency. We open a political horizon where dependency and vulnerability emerge as ethnographic, generative, and political issues. I celebrate this mournful article and its author's grief precisely because it enables an inquiry whose vital gesture is to ground the ethnographer not only in politics but also in the politics of ethnography.

Reply

The temporality of academic publishing leads to strange coincidences. "Ethnographic Betrayals" was written in the aftermath of the 2015–2016 urban war between Turkish state forces and Kurdish militants. This conflict prompted the Turkish government to launch a witch hunt against academics who spoke out against the devastation inflicted on the Kurdish population and cities. The piece reflects on intellectual responsibility and the potentials and limits of ethnography in a climate of right-wing authoritarianism, political violence, and state repression.

Three years later, I am writing this response in a similar climate, amid the ongoing Israeli genocide against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, which has spurred a McCarthyist campaign against academic institutions in the United States. Just a few weeks ago, I, along with many other UCLA students

and faculty members, was physically assaulted by a self-professed Zionist mob, joined by white supremacists, on my university campus, right in front of the anthropology department. Once again, I find myself pondering the same questions originally posed by my article, but this time with the intellectual company of my brilliant respondents.

Why does one write in moments like these? This deceptively simple question has haunted me since a Palestinian colleague responded to one of my recent social media posts criticizing anthropologists for not writing enough about the genocide. They asked, “Is writing the center of our work today?” This reproachful question pointed to more urgent tasks requiring immediate attention from Palestinian academics and their allies, including mourning, solidarity, and self-preservation in the face of doxing, institutional censorship, and the right-wing witch hunt against dissident academics. I was taken aback by this sharp remark, partly because I (perhaps falsely) assumed that anthropological writing was always tethered to some pressing psychic and political demand.

Why write? In a recent essay, Alpa Shah (2022) considers this question, originally posed by Jean-Paul Sartre (1988), to reflect on the possibilities of dissidence in an increasingly neoliberalized academia. I would like to use this space to also think through the same question, informed by my respondents’ thoughtful and generous comments, and to elucidate the motivations that propelled me to write “Ethnographic Betrayals” in the first place. Needless to say, such motivations are rarely, if ever, fully transparent to the author, yet the kind of dialogical reflection enabled by the format of *Current Anthropology* may help both me and the reader unearth the multiple layers of psychic, political, and disciplinary investments that have underpinned this project.

I am grateful for Yildirim’s percipient response, which beautifully captured the main psychic dynamic that animated my article. “Ethnographic Betrayals” was written from a place of grief. My ethnographic research began as a “counter-counter-insurgency” (Network of Concerned Anthropologists 2009) project that sought to implore the fetishization of the disabled veteran body in Turkish nationalist discourse, which was used to manufacture consent for the state’s scorched-earth campaigns in the Kurdish region. As such, the ethnographic intimacies that my interlocutors and I cultivated with great care during my fieldwork were delicate, if not doomed to break apart from the start. Even so, when my “guilt-ridden journey” ended and my return to the field was rendered impossible through an orchestrated campaign of lawfare, doxing, and vigilante violence, I was left with a deep sense of loss that I could not fully comprehend until Yildirim put a name to it.

In his early works, Sigmund Freud (1917) described a kind of mourning that does not enable the mourner to move on, in which loss refuses to find closure, as melancholia. Freud (1917) argued that the melancholic’s sustained libidinal investment in the lost object was pathological and antithetical to the ego’s well-being and flourishing. Later, he rescinded this sharp distinction between mourning and melancholia, recognizing melancholia as an integral component of mourning (Clewell 2004). Blend-

ing melancholia and mourning, “Ethnographic Betrayals” is “anthropology as the work of mourning” (Briggs 2014), grieving for, in Yildirim’s words, what “we lose when we lose the field”—the lost intimacies, unrealized potentialities of life and friendship, and foreclosed paths of personal and political transformation. Although it is an expression of what Zoë Wool (2020) calls “open grief” with its melancholic tinge, the article also aims to work through loss to ask, “after loss, what then” (Butler 2003)?

In the article, I work through, and perhaps sublimate, my loss of the field to make methodological interventions into debates on ethics in anthropology. Saglam’s discerning response specifically highlights two main contributions of the piece to our understanding of ethnographic relationalities in research ethics. The first is the problematization of the hegemonic construction of the anthropologist as the automatically more powerful agent in the ethnographic dyad, with the exception of the situations when the anthropologist “studies up” (Nader 1974). I wanted to push back against this construction, which, despite being deeply rooted in anthropology’s long history of reckoning with its colonial past, has turned into a sort of narcissistic avowal that privileges the anthropologist’s representational powers over the multiplicity of power dynamics that structure an ethnographer’s embodied and embedded existence in the field and beyond. Here, I think with and alongside black, queer, and feminist scholars of color (Berry et al. 2017; Durban 2022) who have shown how even the radical tradition of activist anthropology has failed to acknowledge the racialized and gendered vulnerabilities of the anthropologist vis-à-vis her interlocutors and hence ironically has reaffirmed, rather than displaced, the white, Euro-American, nondisabled, heterosexual, and nontrans man as the assumed subject of anthropology. I argue that thinking through the multilayered heuristic of betrayal may allow us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the ethical, practical, and political complexities of the ethnographic dyad, especially for anthropologists working with the far right in contexts of political violence and state repression.

The second contribution highlighted by Saglam is the piece’s emphasis on the mediated and mediatized nature of the dyadic relations in the field. I write against the reification of the dyadic relationalities between the ethnographer and research participants as the sole locus of moral considerations, specifically underlining the role of the state in structuring the terms of who can establish rapport with whom. The invisibility of the state in anthropology’s ethics deliberations owes much to the “liberal settlement” (Mazzarella 2019) that has historically served as the *raison d’être* of sociocultural anthropology (Jobson 2020). The state, both as a set of institutions and a set of fantasies, is hypervisible in illiberal contexts and purportedly absent in liberal ones. How would our ethical deliberations differ if we took questions of the state and sovereignty seriously, not simply as research subjects but also as force fields within which we operate? What kinds of fidelity, betrayal, and moral agency would such a move require from anthropologists?

Stankiewicz’s poetic response eloquently encapsulates the central argument of “Ethnographic Betrayals”: “Ethnographic

moments (and accumulations) of betrayal . . . light up and define the shifting contours of ethnography in our contemporary global political context.” However, unlike Stankiewicz, my understanding of the flash of lightning originates not from Foucault’s notion of transgression but from Walter Benjamin, whose messianic writings are rich with images of lightning and storms. “Knowledge comes only flashlike [blitzhaft]. The text is the long roll of thunder that follows,” Benjamin (1999:456) suggests in *Arcades Project*. For Benjamin (1999), historical truth becomes accessible to consciousness only at specific moments, appearing suddenly like a flash. The affectively and politically charged moments of ethnographic betrayal were such flashes for me, illuminating both the potential of ethnographic research to enhance our understanding of the far right and the weak spots in our concepts of ethnographic ethics and the disciplinary politics of anthropology.

I agree with Stankiewicz that there are certainly no easy moral closures around the ethicopolitical dilemmas that I present in the article, and I make no pretense of resolving the antinomies that structure anthropological practice. On the contrary, I propose a “negative dialectics” (Adorno 2014) that recognizes and maintains the tension between the contradictory aspects of ethnographic relationality rather than seeking a final synthesis or reconciliation. As Stankiewicz puts it succinctly, “There is no well-lit path forward, only lightning.” Yet as I write these sentences in the wake of the French far right’s gains in European elections, which only days ago led to Macron’s recent decision to call snap parliamentary elections, I cannot help but remember that in Walter Benjamin’s writings, lightning, as a metaphor for knowledge and consciousness, is inseparable from the historical storm of fascism. In such stormy times, anthropologists, I am afraid, would need to do more than simply attending to hybridities and entanglements to fend off the dark clouds on our ethicopolitical horizon.

—Salih Can Açıksöz

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