STREAM 1. On navigating the violent machinations of the contemporary Turkish state: positionality, entanglements and exile.

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I. Coming out as a halfie:

In early March 2023, three weeks after the earthquakes, I stood at the edge of a road in my paternal family's neighbourhood of Affan in Antioch. Before me stretched an unobstructed view of the city's historic centre, a scene both striking and unfamiliar from this vantage point. The corner where I stood, once a gateway into the winding streets of the old Coffeehouse quarter, now faced an expanse of rubble. As I moved deeper into the destruction, I passed the remnants of single-storey homes and half-collapsed walls. These structures had housed local families for generations, now lingering in a state of limbo with uncertain ownership. The sounds of residents, including my own family, no longer animated the streets, yet their grief remained in the words painted on surviving walls: "Hasarsız, yıkma!" ("Do not demolish, undamaged!"), "Bahhurları yeniden yakıp kazanları kaynatacağız" ("We will light the frankincense and boil the cauldrons again"), "Deprem değil, katliam" ("Not an earthquake, but a massacre"), and "Deprem değil, ihmal öldürür" ("Negligence kills, not the earthquake")[iii]."

Witnessing such dizzying sites, I was reminded of Terence Cueno's (2016) 'If These Walls Could Only Speak', in which he examines the role of public icons and textual expressions as conduits of divine speech within the Eastern Orthodox tradition (a tradition for which Antioch serves as both a foundational site and a historical centre). I wondered in turn, could one who has never leaned against these walls register the divinity of the phrase, "we will light the frankincense again and boil the cauldrons"? Could they recognise this seemingly simple expression, rooted in the convivial religious and ceremonial practices of the neighbourhood, as a powerful conduit of local grief and resistance? Spoken in ode to collective faith?

Perhaps it is my transcient feelings of belonging both within- and beyond Antakya that compel me to reflexively question the differences between the city's familiars and strangers. Positionality, after all, is one of the most pressing internal questions underpinning my own methodological approach as an aspiring sociologist, compelling me to address whether I am a generational witness to Antakya, or simply a foreign investigator. In her "Writing against Culture" (1991) chapter, Lila Abu-Lughod refers to this positionality as a *halfie* - an identity mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, and parentage (446). For her, *halfie* scholars' approaches to the notion of culture are emblematic of an act of blurring the boundary between the self and other. This identification somehwat evokes comparison to my own situatedness. After all, I am a child of Antakya, raised within a liminal diaspora but nourished by the divinity of its conviviality and by a family still rooted in its soil. I am both inside and outside. Like Antakya's walls in the contemporary, I exist in flux as a constellation of small memories carefully placed together. Languages and points of enunciation have manifested as the intersecting arteries and veins of a conceptual body, pulsing together in hopes to (re)imagine the

‘home’.

II. A tonic to ambivalence (or entanglement versus detatchment):

As I write this text, Turkey chokes on tear gas and pepper spray[iv]. Messages to some friends still remain unsent on single ticks as the government intermittently shuts off telecommunications. Swiping left to right on social media, scrolling up and down on news feeds, my eyes refocus with apprehension when I encounter updates from Antakya. I check images of placards that have emerged from the city, memorialising the losses experienced in the 2023 earthquakes as a prelude to the demonstrations now taking place on its surviving streets; “*Kolonlarımız değil ama direnişimiz sağlam*” (Our [building] columns may not be durable, but our resistance is[v]), reads one placard. Another, “*6 Şubatta bu kadar polis olsaydı, şimdi daha çok olurduk*” (If there were these many police on the 6 February, there would be many more of us here right now) (Ibid). I think about survival as an embodied act of resistance since the earthquakes, and I think about the survivors inhabiting such resistance whilst residing in large container camps on the fringes of Antakya - trapped in spatial and temporal limbo. I think about entanglement, and I think about detachment.

For Matute (2021), entanglements and detachments are mutually constitutive: ‘depending on the context, time and space at hand, not only is one deeply entangled from a relational standpoint, but also “detached” if such relational ontological departure is displaced by exclusively insisting on the tangible material realm of particles that the ontological commitment to separation affords’ (515). In this view, materiality and physicality are mobilised to normalise detachment and constrain the possibilities of intentional relationality. Temporality and spatiality, whether in Matute’s analysis or in earlier work such as Harvey (1990), remain central to reimagining entanglement as a mode of relational connectivity.

This framework offers a lens for understanding contemporary events in Turkey. The recent demonstrations can be read as a continuation of resistance to the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) increasingly autocratic rule, led in part by earthquake survivors in Antakya who have organised protests over the past two years[vi]. Antakya’s sustained mobilisation and the current nationwide uprisings unfold within the same temporal and spatial landscape, shaped by the government’s shift from ostensible democracy to entrenched autocracy[vii]. These contexts converge as protracted struggles for accountability and justice, with the shared occupation of streets as sites of collective anger underscoring their endurance. Viewed in this light, the connection between Antakya’s two-year mobilisation and the present uprisings reflects profound entanglement rather than the detachment with which it is often perceived.

The ready acceptance of detachment towards Antakya amid the uprisings further reveals the ambivalence with which Turkish society engages the politics of difference. Antakya, a city of historic significance at the margins of the Republic, has never commanded the sustained attention afforded to Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, or to Kurdish metropoles such as Diyarbekir (Āmīd) and Mardin (Merdīn). Its peripheral status may relate to its late annexation, but more likely stems from its proximity to Syria, the vilified ‘Other’, to cities such as Aleppo, Idlib and Latakia. Much like for Kurdish communities, the nation-state itself can be read as a carceral regime, in which those at the fringes are perceived as a threat to the tenuous stitches that hold its collective

identity together. Like the damaged walls of Affan, Antakya persists in a state of existential uncertainty, at once inside and outside the Republic's imagined homeland (Dağtaş 2018).

Terms such as entanglement and detachment, however, may not fully capture the scope of relational significance. A more nuanced framework is needed, one that recognises their coexistence and intersection. Querejazu (2021) reminds us that '[e]ncounters shape life in anything but an ordered and tidy way, yet we often opt to simplify such messiness through knowledge, theories, and methodologies that attempt to capture reality in manageable and discrete categories … systemati[s]ed into binaries composed of opposite poles …' (21). The interplay of movements, actions, and points of enunciation within the same spatio-temporal context may therefore be more accurately conceived as encounters. In light of Antakya's peripheral yet pivotal role as the social centre of the February 2023 earthquakes (Gürboğa et al. 2023), the disproportionate loss of its youth during the 2013 Gezi Uprisings (Taş 2022), and its geographic position as a gateway between Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean, 'encounter' offers a compelling lens for understanding the dynamics of violence in Turkey as they unfold between people and the state. It is this analytic of encounter, tracing the spatio-temporal resonances between Antakya's post-earthquake mobilisations and the current uprisings, alongside attention to the processes consolidating the Turkish state as carceral and autocratic, that underpins my inquiry into civil unrest and state violence.

III. All that's left is us, navigating the landscapes of the *gurbet*:

To begin codifying the structure of this research on Turkish civil unrest and state violence at the University of Cambridge, I relocated permanently to the United Kingdom from Turkey in September 2024. Until then, I had been living between İstanbul and İskenderun[viii] for two years, during which I coordinated an emergency response project for the Doria Feminist Fund[ix], directed a documentary with members of my family titled *No.910*[x], and helped establish a collective amplifying the voices of displaced survivors of carceral violence. I recount these activities not to self-aggrandise but to situate the professional and personal experiences that have shaped my understanding of the tensions between positionality, ethics, and security, and the reflexivity each demands. Since re-entering the academy and shifting from a state of entanglement-encounter to one more akin to entanglement-detachment through my spatial distance, I have been reminded of the volatile transformations that continue to engulf Turkey and the eastern Mediterranean.

As an activist living in Turkey, I was previously sceptical of the need to engage in absolute reflections on threats and security. This hyperactive normalisation of risk only became pressing as I adjusted to the academic pace of life in the UK, increasingly accompanied by a sense of uncertainty. To research Turkey as a 'there', I must consider whether I may need to remain 'here' permanently. Turkey currently hosts one of the largest prison populations of academics and journalists[xi][xii], exacerbated by the wave of indiscriminate arrests and house raids since early 2025. This requires careful reflection on my positionality as an academic with Turkish citizenship to safeguard against potential repercussions. Friends and colleagues continue to face systematic state violence for their activism, whether as refugees, queer people, or members of Indigenous communities. Associates have been unlawfully detained or taken from their homes in early-morning raids[xiv]. With such regressions

occurring systematically, I no longer feel safe as a citizen of Turkey.

Instead, I feel fear. I have never experienced exile, self-imposed or otherwise. I have been detained, interrogated, intimidated, and demeaned, but never banished. Nor is there, as far as I know, any tangible proof that I am at risk. Rather, it is an omnipresent feeling, an existential threat born of protracted subjugation to autocracy, what Sertdemir (2025) names 'civic death'. My agency, security, and trust have dissolved, as they have for millions of others in Turkey and its diaspora. In their place grows a premature sense of displacement. If encounters are where entanglement and detachment meet, where does displacement belong? And what of apprehension for myself, my loved ones, and my interlocutors past and present? Still, it is not in my nature to cling to fear. Fear is a privilege many cannot afford, and acknowledging it can signal the presence of something else: composure, trust, insight, even confidence. Justice, accountability, perhaps revolution. I recall the words of my documentary's protagonist: "we are here and you are there, my love. We endure this because we have no choice, and your role is to make sure that our stories are never presented as fiction"[xv].

In full transparency, I have yet to envision a methodology that allows me to be 'there'—to construct an alternative imaginary that unsettles the entanglement-encounter-detachment defining my situatedness as an academic researching Turkey. I am exploring possible alternatives, whether through retroactive auto-ethnographic analysis drawn from previous fieldwork, encrypted data collection following cybersecurity and digital hygiene training, or open-source investigative methodologies. As my supervisor Dr Zeina al-Azmeh observes, violence in our region has "sadly been normalised, and we have, over time, developed coping mechanisms which we find ourselves pressured to draw upon all too frequently"[xvi]. Such mechanisms do not disappear in academia. I believe they can instead provide the foundation for a methodology of protection and safety—for myself and my interlocutors—that enables an affective, rigorous, and sustainable practice of inquiry in the near future.

It is yet to be determined whether I will find success in such endeavours...