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## TWO ENDS OF TRANSFORMATION IN ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE IN TÜRKİYE: A METHODOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF THE DISSERTATIONS OF ORHAN ACIPAYAMLI AND MEHMET ALİ SEVGİ

TÜRKİYE'DE ETNOGRAFİK PRATİKLERİN DÖNÜŞÜMÜNÜN İKİ UCU: ORHAN ACIPAYAMLI VE MEHMET ALİ SEVGİ'NİN DOKTORA TEZLERİ ÜZERİNDEN YÖNTEMSEL BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMA

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### Anahtar sözcükler

Etnografi, Deneysel Etnografi, Klasik Etnografi, Acipayamlı, Sevgi.

### Keywords

Ethnography, Experimental Ethnography, Traditional Ethnography, Acipayamlı, Sevgi.

### Öz

Bu makalede, Türkiye'de etnografik pratiğin 20. yüzyıl ortalarından günümüze geçirdiği dönüşümü, pozitivist nesnellikten refleksif öznelliğe doğru paradigmatik bir kayma olarak ele alıyorum. Bunu, Orhan Acipayamlı'nın 1954 tarihli Acipayam ve Çevresinde Mesken ve Mesken ile İlgili Etnografik Araştırmalar başlıklı tezi ile Mehmet Ali Sevgi'nin 2015 tarihli Writing Migration: Lives as Ethnographic Fiction adlı çalışmasını karşılaştırarak yapıyorum. Acipayamlı, Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi'nde hâkim olan -ve derleme ile yorumlama arasında katı bir ayrıma dayalı- folklorik arşivcilik geleneğini temsil ederken; Sevgi, deneysel ve otoetnografik anlatının öne çıktığı daha güncel bir yönelimi örneklemektedir. Bu iki ismi, dönemin folklor/etnoloji tartışmalarını şekillendiren Pertev Naili Boratav, Nermin Erdentuğ ve Sedat Veyis Örnek'in çalışmalarıyla; günümüzde ise Hande Çayır, Serap Duman İnce ve Budem Çağıl Büyükpoyroz'un otoetnografik ve multimodal araştırmalarıyla birlikte değerlendiriyorum. Bu daha geniş çizgiyi dikkate alarak, Türkiye'de etnografyanın doğrusal bir sentez arayışına değil, arşivsel titizlik, anlatısal yaratıcılık ve etik sorumluluk arasındaki süregelen bir diyaloga işaret ettiğini öne sürüyorum. Araştırmacı olarak kendi konumumdan da hareketle, yalnızca insanlara değil; hayvanlara, materyallere ve çevresel aktörlere de duyarlı çokturlu bir bakışın bu diyalogu derinleştirebileceğini ve etnografik yazımın gelecekteki biçimlerine yeni imkânlar sunabileceğini savunuyorum.

### Abstract

In this article, I examined the transformation of ethnographic practice in Türkiye from the mid-20th century to the present, framing it as a paradigmatic shift from positivist objectivity to reflexive subjectivity. I did so by comparing two doctoral dissertations: Orhan Acipayamlı's *Ethnographic Research on Dwellings in Acipayam* written in 1954 and Mehmet Ali Sevgi's *Writing Migration: Lives as Ethnographic Fiction* written in 2015. While Acipayamlı represents the tradition of folkloric archiving and classification -anchored in a strict division between collection and interpretation- dominant at Ankara University's Faculty of Languages, History, and Geography, Sevgi exemplifies the experimental and reflexive turn that has gained traction in recent decades. To situate these works, I also drew on figures such as Pertev Naili Boratav, Nermin Erdentuğ, and Sedat Veyis Örnek, who shaped the folklore/ethnology debates of their time, as well as more recent autoethnographic and multimodal works by Hande Çayır, Serap Duman İnce, and Budem Çağıl Büyükpoyroz. By engaging with this longer trajectory, I argued that ethnography in Türkiye has not moved in a linear path toward synthesis but rather unfolds as an ongoing dialogue between archival rigor, narrative creativity, and ethical responsibility. From my perspective as a researcher, I suggested that a multispecies outlook -attentive not only to human but also to nonhuman agencies- could expand this dialogue further and help us imagine future forms of ethnographic writing.

## Introduction

Ethnographic studies in Türkiye, particularly since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, exhibit a significant transformation that reflects a broader epistemological shift in the social sciences. The 1950s were largely defined by a model of “objective description,” where studies categorized as “village monographs” or “regional ethnographies” aimed to produce systemic catalogues of cultural life. This approach found particularly fertile ground in the academic climate of Ankara University’s Faculty of Languages and History-Geography (DTCF), the institutional heart of Turkish anthropology and folklore. Established as a key ideological institution of the young Republic, the faculty’s anthropological focus had shifted in the post-war period from the politically charged study of “race” to that of “culture”. This transition solidified a methodology, heavily influenced by the German tradition, which drew a sharp distinction between folklore -the uninterpreted collection of cultural data- and ethnology, the theoretical analysis of that data. Within this paradigm, the researcher was expected to be an invisible archivist, positioning themselves behind the text to distance the observation process from subjective involvement and personal perspective (Aygün Cengiz, 2024; Münüsoğlu, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

This tradition of positivist objectivity underwent a profound transformation beginning in the 1980s, as global disciplines of ethnology and anthropology were reshaped by post-structuralist and postmodern thought. Initiated by Clifford Geertz’s concept of “thick description” (1973) and reaching a critical turning point with *Writing Culture* (1986), edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, a new paradigm emerged. This approach underscored the ideological and fictive dimensions of cultural writing, reframing ethnographic texts not as objective accounts but as authored, selective, and constructed narratives. Consequently, concepts such as “the author’s position,” “the problem of representation,” and “subjectivity” gained central importance. Methodologies like autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) and experimental ethnography (Tedlock, 1991; Behar, 1996) broke down the wall of the “invisible author,” legitimizing the researcher’s personal experiences as data and expanding the expressive possibilities of the social sciences through creative narrative techniques.

In this article, I analyzed the concrete reflections of this epistemological shift within the context of Türkiye

through a comparative reading of two ethnographic theses that represent these opposing poles. Orhan Acıpayamlı’s classical monographic work, *Acıpayam ve çevresinde mesken ve mesken ile ilgili etnografik araştırmalar* (1954), stands as a quintessential product of the DTCF’s mid-century tradition of folkloric archiving. In stark contrast, Mehmet Ali Sevgi’s *Writing Migration: Lives as Ethnographic Fiction* (2015) embodies the experimental and reflexive turn, blending autoethnographic data with fictional storytelling. Indeed, Sevgi’s experimental and reflexive turn is not an isolated phenomenon but rather part of a broader scholarly movement that has gained significant traction within Turkish academia itself. In recent years, Türkiye-based theses have adopted similar strategies, further entrenching this paradigm in local academic production. Serap Duman İnce’s *Autoethnographic Experimental Film: Motherhood as the Lost Object of Desire* (2024), for instance, uses experimental film techniques to situate personal experiences of assisted reproduction and motherhood within broader cultural and psychoanalytic frameworks. Likewise, Hande Çayır’s *Documentary as Autoethnography: A Case Study on the Changing Surnames of Women* (2016) transforms a personal trajectory into a feminist documentary and academic inquiry, interrogating identity, power, and legal structures surrounding surname politics. Budem Çağl Büyükpoyroz’s *In the Shadow of the Ideal Body: An Autoethnographic Analysis* (2023) employs the researcher’s personal embodied experiences to critically examine body politics, cultural norms, and the pressures of idealized femininity. Together, these works illustrate how experimental and autoethnographic forms have been increasingly embraced not only in diasporic or transnational contexts but also within Türkiye itself. By juxtaposing Acıpayamlı’s descriptive monograph with these reflexive and multimodal explorations, this article traces a trajectory “from objectivity to subjectivity,” “from description to interpretation,” and “from observation to participation”. This trajectory offers valuable insight into the broader evolution of social science writing in Türkiye.

## Orhan Acıpayamlı’s Classical Ethnography: Folkloric Archiving and Classification

In his doctoral dissertation, completed in 1954 at Ankara University’s Faculty of Languages and History-Geography, in the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology under the supervision of Şevket Aziz Kansu, Orhan Acıpayamlı presents a detailed account of traditional housing construction (Aygün Cengiz, 2024:

<sup>1</sup> In order to situate Acıpayamlı’s thesis within its institutional milieu, it is crucial to note the genealogy of folklore/ethnology at Ankara University’s DTCF: the Turkish Anthropology Research Center (1925, Istanbul) was transferred to the new faculty in 1935; Pertev Naili Boratav established the first “Turkish Folk Literature and Folklore” chair in 1947 in Türkiye (closed in 1948); Nermin Erdentuğ then consolidated ethnology with a separate chair in 1961, and Sedat Veyis Örnek institutionalized folklore in 1980. This arc - “from race to culture,” from archiving to field-based ethnology- structured the methodological common sense in which Acıpayamlı worked (Aygün Cengiz, 2024: 27-37).

36). This account includes the architectural features of the housing, the materials used in its construction, and the rituals interwoven with the local belief systems. The dissertation reflects the "descriptive" and "cataloguing" academic approach that was dominant during that period. The village monograph tradition, which was prevalent in social sciences in Türkiye at the time, positioned the researcher as an objective observer. Within this tradition, the ethnographer engages in a systematic effort to archive the geographical, material, and cultural data collected from rural communities. Acıpayamlı's study adheres to this methodological framework and aims to document the phenomenon of "dwelling" not only in its technical and structural aspects but also through the connections it establishes with social relations and religious practices.

Acıpayamlı's sharp division of labor -folklore as non-interpretive collection versus ethnology as theory-building- echoed a broader mid-century DTCF campus that moved away from biologized "race" studies toward cultural cataloguing and ethnographic inventory. Read alongside his contemporaries, Acıpayamlı's monograph appears not as an idiosyncrasy but as a representative node in a contested institutional epistemology. Pertev Naili Boratav, for instance, studied within a text-centered framework, focusing primarily on folk literature. Unlike Acıpayamlı, Boratav defined folklore as a broad analytical discipline that required interpretation, comparison, and the consideration of historical and social contexts, using both written sources and field compilations rather than formal ethnographic fieldwork. His insistence on a scientific approach that did not sterilize or ignore "inappropriate" elements of folk culture placed him in direct conflict with the nationalist project of the era, ultimately leading to his expulsion from the university. (Münüsoğlu, 2015: 135-136). This makes his vision of an analytical folklore profoundly different from Acıpayamlı's descriptive model. Comparable cataloguing tendencies were visible in other mid-century works at DTCF. Nermin Erdentuğ's *Hal Köyü: Sosyo-Kültürel Bir İnceleme* (1956) and *Sün Köyü: Etnolojik Tetkik* (1959) systematically

grouped data on "material life," "social life," and rituals such as birth, marriage, and death into monographic categories without interpretive commentary (Münüsoğlu, 2015: 132-133). Sedat Veyis Örnek's subsequent arrival would lead to a definitive challenge to Acıpayamlı's rigid separation, resulting in the eradication of the boundary between the two fields. For Örnek, folklore was essentially a form of "regional ethnology," and he applied contemporary anthropological theories (like Van Gennep's rites of passage) directly to his studies of Turkish customs and beliefs, viewing culture as a dynamic, ever-changing process rather than a collection of static, "pure" artifacts to be traced to an origin. When considered as a whole, these figures illustrate a paradigm in which Acıpayamlı's strict division and descriptive rigor represented one powerful, institutionally-backed approach amidst Boratav's text-based analytical project and Örnek's later synthesis of folklore and ethnology (Münüsoğlu, 2015: 136-139)<sup>2</sup>.

Acıpayamlı's methodological framework was a direct reflection of his intellectual stance, which sharply separated folklore from ethnology. For him, folklore was a science responsible for discovering and recording cultural documents "without establishing any system of thought". Its duty was to transfer the material "as is," without interpretation. Ethnology, on the other hand, was the "thinking brain" that took this raw material from folklore and ethnography to build theoretical systems and arrive at general principles. This division is not merely a theoretical preference but a structuring principle in his work. For example, in his well-known study on rain prayers, he published two separate articles: the first, subtitled "Folklor," presented a compilation of data from various regions without any analysis, while the second, subtitled "Etnoloji," used this data to conduct a comparative analysis within the context of Central Asian Turkish beliefs. His dissertation on housing follows this exact "folkloric" logic of meticulous, uninterpreted documentation, serving as the raw material for a potential future ethnological analysis (Münüsoğlu, 2015: 135-136).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The distinct methodologies adopted by these three key figures - Acıpayamlı, Boratav, and Örnek- are not coincidental but are deeply tied to the academic formation of each. Sedat Veyis Örnek's approach of integrating the fields of folklore and ethnology was significantly influenced by his doctoral studies in "ethnology and history of religions" in Germany. Contrary to the sharp folklore/ethnology distinction claimed by Orhan Acıpayamlı, Örnek's holistic and theoretical perspective, which was acquired from the German academic tradition, laid the groundwork for an approach in Türkiye that analyzed folklore directly through anthropological theories, thereby framing it as a "regional ethnology" (Aygün Cengiz, 2023:36). There is an intellectual affinity between Örnek's background in the history of religions and the approach of Mehmet Ali Sevgi, a sociologist of religion with training in theology, who is discussed in this article. The training of both has oriented them toward interpreting cultural narratives through the dimensions of belief and meaning. Similarly, Pertev Naili Boratav's conception of folklore as an analytical and comparative discipline stems from his engagement with major European theoretical folklore traditions, such as those of Arnold van Gennep, Georges Dumézil, and the Finnish School (Münüsoğlu, 2015: 133). This intellectual background led him to position folklore not as a simple activity of collection but as a scientific field requiring interpretation within its historical and social context. Orhan Acıpayamlı's adherence to a strict separation, however, is a direct reflection of his academic training at

Ankara University's DTCF in the Department of Anthropology and Ethnology. The prevailing school of thought at DTCF at that time, itself influenced by the German tradition, defined folklore as the "uninterpreted transfer of material" and ethnology as the "thinking brain" that processed this material. Therefore, Acıpayamlı's work can be seen as a faithful application of this institutional methodology. These three different approaches reflect the diverse and sometimes conflicting intellectual currents that shaped the fields of folklore and ethnology in mid-20th-century Türkiye.

<sup>3</sup> The reader might rightly wonder if this distinction elevates Acıpayamlı beyond the role of an archivist, given that he incorporates an 'ethnological' stage of interpretation. This is a valid point of potential confusion. However, it is crucial to clarify what 'ethnological analysis' meant for Acıpayamlı. His analysis was not an interpretive effort in the modern sense of exploring contemporary social meanings or symbolic functions. Instead, his work was almost entirely historical-reconstructive and classificatory in nature. As seen in his analyses of rituals, his primary goal was an 'essentialist search' to trace cultural elements back to their perceived origins in Central Asia and to categorize them within established anthropological frameworks. In this sense, his analysis functions as an extension of the archival impulse: it takes a cultural 'fact' from the field archive and places it within a larger historical and typological catalogue, rather than interpreting its living significance.

In the introductory section of his dissertation, Orhan Acıpayamlı laments the scarcity of ethnological studies on dwellings in Türkiye and, in an effort to address this gap, designs a comprehensive “questionnaire” disseminated to local villages, schoolteachers, and residents through the Ministry of National Education (Acıpayamlı, 1954: 164–165). The responses collected were initially organized into index cards, then cross-referenced during a series of “investigative field visits.” During these visits, inconsistencies and gaps were corrected, and the dataset was restructured through a secondary indexing process. Considering the historical context, this methodology is noteworthy not only for its data collection process but also for its embedded system of verification. Acıpayamlı provided comprehensive descriptions, particularly regarding construction materials and building techniques. He meticulously documented technical elements such as the types of stones used in villages (river stone, slate, rough stone, etc.), the stages of adobe-making, and how lime was extracted and processed from kilns (1954: 166–172). Furthermore, he carefully recorded distinctions between dry-stone masonry and mud mortar, village-specific preferences for these techniques, and how building materials were transported either by human or animal power.

A similar “cataloguing” approach is evident in the sections where Acıpayamlı addresses the ritual practices accompanying house construction. Rituals such as animal sacrifice, prayers, and the hanging of amulets during the “groundbreaking” phase are conveyed systematically, with detailed accounts of how and in what form they are performed in each village (Acıpayamlı, 1954: 175–186). Another notable aspect of this section is the author’s adherence to the role of an “external observer.” The narrative, shaped by phrases such as “villagers believe that...,” is deliberately stripped of personal commentary or experiential reflections. This “invisible author” perspective reflects the prevailing scientific ethos of 1950s Turkish academia, which prioritized minimizing subjectivity and recording data in the most “uncontaminated” form possible. Although this approach may seem limited in terms of critical analysis by today’s ethnographic standards, the extensive dataset provided by Acıpayamlı serves as a valuable archive for documenting the ritual dimensions of architectural practices from that period.

Nevertheless, the detailed and comprehensive field notes, technical drawings, and schematics included in

Acıpayamlı’s dissertation (Acıpayamlı, 1954: 166, 180, 176, 186, 191–192 ff.) possess significant archival value, as they document a temporal moment in which traditional construction and ritual practices had not yet been transformed under the pressures of modernization.<sup>4</sup> The text’s richness, including the molds used for shaping adobe, the tools employed at various construction stages, and the step-by-step enactment of belief-related practices, transformed the text into more than a descriptive monograph as it became a rich source of “raw data” for future theoretical inquiries. Indeed, as is common in the tradition of village monographs, this study is grounded not in desk-bound theorization.<sup>5</sup> but in direct empirical observation, thereby offering a foundational framework for questions that may be developed by subsequent generations, such as: *How does social solidarity accompany the process of house construction? Or, how do ritual practices shape peasant identity and senses of belonging?* When assessed within the context of its historical period, the 1950s in Türkiye represent a time when rural architecture had not yet been completely integrated into the prevailing wave of modernization, and the use of reinforced concrete had not yet become widespread. Consequently, traditional construction techniques and rituals were still actively practiced by the last generation of master builders and villagers with whom the author was able to engage. While Acıpayamlı’s “archival meticulousness” may not permit critical interrogation or reflexive discussion of the researcher’s own positionality, it nonetheless offers today’s scholars a valuable ethnographic document of a “lost” period. Contemporary researchers, for instance, might revisit his collected data within new theoretical frameworks to pose questions such as: *What connections exist between wall-building techniques and patterns of social solidarity in the village? Or how do house-building rituals reflect gender roles?*

In conclusion, Orhan Acıpayamlı’s work stands as a compelling example of the “classical monographic ethnography” tradition in Türkiye. His extensive fieldwork is coupled with a remarkable effort in description and cataloguing. However, the researcher largely renders his own subjectivity and personal relationship with the field invisible within the text. Although this approach may now be seen as lacking in critical reflexivity, it mirrored the prevailing standard of “scientific objectivity” in its own time. Particularly with regard to rural architecture and folk beliefs, this thesis serves as an archival document of a world that, in retrospect, has nearly vanished due to the

<sup>4</sup> I do not intend to express a value judgment that either endorses or criticizes modernization. The crux of the debate is that Acıpayamlı’s study was conducted within a historical context in which rural areas had not yet been fully exposed to the transformative effects of modernization processes. The phrase “transformed under the pressures of modernization” does not imply an ideological stance; rather, it signifies an epistemological paradigm shift of which reflections we observe in the regulation of public and spatial life. My aim is neither to romanticize nor to condemn this process, but rather to illuminate the specific historical and social threshold at which the ethnographic narrative was produced.

<sup>5</sup> Conducting field-based research grounded in empirical observation rather than relying solely on desk-based analysis remains an ideal actively pursued by a significant number of researchers within today’s disciplines of anthropology, ethnology, and sociology.



widespread adoption of reinforced concrete and modern construction methods. For this reason, the meticulously catalogued findings presented by Acıpayamlı maintain their value not only for comprehending the ethnographic legacy of village life during that period but also for inspiring new generations of researchers to revisit the field with more comprehensive and critically informed questions.

### **Mehmet Ali Sevgi's Experimental Ethnography: Between Fiction and Reality**

In his thesis, entitled *Writing Migration: Lives as Ethnographic Fiction* (Sevgi, 2015), written in the 2010s, Mehmet Ali Sevgi presents a highly unconventional study on Turkish-German migration. Identifying himself as a "migrant researcher," Sevgi moves away from conventional ethnographic writing. Instead, he embraces fictional and experimental forms, presenting his field data through short stories that verge on fiction. In doing so, the text conveys the emotional dimensions of migration in depth, while simultaneously challenging the boundaries between "objectivity" and "fictionality." The author's theoretical framework draws upon the idea-articulated most clearly in James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986)- that ethnography is also a literary act. Consequently, the work interrogates the traditional anthropological/ethnological "observer position" by foregrounding the subjectivity of the researcher, the construction of fiction, and the narrative strategies employed in writing. A comparable blurring of reality and constructed narrative can be seen in Hande Çayır's (2016) autoethnographic documentary on women's surname changes, where lived experience is interwoven with cinematic narration. By using editing, framing, and voiceover techniques, Çayır transforms a biographical trajectory into a broader commentary on gender and identity politics, showing how filmic form itself can destabilize the boundary between factual record and creative re-interpretation.

One of the central features of Sevgi's thesis is the fluid relationship and dynamic interplay between literary fiction and "raw field data" (Sevgi, 2015). Audio recordings and notes from interviews conducted with more than forty migrants are transformed by the author into short stories. Stories such as "Surprise" and "The Patient's Guitar" (Sevgi, 2015: 18–40) are inspired by real-life interviews; however, the narrative backbone of the text is extended through fictionalized scenes and characters. At times, the author makes statements such as, "This character is actually a composite of three different migrants," thereby making the boundaries between fiction and reality visible; he also openly acknowledges incorporating elements from his own lived experiences and imagination into these characters. This approach does not aim to assert documentary truth.<sup>6</sup> but

rather seeks to reveal the emotional truths of migration. The result is a hybrid text that occupies a space between the literary and the anthropological -one that aspires to convey the migrant experience with rawness and emotional intensity.

A second notable aspect of the work is the author's autoethnographic positioning. By stating, "I am also one of the people in these stories," Sevgi positions himself not merely as an observing researcher, but also as a subject of migration -as an insider ethnographer. This approach draws on Ellis and Bochner's (2000) conceptualization of "autoethnography," which deviates from the classical ethnographic ideal of the "invisible author." The researcher's personal experiences, emotional responses, and subjective narratives become integral to the text. Sevgi's integration of "journals" (ethnographic diaries) within the short stories serves to exemplify this method. At times, he overlays a character's despair with his own emotional struggles during the migration process. At others, he explicitly shares how a narrative blends real interviews, childhood memories, and images drawn from diverse sources. This technique opens a porous space between narrative and life, offering readers not only knowledge but also the possibility of emotional resonance. Thus, the author's role shifts from that of a distant observer to that of a witness and narrator, who becomes interwoven with the story.

Thirdly, Sevgi's inclusion of ethnographic journal/commentary sections at the end of each story contributes a distinct "experimental ethnography" character to the text. Drawing on the concepts of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Homi Bhabha, the author not only narrates the migrant experience but also attempts to interpret it through a theoretical lens. For instance, in the section titled "Immigrant in Panopticon" (Sevgi, 2015: 45–56), he examines the sense of "constant surveillance" felt by migrants in Germany through Foucault's analysis of surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms. In another section (Sevgi, 2015: 168–179), he employs Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to explore how migrants reproduce internalized cultural practices within a new social context. These theoretical reflections, integrated into the reflective texts following the stories, create a porous space between the literary layer of the narrative and social scientific thought. In this manner, Sevgi blurs the boundary between narrative expression and theoretical inquiry, thereby expanding the formal and conceptual limits of ethnographic writing.

Fourthly, Sevgi's work is distinguished by linguistic diversity and multilingual narration. Some interviews were conducted in German, others in Turkish, and many in a hybrid form where both languages were interwoven. The primary language of the written text, however, is

<sup>6</sup> In this context, the term "truth" does not refer to a modernist or absolutist conception, but rather to a factual -though not absolute- designation aimed at indicating and describing what exists.

English. The incorporation of Turkish dialogue and occasional German expressions within the fictional stories does more than build atmosphere.<sup>7</sup>; it serves to reflect the everyday practice of code-switching<sup>8</sup> practices among migrants. This multilingual structure renders the hybrid and permeable identity of migrant life visible on a formal level. The author's statement<sup>9</sup>, "I first write the stories in Turkish and then translate them into English" (Sevgi, 2015: 13) reveals not only a writing process but also the bilingual nature of the migration experience and how cultural identities are constructed through language. Consequently, the text, with its movement between different languages and cultural registers, formally echoes the plural and fragmented realities of migrant life.

Fifthly, the themes of "belonging" and "identity crisis" lie at the core of Sevgi's narrative. Evidenced by his statement, "Migrants struggle not only with economic and social issues but also with spiritual and emotional voids," the author highlights<sup>10</sup> that the migration experience constitutes a dual challenge, both material and existential. This approach renders visible the fine line between "cultural hybridity" and "alienation," both of which frequently appear in the stories. The emotional state expressed by many Turkish migrants in Germany, such as "I don't fully live here, nor am I entirely in Türkiye," is embodied through Sevgi's fictional characters. Especially in pieces such as "A Monday Ritual" and "Adopted Migration" (Sevgi, 2015: 45–49), the identity struggles of migrants "caught between two worlds" are explored through poetic, emotional, and intimate portrayals grounded in everyday details such as unemployment, family ties, and language barriers. As a result, the concept of migration is depicted not solely as a sociological category, but rather as an interior space, a regime of affect. Büyükpoyroz (2024) similarly demonstrates how autoethnography can render interior

spaces politically legible, as embodied struggles with the "ideal body" are narrated not as private matters but as deeply social and affective processes.

The five aforementioned dimensions contribute to the distinct and experimental character of Sevgi's thesis. On one hand, the narrative strategy of "storytelling" enables readers to emotionally engage with the internal tensions, loneliness, and sense of separation experienced by migrants. On the other hand, through the use of "ethnographic journals," the author both explains how the collected field data is transformed into narrative form and enriches the text through theoretical reflection. This approach transcends conventional academic norms and opens up a rich expressive space "at the intersection of anthropology and literature."

In conclusion, the thesis *Writing Migration: Lives as Ethnographic Fiction* offers an alternative perspective on the phenomenon of Turkish-German migration. By blending fiction with factual experience, the work makes visible the emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions of migration that cannot be captured through mere statistical data or "objective" measurements. The incorporation of the author's personal experiences as a migrant into the narrative, through both subjectivity and reflexivity, offers a concrete example of postmodern/new anthropology's engagement with "the ideological and fictive dimensions of writing." In doing so, Sevgi departs from the conventional ethnographic format of "reporting" and instead rewrites migrants' stories through an artistic and theoretical lens. This experimental gesture opens up a new narrative space within the social sciences -one that is characterized by storytelling- thereby fortifying the human dimension and offering a more empathetic<sup>11</sup>, a multi-faceted perspective on migration. Taken together with works such as those by Çayır (2016), Duman İnce

<sup>7</sup> By the term "atmosphere," I refer to the textual groundwork that is created to make the cultural, social, and emotional context within which a character and/or narrative unfolds, perceivable to the reader. Such linguistic insertions go beyond merely adding a sense of realism to the narrative; they actively transmit the cultural context in which the story is situated to the reader's perception. Multilingual usages have been shown to affect both the content and the form of the narrative, thereby embedding the hybrid identity of migration into the structure of the text itself. In the domain of literary theory, such atmospheric narrative devices are often regarded as stylistic strategies that constitute the "tone" and "emotional resonance" layers of a narrative.

<sup>8</sup> The term "code-switching" refers to a speaker's shift between multiple languages, dialects, or social discourses within a single utterance or conversation. This practice is not merely a technical linguistic maneuver; it is a multi-layered communicative strategy that also reflects identity, belonging, and social positioning. Commonly observed in migrant narratives, such transitions demonstrate that language functions simultaneously as an individual and cultural vehicle. In multilingual fiction, code-switching reveals not only the character's voice but also the hybrid identity and experiential fluidity of migration. For foundational readings on the subject, see: Gumperz (1982); Auer (1998).

<sup>9</sup> The statement is articulated in the thesis as follows: "I wrote the short stories in Turkish. There are various reasons for this preference. As a native Turkish speaker, the only language with which I can completely express myself is Turkish. By using Turkish, I didn't want to miss the emotional descriptions of the protagonists linguistically. Also, by writing the short stories first in Turkish, I aimed to be linguistically comfortable while describing the very personal life of immigrants efficiently..." (Sevgi, 2015:13)

<sup>10</sup> Although the author does not state this viewpoint explicitly, in the section titled "Sense of Non-Belonging" (Sevgi, 2015: 88–90), the emotional and identity-related void is expressed through a migrant character's statement: "I was living a marriage that I didn't belong to on lands where I couldn't express myself." In the same section, another character says, "We are like the unexpected guests. We are like rain, coming suddenly and making everything muddy..." Similar expressions of this sense of dislocation and lack of belonging appear in other parts of the thesis as well.

<sup>11</sup> I use the term "empathetic perspective" here with some caution, as the notion of "empathy" is often situated within a context that is susceptible to romanticization within the domain of social sciences. In the context of structurally complex phenomena, such as migration, which are intricately interwoven with systems of inequality, there is a risk of reducing the issue to the level of individual emotional resonance. Nevertheless, Sevgi's narrative does more than merely convey information; it creates the possibility for readers to emotionally engage with the migrant subject's experience. Therefore, "empathy" here should be understood not merely as a sentiment, but as a form of ethical positionality.

(2024), and Büyükpoyroz(2024) -as well as an increasing number of similar theses in Türkiye- Sevgi's dissertation can be situated within the broader trajectory of contemporary ethnographic practice, one that is increasingly defined by reflexivity, multimodality, and experimental narrative.

### **A Comparative Analysis of Classical and Contemporary Ethnography: Methodological and Theoretical Intersections**

The most tangible way to trace the transformation of ethnographic practice in Türkiye from the 1950s to the present is through a comparative reading of Orhan Acıpayamlı's classical monographic work (1954) and Mehmet Ali Sevgi's experimental ethnographic example (2015). Although these two theses, which have been analyzed in detail in previous sections, may appear to be situated at opposite poles in terms of methodological orientation, authorial positioning, and theoretical framing, they nevertheless share certain common goals and underlying assumptions. In this section, without falling into repetition, I aim to provide a brief overview of the convergences and divergences between the two works in order to sketch a snapshot of the evolution of ethnography in the Turkish context. The divergences between Acıpayamlı and Sevgi thus cannot be reduced to matters of individual style or authorial positioning alone. They embody two distinct institutional moments of DTCF and Turkish social science: the mid-century paradigm of descriptive archiving under the Anthropology and Ethnology chair, and the later trajectory shaped by the establishment of ethnology in 1961 and the folklore chair in 1980, which opened curricular space for reflexivity and multimodality. Situating the comparison in this longer history highlights that what appears as personal methodological choice is in fact symptomatic of broader academic infrastructures.

Both studies share a concern with documentation. Acıpayamlı's thesis, written in the 1950s, fully embodies a "cataloguing" ethos, aiming to record in meticulous detail the processes of house construction, material use, and associated rituals in rural Anatolian life. This exemplifies a typical manifestation of the monographic tradition of the period: to produce a comprehensive dataset for future generations to draw upon. Despite its experimental style, Sevgi's work also fulfils a similar documentary function by grounding the stories of Turkish migrants in Germany in audio recordings and field notes. Although his approach is more open to fictionalization and narrative richness, it does not entirely abandon the goal of "documenting" a particular socio-

cultural reality. Both theses, in accordance with the spirit of their respective times, sought to examine Turkish society -or, more specifically, the Turkish community in Germany- from a variety of perspectives and to contribute to a broader body of knowledge for future research. This documentary impulse is no longer confined to textual description. Recent Türkiye-based theses mobilize autoethnography and multimodal techniques to document lived experience while explicitly thematizing method. Çayır's doctoral work (2016) frames her film as an autoethnographic inquiry -"a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context," where "the personal is political"- and links surname politics to feminist/human-rights debates, thus making method and politics co-visible in the artifact itself. Similarly, Duman İnce's work (2024) theorizes and practices autoethnography through an experimental film on IVF and motherhood, aligning reflexive writing with a visual-auditory register that carries ethnographic description into affective, embodied registers. Büyükpoyroz (2024), in turn, advances an autoethnographic analysis of the "ideal body," weaving first-person narrative, visual traces, and sociocultural theory to document how normative aesthetics shape embodied agency and shame.

Despite the presence of certain similarities, a significant gap emerges between the two texts regarding their treatment of "authorial positioning" and "narrative strategy." In Acıpayamlı's work, the researcher is almost entirely invisible. The author adopts a methodological approach that prioritizes presenting field data "as it is," meticulously ensuring to keep his subjective experience or emotional reactions outside the text. This approach was entirely compatible with the scientific standards of the 1950s academic paradigm: the researcher was expected to remain a neutral observer and refrain from inserting personal perspective into the text. In contrast, Sevgi deliberately makes his migrant identity and emotional involvement visible within his thesis.<sup>12</sup> In his fictionalized stories, he at times refers directly to his own memories or journals, and at other times openly states that certain characters are composites of multiple individuals' life stories. In doing so, he poses the following question to the reader: *Where do the boundaries of a scientific text begin and end?* This model, which places the identity of the researcher at the center of the narrative rather than obscuring it, offers a concrete example of the debate around "the position of the author" that gained prominence through James Clifford and George Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986). A similar divergence is observable on the theoretical level as well. Acıpayamlı's thesis reflects clear traces of the structural-functionalist -and in

<sup>12</sup> Comparable strategies are evident in Türkiye-based autoethnographies. Çayır's (2016) work represents a distinctive approach to the analysis of data, wherein the author utilizes her own personal history as a foundation for the construction of a cinematic self-narrative. This narrative serves the primary function of interrogating the dynamics of power and identity within the context of surname regimes. Her thesis frames documentary as an autoethnographic inquiry and mobilizes interviews, legal testimony, and public reception within the artifact itself. Similarly, Duman İnce (2024) theorizes and practices autoethnography through an experimental

film on IVF and motherhood, drawing on the reflexive lineage of ethnographic/experimental cinema (beginning with Jean Rouch) to foreground the researcher-filmmaker as narrating subject. Büyükpoyroz (2024) extends this trajectory via a first-person, embodied autoethnography of the "ideal body," weaving lived experience with cultural critique to render shame, surveillance, and normativity politically legible.

some respects, historical-geographical<sup>13</sup>- an approach which was dominant in his era. Structural functionalism, as pioneered by foundational figures such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, assumes that social institutions and cultural practices fulfil complementary functions to maintain the continuity of the whole (Özbudun, Şafak, & Altuntek, 2007: 99-139). Within this framework, Acıpayamlı's ethnographic data on village architecture primarily seeks to make sense of cultural phenomena that are observable, measurable, and classifiable. He focuses on how elements such as building materials, architectural plans, and ritual practices are positioned within the functioning of a larger social system and what roles they fulfill. The text seeks to explain the historical development of traditional motifs, material usage, and rituals; yet it rarely engages with contemporary social theory topics such as power relations, identity construction, or surveillance. This approach aligns with the village monograph tradition of the period and is characterized by an outlook that centers society, views it as a relatively fixed structure, and interprets various layers of social life as components of a functional whole. In contrast, Sevgi's experimental ethnography employs the concepts of theorists such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu to interrogate themes including space, surveillance, *habitus*, and cultural hybridity within the context of migration. His work thus creates a considerably more substantial theoretical foundation than that of classical ethnographic writing, as it addresses the emotional, political, and identity-based dimensions of migration -facets that cannot be adequately explained through functionalist reasoning alone. This theoretical expansion brings into focus power relations and cultural border crossings experienced by migrants, moving beyond mere description and toward a more transformative ethnographic vision. Consequently, a clear distinction emerges between Acıpayamlı's world, which is predominantly "anchored in observational data," and Sevgi's more open-ended universe, which is "expanded through critical theory and fiction." The former leans on a descriptive, monographic tradition, whereas the latter places contemporary debates in the social sciences, such as subjectivity, representation, and power, at the core of its narrative.

It is important to reiterate that despite these distinctions, both works share a vivid desire to document a reality specific to Turkish society. One captures a temporal moment in rural life before its transformation by modernization, while the other presents the transnational experiences and tensions of migration through a literary form. In this sense, the "documentary" dimension of both authors' works should not be overlooked. While classical

ethnography lacks elements such as "subjectivity" and "critical reflexivity" when assessed through today's standards, experimental ethnography explicitly foregrounds "textual constructedness" and "authorial subjectivity," thereby intensifying the debates surrounding representation in the social sciences. It is crucial to acknowledge that ethnographic knowledge itself has undergone a transformation that transcends mere methodological nuances and encompasses a shift in its very epistemology. Accordingly, the opposition between Acıpayamlı's meticulous and folkloric archiving and classification approach and Sevgi's experimental and autoethnographic method reflects the broader transformation ethnography has undergone across different temporal contexts in Türkiye. Each thesis employed the methodological tools available at the time and adhered to the academic norms of its era. The former, by focusing on "objectivity" and "descriptive" data, sought to preserve the material and symbolic elements of rural culture for future generations. The latter, by relying on "subjectivity" and "narrative" force, placed the affective and identity-related experiences of migrants at the center of the ethnographic text. At the same time, these differing orientations underscore that methodological and narrative forms in the social sciences are shaped not only by "the field itself" but also by the researcher's social, historical, and personal positionality. Thus, these two theses assume particular significance as crystallized examples of the evolving landscape of academia and the multilayered transformation of ethnographic literature in Türkiye. Ultimately, the encounter between classical and contemporary ethnography should not be regarded solely as a confrontation between the past and the future, but also as a space of potential complementarity, a site where documentation and narrative creativity may coexist in hybrid forms.

In summary, the methodological and stylistic contrasts that separate Acıpayamlı's cataloguing monograph from Sevgi's experimental ethnography represent merely the most visible surface of a more profound epistemic shift. The fundamental debate underlying questions of description versus narration or objectivity versus subjectivity concerns a more fundamental debate over *how* ethnographic knowledge is produced, *where* the researcher is situated within that production, and *what ontological claims* are being made about the realities we study. In order to clarify the implications of this paradigmatic shift, the discourse has turned from technique to reflexivity, positionality, and the onto-epistemological foundations that have reconfigured ethnography since the late twentieth century.

<sup>13</sup> The historical-geographical approach is a methodological framework that has been widely employed in the field of folklore and oral tradition research. This approach seeks to identify shared motifs, patterns of transformation, and regional variations by examining the temporal development and spatial dissemination of cultural elements (e.g.,

folktales, legends, rituals). During Acıpayamlı's era, the historical-geographical perspective served as one of the principal methodologies in village monographs and ethnographic studies. It aimed to systematically document how a particular cultural element, such as a housing form or a ritual practice, evolved over time and across diverse geographical regions.



## Reflexivity, Positionality, and Onto-Epistemological Turn

The trajectory of ethnographic writing in Türkiye extends from Orhan Acıpayamlı's 1954 thesis, which focused on an architectural inventory centered on domestic structures in Acıpayam, to Mehmet Ali Sevgi's 2015 work *Writing Migration*, which interweaves fiction with ethnographic data. On the surface, this shift may appear as a mere stylistic movement from "objective description" to "autoethnographic storytelling," or from "inventory" to "creative narrative." However, the transformation runs much deeper: it entails critical questions regarding the production of knowledge, the researcher's position within the text, and the nature of "reality" represented by the ethnographic account. Both theses expose different regimes of the reciprocal interaction between the researcher and the field -that is, how the field is simultaneously shaped by and shapes the researcher. In the following discussion, I elucidate this epistemic rupture through four interrelated dimensions: (i) the myth of positivist objectivity, (ii) the researcher's positionality and their formative impact on the field, (iii) an onto-epistemological paradigm shift, and (iv) the consequences of limiting ethnographic focus to human actors -what I refer to as anthropocentric "subtractions." The goal of this analysis is to uncover the underlying paradigmatic tensions that underpin the formal comparison presented in the previous section, without merely reiterating it.

Acıpayamlı's doctoral dissertation meticulously maps the phenomenon of dwelling "from the extraction of limestone from kilns to the heating duration of adobe"-with precision down to the finest detail. His logic of data collection unfolds step by step: distributing surveys via the Ministry of National Education, recording the responses on index cards, conducting "correction trips" in the field, and finally re-sorting the cards after rectifying inconsistencies. However, this methodological rigor operates under the assumption that the researcher's perspective is natural, transparent, and ideologically "neutral." As a middle-class, male academic who was likely shaped by the Republican-modernist climate of 1950s Ankara, Acıpayamlı may have reduced rural architecture to a folkloric material "in need of development." Decisions such as whom to interview (mostly men), which details to prioritize (stone thickness, adobe dimensions), and whose labor to render invisible (e.g., women kneading mud, animals transporting loads) all appear filtered through this probable perspective. The resulting objectified catalogue thus presents rural architecture as a frozen "artifact" to be passively observed. However, the structure of the questionnaire, the framing of photographs, and the researcher's image

as a "state official" circulating through the village all serve to reproduce the very practices under investigation. At the beginning of his thesis, Sevgi -the researcher-narrator- confronts this issue directly: "My first notes were not only observations, but emotions; I, too, am part of this migration" (Sevgi, 2015: 13). Audio recordings transform into narratives, and subsequently into field diaries. These diaries are reinterpreted through Foucauldian notions of "surveillance" or Bourdieusian concepts such as "habitus." In this recursive layering, field data is reconstituted through fiction, while the researcher-subject takes center stage within the text. Nevertheless, positionality is not merely a one-sided confession. As a male Turkish migrant with a postgraduate education living in Germany, Sevgi holds a position of authority in determining which narratives become "literary" and which voices are "silenced" within the fictionalized text. As seen in the episode in which a "nationalist" friend is "killed off" in the narrative, the editorial power that reshapes the field is not always explicitly acknowledged. Thus, the surface transparency of self-disclosure does not necessarily dismantle the hierarchies embedded in processes of selection and representation.<sup>14</sup> In both cases, the tension that the production of knowledge is contingent upon the position of the observer is evident. Gender, class, species, and ideological framing collectively influence and shape what is seen and how it is documented and recorded. While Acıpayamlı's invisible male-statist gaze and Sevgi's visible male-migrant gaze represent different regimes of knowledge production, both gazes shape the field according to their respective epistemic backdrops -by omitting dimensions such as female labor, animal companionship, and the vitality of materials. In this sense, both theses exemplify how the bidirectional interaction between researcher and field operates through distinct "ways of seeing," while also revealing how these modes of vision often remain implicit and unexamined.

The most fundamental rupture between the two texts lies in how they approach *positionality*. Acıpayamlı classifies the village from the outset by embedding his inquiries into a state-distributed survey form. He identifies male village headmen as his primary sources of knowledge, while excluding the labor of women and children from the dataset. He then deems all these choices "natural," thus perceiving no need to justify them. The reader encounters no reference to the researcher's negotiations within the field, the power dynamics he may have established with local notables, or even something as mundane as who held the measuring rod during data collection. The resulting account, therefore, rests on a monologic claim to reality -one that fixes the "village house" as a singular,

<sup>14</sup> Autoethnographic films redistribute representational power by bringing private experiences into the public sphere. In Çayır's case (2016: 15-17; 48-49), ECHR-related testimonies and media reception become part of the narrative's circulation, complicating authorship and audience uptake while making the politics of naming empirically traceable on screen.

unified object, detached from the positionality of the researcher. In contrast, Sevgi begins his thesis by revealing the "story-hunting" atmosphere of a café on Sielwall Street in Bremen: the patrons nickname him "the interviewer," and it is up to them whether to share their stories, withhold them, or allow themselves to "die" or "be saved" within the fiction. The author cannot fix his position as either "insider" or "outsider". Each interview generates a new space of interaction, thereby establishing a field of co-creation. In this context, positionality is not merely expressed through first-person narration but also functions as a matrix of power that determines which voices are legitimized and which are silenced. At this point, onto-epistemology comes into play.<sup>15</sup> Classical ethnography assumes a singular and external reality and seeks its "accurate" description. In contrast, new ethnography posits that realities are enacted through practice. The layered structure of Sevgi's short stories, field diaries, and theoretical reflections aligns with Karen Barad's (2007) concept of *intra-action*, situating the phenomenon of migration within a network of entangled human and nonhuman agencies, including audio recorders, café spaces, and passport bureaucracies. In this sense, while Acipayamlı's numerical precision offers a sense of methodological reliability, it also advances an implicit ontology: the world being observed exists as a stable entity unaffected by the researcher's gaze. However, what counts as noteworthy architecture, invisible labor, or a mere "detail" of ritual is shaped by that very gaze. The positivist method, under the guise of "neutralizing" data, ends up obscuring its formative effects. Sevgi's narrative, in contrast, makes many of these effects, particularly the power dynamics between researcher and participant, far more visible than Acipayamlı's account. Still, it does not entirely transcend an anthropocentric frame, as interspecies and inter-object relations mostly remain in the background and are ultimately subsumed within a discursive human interpretation.

In classical ethnography, the sequence of "pre-field preparation -field data collection- writing" becomes nearly ritualized in Acipayamlı's work. He develops the survey forms in his Ankara office, distributes them via the Ministry of National Education, and conducts "first, second, and third investigative trips" from village to village to gather data cards. Upon returning, he reclassifies the cards after "correcting errors." The text meticulously documents the researcher's journeys through rural areas with military-like precision, yet it leaves no room for his doubts, astonishment, or embodied sensations during those trips. The field is not portrayed as a transformative experience but as a seamless conduit through which raw data is funneled into the folkloric

archiving and classification. Analytical weight is placed on the measurements and materials of village architecture, not on the researcher's own epistemic disorientation. In contrast, Sevgi's thesis places transformation at the very center of the narrative. He reflects on how he approached the pre-field phase with the excitement of a "story hunter," only to find each encounter subverting his initial plan. The ethnographic journals written after each story reveal how he reworked his earlier notes into new narrative forms. Consequently, the field transitions from a geographic location to a post-field process that extends across memory, text, and emotion. Each new story transforms the author further into a "migrant-narrator." Still, Sevgi's approach is not without its limitations. As will be elaborated in the next paragraph, nonhuman elements – such as ambient noise in the Sielwall café, cigarette smoke, and the cats sitting on tables – are frequently relegated to the background. This phenomenon can be compared to the erasure of women kneading adobe in Acipayamlı's account. The anthropocentric narrative lens, whether consciously or not, renders certain layers of post-fieldwork transformation invisible. One may ask: What would have changed if Acipayamlı's thesis had incorporated a reflexive post-field component? It is important to note that details such as the trembling of the hand holding the measuring rod, the silencing of villagers by the phrasing of the survey questions, or the commentary offered by women while mixing mud could have been documented in a field journal. An addition of such a reflexive nature would have moved beyond adobe dimensions to illuminate the co-productive conditions of data-making, transforming the researcher from an "invisible eye" into a situated subject. Ultimately, while Acipayamlı foregrounds a direct model of data transmission that suppresses the interaction between researcher and field, Sevgi partially reveals this interaction but does not fully transcend the anthropocentric filter. The key difference between these approaches lies in the extent to which positionality is made visible and critically unpacked within the text. Both works, however, offer rich material for reflecting on how pre-field assumptions are reshaped through post-field writing.

As previously mentioned, both theses fundamentally reduce the field to human-human relations, thereby systematically marginalizing the agency of both nonhuman animals (e.g., oxen, crows, and cats) and inanimate but active entities (e.g., lime, tramway lines, or rain). For Acipayamlı, the ox is merely a "transport force," and adobe is a "material". He never questions how nonhuman agents that co-constitute the village fabric influence social mobility or the sensory environment – the smell of dust, the consistency of mud, the sound of bells.

<sup>15</sup> Duman İnce's (2024:18-20) engagement with the ethnographic/experimental film lineage (from Rouch to reflexive cinema) underscores that apparatus and form are ontological interventions: camera placement, editing, and performance do not merely record realities; they enact them.

Sevgi, on the other hand, constructs migration through the use of dialogue, identity, and memory. However, the flowers in Bremen, the misty scent of the river, the screech of rails, and the population of stray cats and dogs are not, as Bruno Latour (2005) might assert, passive backdrops to a human-centered drama grounded in migration and rural life. Instead, they are active nodes within an intersubjective network that shapes experience. Although the current focus of multispecies ethnography has been on human-animal-plant entanglements (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010), both Latour's *actor-network theory*<sup>16</sup> and Karen Barad's theory of *intra-action*<sup>17</sup> remind us that nonliving matter is equally constitutive. The lime in the mortar of a village house does not merely form a chemical bond with water; it also becomes part of a matter-discourse assembly interwoven with villagers' bodily labor and affective investment. The metallic hum of Bremen's tramlines rhythmically reinforces the migrant's feeling of being far from home. By anchoring fieldwork in sensory modalities<sup>18</sup> -recording smells, tactile vibrations, and acoustic reverberations- it becomes possible to breathe life into Acıpayamlı's archival index and add nonhuman pluralities to Sevgi's narrative. If Acıpayamlı's raw data were revisited in the future, one could imagine adding sensory traces such as the sloshing sounds of adobe being kneaded by local craftsmen, the sharp scent of straw, or the rhythmic clatter of donkeys climbing uphill. The smell of straw rising during adobe production attracts flies, shapes dogs' barking patterns -thus revealing the dense relationality between human, nonhuman animal, material, and environment as a rhythmic, sensory mode of *co-existence (intra-action)*. Sevgi's ethnographic fiction, too, could render more perceptible the ambient hum of the recorder accompanying migrant stories, the metallic screech of train brakes, or the ecological incompatibility of the houseplants that migrants brought with them. This could be achieved through sound fragments, olfactory journals, or trace-maps. Such an approach would merge "archival value" with "affective depth" in a single text, while also making clear that methodological choices are always ontological interventions, exerting a profound influence on the formation of both human and nonhuman subjectivities. Ultimately, the onto-epistemological transformation can only be considered complete when we

step beyond anthropocentric filters and begin to write from a worldview that is multispecies, multisensory, and multimaterial.

### Conclusion: Inheriting the Past, How Do We Write the Future?

The central objective of contrasting Orhan Acıpayamlı's classical dissertation (1954) with Mehmet Ali Sevgi's experimental thesis (2015) is not to determine a winner in a methodological competition between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather, it is to map the evolution of ethnographic thought in Türkiye -grounding this trajectory within the specific institutional history of folklore and ethnology at DTCF- and to explore the productive dialogue that emerges when these different paradigms are considered together. The inevitable question is not "Which approach is more correct?" but rather, "How can the strengths of each inform a more robust, ethical, and multi-layered ethnographic practice for the future?" Moving beyond the ambition of a final synthesis, we can instead envision a future for ethnography built on complementarity, methodological pluralism, and a deep sense of narrative responsibility.

This future begins by recognizing the enduring value of the classical tradition. In an academic landscape increasingly shaped by theoretical abstraction, the meticulous folkloric archiving and classification developed by Orhan Acıpayamlı offer an invaluable foundation. His work, alongside the monographic studies of Nermin Erdentuğ and the text-centered analyses of Pertev Naili Boratav, represents a mid-century scholarly ethos at DTCF committed to documenting cultural life with empirical depth, even as their specific methods differed. While this paradigm was later challenged by figures like Sedat Veyis Örnek, who began to dissolve the rigid boundaries between folklore and ethnology, the rich descriptive data produced by these early researchers remains a vital resource. A contemporary ethnographer could return to Acıpayamlı's detailed records not to replicate his approach, but to "re-read" them -uncovering hidden narratives of gender, power, and human-material relations that his positivist framework did not address.

Simultaneously, the reflexive turn offers indispensable tools for ethical and theoretical sophistication. Mehmet Ali Sevgi's thesis is a key example, but it stands as part of a broader movement in Turkish academia, evidenced

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Latour, the French sociologist and philosopher of science, developed Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to argue that explaining social phenomena solely through human-to-human relations is insufficient. According to Latour, nonhumans -such as animals, objects, technological devices, and even documents or infrastructures- are as many agents in the formation of events and processes as humans are. For this reason, all these elements are considered "actors." ANT conceives of "society" not as a fixed structure but as a constantly emerging network of relations, and it destabilizes the subject/object distinction by emphasizing the distributed nature of agency.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of *intra-action* was developed by feminist physicist and science theorist Karen Barad, who is especially known for her original approach combining quantum physics with feminist theory. According to Barad, the classical notion of "interaction" presumes that entities are separate and pre-existing before coming into relation. In contrast, *intra-*

*action* posits that entities emerge through their relations -they become what they are in the very process of engaging with one another. This perspective invites us to consider how nonhuman beings (such as animals and plants) or inanimate objects (such as stone, mud, or railway tracks) can play active roles in social and affective experiences.

<sup>18</sup> Multimodal autoethnography in Türkiye already points toward this sensory turn. Duman İnçe's (2024) experimental film on IVF and motherhood employs visual-auditory textures and performance choices to demonstrate how sound, image, and gesture can extend thick description beyond language, opening a path for genuinely multisensory ethnography. Çayır's autoethnographic documentary (2016) on women's surname changes similarly mobilizes cinematic form -through editing, framing, and voiceover- to render biographical experience as both sensory and political testimony.

by the autoethnographic and multimodal works of Çayır (2016), Duman İnce (2024), and Büyükpoyraz (2024). These scholars use creative and personal narrative forms to foreground the researcher's positionality and explore the affective dimensions of experience. They provide powerful models for how to write with vulnerability and accountability. The challenge, then, is to channel this narrative creativity and ethical awareness toward a broader ethnographic project -one that remains grounded in systematic observation and committed to documenting collective realities, not just individual subjectivities.

Ultimately, a path forward lies not in choosing between these poles, but in fostering integrative practices. This could involve creating multi-layered texts that present findings in distinct but interconnected sections: a chapter of "thick description" (1973) that honors the archival impulse; a series of autoethnographic vignettes that illuminate the researcher's journey, and a robust analytical discussion that theorizes the relationship between these layers. Such a practice would also consciously move beyond the anthropocentric limitations shared by all the scholars discussed. A future study of rural architecture would not only map house plans but also trace the lives of nonhuman actors: the agency of clay and stone, the role of livestock in shaping domestic space, and the sensory ecology of the village. This is the promise of an entangled ethnography: a practice that cultivates a reflexive ethics of documentation and remains accountable to every being -human and otherwise- that co-authors the ethnographic text.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The primary focus of this article is to analyze the transformation between two historical poles of ethnographic practice in Türkiye. Consequently, more contemporary methods, such as multispecies ethnography, and related theoretical fields in other disciplines like new materialism, posthumanism, and critical animal studies, have been deliberately excluded from its main scope. However, as my own research practice is situated precisely at the intersection of these fields, I felt compelled to deliberately incorporate this perspective at various points in the text, even at the risk of stretching the article's primary argument. I ask for the reader's understanding of these intentional 'interventions' that push against the established boundaries of the text.



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