RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reconsidering the vignette as method

Art, ethnography, and refugee studies

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Abstract
When ethnography is used in fields outside anthropology, vignettes often take a central role. Yet methodological discussions of the vignette are not as central to anthropology as their cross-disciplinary use might warrant. By dwelling on, but perhaps less stringently guarding, disciplinary boundaries, anthropology can gain a clearer view of its own central tools—in this case, vignettes. Reconsidering these tools holds particular relevance for work on refugee studies, an inherently interdisciplinary field that anthropology has had a key role in shaping. Artistic works focused on refugees are considered here from a meta-ethnographic perspective that pays attention to the processes through which a specific series of artworks were produced alongside their content. Central to this analysis is the role of the vignette in the artist's presentation of her work, which enables an inquiry into the double role of the vignette as both method and presentation in anthropology.

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British bases, Cyprus, ethnographic art, refugees, vignettes

I first met Dani in Cyprus, where he spent two decades as a refugee. Later on, when he arrived in the UK, I interviewed him about his experiences. As we spoke, I sensed that his time in Cyprus was something he wanted to put behind him.[1] He spoke with excitement about the new life he was building— as eloquently as he had spoken back in Cyprus, before the move, about his struggles, his hopes of leaving the island, and his expectations of what might happen if he did so. Dani described his time in Cyprus as one that was both good and bad but now over, and in this description, I thought I perceived Dani exercising what Khosravi (2020, p. 294) calls "the right to opacity." Speaking of the decolonization of refugee studies, he posits that "not everything" needs to be "seen, explained, understood, and documented" (p. 294). Groping at the least impudent way to end the interview, I asked what image he might use to explain Richmond village, which had been his home in Cyprus. "A door," he said. "A door that opened once and became a prison, then closed for another one to open, this time to freedom." I read that as a parting with Richmond, with the refugee label, and with researchers like me, and thanked him.

I write of this moment of opacity knowing that it inevitably presents an ethical failure: to be shown, this opacity has to be relinquished. This is an ethics of representation that anthropologists, in striving to bring across refugee "voices" and agencies, find increasingly problematic, giving rise to a search for ways to more meaningfully understand both silences (Lems, 2020) and sound (Western, 2020), and to account for the "ethically charged" processes and "uncomfortable conversations" (Aparna et al., 2020, pp. 110–11) that we encounter in the field. Perhaps because of this discomfort, ending conversations is less often exemplified than initiating them. Yet such examples can hold lessons for those less discussed moments of methodological and ethical uncertainty.

From what might seem an oblique perspective, yet one that holds significant potential, I want to focus on the deceptively tangential methodological moment here. This is the moment of the shift in the medium for discussing, or more importantly, refusing to discuss, refugee predicaments. In going from orality to visualization, Dani and I found a way to acknowledge the presence and value of previous encounters and to recognize, implicitly, that it was time to end them. This shift in medium did not occur spontaneously. It indexed another point in our relationship: the first time I had met him, through an artist who was a common friend. Both of us, separately in the main, had had conversations with her over images she had produced of

Richmond, and we had previously discussed how the images represented the feel of daily life there. In an unstated way, engaging with the discomfort of opacity in parting with Richmond was mediated by the connection to this absent common friend and the affects in which her work and engagements with the place were enveloped.

I offer this vignette to show how anthropologists' methodological and ethical reflections are sometimes couched in wider fields of relations and materialities that remain outside the focus of discussion. They include people who are immersed in the same field sites, who may be intermediaries, collaborators, friends, or people we hardly meet, but who nevertheless establish and maintain relations with the same key interlocutors. In this capacity, they are part of the affective environments we encounter in the field, as well as the registers on which these environments exist—visual, oral, conceptual. They account for how what Stewart (2007) calls "ordinary affect" is formed in these places. Yet ethnography seldom approaches these relations as integral to the sites it focuses on; instead, it mostly brackets them off or presents them through scrutiny and critique. People in the periphery of the sites and communities we focus on (activists, artists, journalists, neighbors, researchers, friends) enter our field of vision usually as intrusions, even if oftentimes necessary ones. And although such critique is often warranted, the question remains: What could we learn if we focused on these relations? This article grapples with this question.

At the focus of the ethnographic site is Richmond village, a location that has been home to refugees from Iraq, Syria, Ethiopia, Sudan, and elsewhere since 1998. It consisted, until 2022 (when most of its residents were relocated), of a dozen or so houses spread over three roads on a corner of the British Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia in Cyprus. For the last two decades, refugees have built lives and made families in this exceptional space (Constantinou, 2020), after arriving on a boat and being rescued by authorities at the base. Most of them have been granted official refugee status. Threatened with eviction in 2011, they requested relocation to Great Britain, and after a long and inconclusive legal battle, some of them were finally offered transfer in an out-of-court agreement in 2018.[2] The ones who remained were moved to other accommodation on the base in the following years. Around this site are several people and networks of lawyers, journalists, activists, and artists who have been interested in the case, visited the village, spoken to the refugees, and contributed to the success of the case.

Efi Savvides, a Cypriot artist working with film and installations, has been following the villagers' plight since 2016. By the time I met her, as a researcher interested in the case, she had developed close connections to the villagers and introduced me to Dani's and other families. She had by that time been working with refugee and migrant communities for many years. Many times during my research, I observed her interact with refugee residents on the military base. I also observed the production of artworks and their curation for exhibitions, and I participated in some of the decision-making pertaining to these artworks. I also came to see, be part of, and reflect on her interactions with other refugees and to discuss extensively her previous and ongoing projects. Even though she never labeled this work "ethnogra-

phy," I was in fact engaged in a form of meta-ethnography, observing and engaging with another's ethnographic practice. In trying to reflect on my observation of her work, I have attempted to indicate the distinction by referring to Efi, using her first name, in her interlocutor role, and Savvides, using the surname by which she signs her work, in her professional role.

As Efi and I came to pursue aspects of our projects collaboratively (Demetriou et al., forthcoming; Savvides & Christodoulidou, 2021), these reflections became both an introspective exercise and a point of exchange. They offered opportunities to consider and discuss wider issues of cross-disciplinary research that are now particularly pertinent to the field of refugee studies. It is in this context that I had the opportunity to reflect on a tool that we both spoke about but used very differently: the vignette. As I did this, I came to consider several questions that sit on the vignette's frayed edge and that connect it directly to the practice, politics, and ethics of anthropology.

RECONSIDERING THE VIGNETTE

The vignette, that central piece of ethnographic practice, speaks at once of the labor of fieldwork and the labor of transforming it into text. It is also, appropriately, a description of art inserted into text:

> a small decorative design or illustration on a blank space in a book etc., at the beginning or end of a chapter or on the title page; *spec. one not enclosed in a border, or with the edges shading off into the surrounding paper.*[3]

In this now-dated *OED* edition (emphasis added), the definition that anthropologists apply to their vignettes is listed fourth: "a brief descriptive account, anecdote, or essay; a character sketch; a short evocative episode in a play." In this fourth definition, art again precedes ethnography, here in the guise of theatrical performance.

In fact, for all its reliance on the vignette as a trope for thinking and writing, little work in anthropology has highlighted the vignette as a methodological question. Entries on "vignette" are absent from dictionaries of anthropology (Morris, 2012; Seymour-Smith, 1987; Winick, 2013). Clifford and Marcus's (1986) canon-setting volume on anthropological writing, unsettling as it was for all kinds of conventions, includes a single passing mention of vignettes as one of the instruments used by "[Chicano] writers who have begun to write more directly of themselves … [using] a fragmentary, richly evocative, vignette style, in English" (Fischer, 1986, p. 220). The vignette, Fischer continues, can enable "a collective voice of the people, powerful and searing" (p. 221); the vignette, in this early formative period of reflexive writing, is the trope that connects the self to the collective, the specific to the general, observation to interpretation—and that also inaugurates a decolonial writing.

In an insightful, if polemical, blog post, Thorkelson (2018) suggests that the by-now-canonical uses of vignettes reinforce the boundary between data and theory, and, accordingly, between text that in peer review is free and text that is

tightly policed, and ultimately, feminine and masculine ways of writing. The vignette, it is suggested, as a term, marks the boundaries that separate stories and stop them from blending into (theoretical) text. This would suggest that in anthropology, vignettes acquire the borders they were not meant to have in art; the edges, instead of shading off, have become a fixed and solid frame—and that these borders are those between theory and empirical information.

It is an interesting suggestion, one that homes in well on the fragmentary aspects that vignetting elicits. It forgets, however, that the ethnographic vignette was (quietly) part and parcel of that reconsideration of ethnography as a method of both research and presentation. If the reflexive turn inaugurated the blurring of the distinction, along with the recognition that empirical knowledge and theory are inseparable, it did so on the undeclared central point of the vignette. Not that the "vignette" as properly named approach came into being at that point. When the Balinese cockfight gave Geertz (1973, pp. 412–16) pause for writing his canonical Notes essay, he wrote of it in vignette form, yet the word does not appear anywhere in The Interpretation of Cultures. In that unannounced shift whereby the vignette has come to spearhead anthropological analysis, it has also functioned as a bridge across anthropology's parting with its maligned colonial origins. Becoming reinforced by the hermeneutic approach, the vignette is essentially the description of "the imponderabilia of everyday life" that Malinowski (2002, p. 21) exalted us to seek in the discipline's founding days. It is the minutiae below and beyond the grand descriptions of, say, ritual, that remained intact from those first accounts to the thick descriptions we employ when we use the "microscopic nature of ethnography" to account for "social actions [as] comments to more than themselves," to make "small facts speak to large issues" (Geertz, 1973, p. 23). The reflexive turn has rather shaded off the vignette's edge as it brushed against its disciplinary history.

In contemporary ethnography, the vignette is a taken-for-granted mode of writing that attests to the cultural knowledge gained by participant observation. At worst, it is an authoritative sign of presence that may mask the lack of adequate fieldwork, as suggested by critiques like Hammoudi's (2009, pp. 39–40) and Hannerz's (2003). At best, it is a carefully selected story that, among a myriad other observations, distills what we consider important to analyze. The vignette, in ethnography, hovers between authenticity and performance: its "descriptive" style speaks to the authenticity of field research, yet this is in tension with the literary presentation that makes a text compelling. It simultaneously exposes and collapses the distance between what Strathern (1987, pp. 24–27) calls, via Barthes and Rabinow, an author and a writer. That tension inheres in ethnography as at once a doing (of fieldwork) and a writing, and that is what vignettes distill. The vignette is ethnography, because it is at once practice and presentation. The politics—and, potentially the violence—that inheres in the vignette, around what to include, what to silence, and how to do so in ways that are ethically and politically responsible rather than exoticizing and otherizing, are exactly the politics of ethnography.

The vignette is akin to Marcus's (1998, 2010) concept of the mise-en-scène—the scene setting that anthropologists

engage in while carrying out and presenting their fieldwork. Marcus's (1998, pp. 236–37) concern is with what multisited ethnography can offer in rescuing classic approaches to "being-there-ness" from the Malinowskian paradigm and opening them up to the possibilities that theoretical advances offer. Glimpses of such possibilities are visible in anthropologists' "second projects," an often-missed but key reference point for Marcus's call for multisited-ness. These projects are carried out in mid- and later career, where fieldwork and writing is freer and more experimental, and where "since careers do not depend on such projects, they tend to be more quietly developed, more intensely personal, and more ambitious, and pursued less confidently" (Marcus, 1998, p. 234), while also often being more interdisciplinary.

While Marcus's work is often discussed in the context of his focus on multisited-ness, in question is nothing less than a new paradigm for vignetting: approaching the field methodologically as presentation and practice at once and continuing to approach and modify this double approach through the sites and contexts that we encounter within and across projects. For this, I would suggest, the notion of vignette is perhaps an even more expansive sign than the mise-en-scène, one that may better describe the less bounded approach of second projects that Marcus is advocating: much as the vignette distills analysis in one moment, it can never work in the singular, in the way a scene might—and even when it is, it always gestures to its multiples. Its episodic nature underscores the inherent doubt that scene setting might obfuscate.

Reconsidering the vignette as the central trope in which the interaction of ethnographic practice and presentation happens means reconsidering the vignette as method. Considering it, that is, in an expanded way as something that, in linking the field to the writing, continues to develop in time and across spaces as well as considering that as a method of discussing with others, it also expands across disciplines and across academic and other fields. This expansive development is one in which questioning and explanation (of ourselves, interlocutors, and others) reinforce each other. It is the hurried scene setting that ends an interview like Dani's smoothly, having groped about past relations and experiences and having been reorganized from the initial imagination of a longer discussion.

OBSERVING AN ETHNOGRAPHY

At the close of her Richmond project, Savvides (2018) collated 11 short video sequences into an art documentary entitled Vignettes of the Camp. It is this project that prompted me to think more deeply about the vignette as method. It is a 20-minute film in which nothing much apart from the mundane happens. Children play with makeshift toys made from cardboard scraps and other discarded materials, a shepherd follows his flock, women stroll in the afternoon, domesticated pigeons feed, acacias move in the wind (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). We simply observe, and as the minutes go by, we might wonder about the point of these vignettes. Imperceptibly, the vignettes become a thinking tool: Is this about the children and their game? Is it about the materialities that animate them? Is it

FIGURE 1   Children build a house using discarded materials in Richmond village, Cyprus. From the film *Vignettes of the Camp*, by Efi Savvides, from the series *The Empire Is Perishing; the Bands Are Playing,* 2016–18. Single-channel video, color, sound, 19 minutes, 8 seconds. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

about the practice of filming them? Is this performance or observation? Who is at the center of this vignette, the children, the space, the artist, or the viewer? What is it we are not seeing? These questions, which are about method and presentation, are pertinent to a comparative discussion about the commitments and concerns of art and anthropology. The vignette is not only a heuristic trope in this discussion; it is also a means to reconsider the relations between the ethnographic approaches of these two fields.

What struck me in Savvides's approach to her work was the familiar terms with which she discussed it. She often spoke to me of the people she filmed and photographed in terms that intimated close connection yet at the same time enfolded analysis and a primary interest in observation. She noted, for example, with amazement and mock frustration, the permanent background sound of a TV always on in a family's often-empty living room as she filmed a dinner preparation, while explaining it as part of what made the home comforting (see Figure 4). What was shown on that TV—sometimes violent and other times intimate scenes that may have been considered inappropriate for kids walking in and out of the living room, or playing on the floor—was less important than the fact that it was shown and, more importantly perhaps, heard.

Yet, in contrast to more formal versions of ethnographic art (Foster, 1995; Marcus, 2010; Rutten et al., 2013; Siegenthaler, 2013), the terminology of fieldwork, ethnography, or anthropology was not in her vocabulary. Access, rapport, consent, and collaboration were not registered as "issues" but were confronted in a terminology of "simplicity," of things that "just" happened. Some villagers had invited her in, others did not,

and that was that. People were shown and named because their story was known, because they should be made real for an audience that might be moved to advocate for their relocation, and because anonymity never came up in conversations—issues that recent anthropological work also registers (e.g., De León, 2018, pp. 119–20).

It was not only that the ethical threshold designating "research" was elsewhere, as previously noted for critics of design (Murphy, 2018) and crisis art (Yalouri, 2016). Savvides's work does not use "ethnography" in any declaratory sense, in the way that alarms many anthropologists when the term is brandished in the social sciences and beyond to refer to all kinds of engagements considered informal (Hammersley, 2006; Ingold, 2001, 2014). *Ethnography* here is not an emic term, let alone an aspiration to anthropological practice, as it might be in more formal contexts of structured collaborations and international exhibitions (Fillitz, 2018; Kwon, 2000; Rikou & Yalouri, 2018; Schneider & Wright, 2010). But the invitation for reflection that Vignettes of the Camp provides, and which runs throughout the corpus of Savvides's work, is also an invitation to consider what it means for ethnography to happen unannounced, despite itself, in disciplinary elsewheres and outside the academy.

This is especially relevant in rethinking the common tools we employ in crafting work that is attentive to the complex and urgent ethical and political concerns of difficult and crowded fields, in this case refugee studies. Many years ago, Marcus (1998, p. 249) claimed that anthropology "is perhaps unique in drawing on interdisciplinary participations to continue to define a distinctly disciplinary authority for itself." Far from reading

FIGURE 2   A shepherd tends his flock in the fields around Richmond village, Cyprus. From the film *Vignettes of the Camp*, by Efi Savvides, from the series *The Empire Is Perishing; the Bands Are Playing,* 2016–18. Single-channel video, color, sound, 19 minutes, 8 seconds. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

FIGURE 3   Home-bred pigeons in a Richmond village yard, Cyprus. From the film *Vignettes of the Camp*, by Efi Savvides, from the series *The Empire Is Perishing; the Bands Are Playing*, 2016–18. Single-channel video, color, sound, 19 minutes, 8 seconds. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

this as castigation, I find it instructive for refugee studies today, where anthropology is at the forefront of methodological innovation that seeks more ethical, more caring, and more collaborative approaches to the vast power differentials research in this field involves. Two notable examples are the use of autoethnographic methods (Khosravi, 2016; Mai, 2018) and the curation of exhibitions.[4] Both examples aim to open up the field beyond the academy. Others include the proliferating body

FIGURE 4   A living room in a Richmond village household, Cyprus. From the film *Daughters*, by Efi Savvides, from the series *The Empire Is Perishing; the Bands Are Playing*, 2019. Single-channel video, color, sound, 19 minutes, 55 seconds. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

of work that offers critical appraisals of others' approaches across the gamut of refugee work (Brun, 2016; Cabot, 2016, 2019; Feldman, 2018; Gabiam, 2012; McGee & Pelham, 2018; Ramsay, 2020; Rozakou, 2017, 2019; Sandri, 2018). Across such practical and analytical engagements, anthropological authority can be at times more collaborative and at others more confrontational, and it sometimes entails a self-referential critique of others' methods and practices: Are they doing anthropology well enough?

Consider the flip side of this question, though: Can we recognize good ethnography outside anthropology? As I observe and participate in Savvides's participant observations, I find much that such meaningful engagements with subjects can tell us about our own commitments and alignments. They can aid our own research in ways that are less hierarchical and more hospitable. Vignettes of the Camp is a reminder that the vignette is a tool that anthropology has appropriated from elsewhere (design), claimed in a distinctly unique manner, but whose centrality it has also (at least formally) overlooked. Borrowed from other artistic forms, it is already crossing boundaries and thus reminds us of how fitting it is for anthropologists to blur disciplinary and field boundaries. Through centralizing the vignette, we can reconsider ethics and politics in ways that allow us to better navigate terrains such as refugee studies.

As the anthropology of refugeehood increasingly considers the work of others and the power dynamics it is embedded in, we look to the work of humanitarians (Feldman, 2010; Malkki, 1996; Rozakou, 2012), NGOs (Billaud, 2020; Fassin, 2007; Ticktin, 2011), artists (Ossman, 2019; Strohm, 2012; Yalouri, 2019), and legal professionals (Cabot, 2014; Good, 2007; Harrell-Bond & Voutira, 1992; Knudsen, 2009). In a field

in which knowledge is ever complex and political (Demetriou, 2022; Scheel & Ustek-Spilda, 2019), these communities are at once research subjects and researchers. And thus anthropologists are correct to put a critical lens on the tropes and methodologies through which these communities work, especially as they oftentimes employ ethnographic approaches. Beyond their reading as discourses or data, however, those methodologies are less frequently treated as instructive to the discipline. A meta-ethnography of such work—that is, the treatment of "the intersections and gaps between disciplines as its own ethnographic zone"—"revisit[s] ethnographically the marginalization and appropriation of anthropology's tools and insights" (Riles, 2006, p. 55), which happens at these intersections. In this case the marginalization happens not by a hierarchy that assigns the empirics and analysis of "culture" to anthropology and real-life solutions to the discipline considered more "robust," as Riles finds of critical lawyers, but by anthropology itself. The marginalization of the vignette within anthropology compels the focus on its frayed edges.

Looking across these edges into art, we find critical anthropological perspectives that consider the power relations surrounding the moment when people are rendered visually as objects, subjects, or proxies for cultures and communities. They include the cautionary lessons about the optics of representing refugeehood as victim centered for campaign purposes (Malkki, 1992, 1996; Nyers, 2013); the wider political economies that recent artworks of this bent circulate in (Arda, 2019; Chatzipanagiotidou & Murphy, 2021; Nedeljkovic, 2021); and the possible alternatives to such representation (Finley et al., 2021; Pussetti, 2013). They also include wider considerations about the politics that inhere in socially engaged art at times of

crisis; its attempts at collaboration with anthropology (Rikou & Yalouri, 2018; Wright, 2018); the difficulties of such art disengaging from colonial frames (Kalantzis, forthcoming); what Herzfeld (2020) has called "crypto-colonial" modes of thinking (see also Kalantzis, 2020); and the role that art can play in collaborations that seek to decolonize the discipline (Alonso Bejarano et al., 2019; Khosravi, 2021). They are aware of concerns about the role of activism and ethical commitments (Fobear, 2017; Jones, 2018; Tello, 2016; Yalouri, 2019) and of the increasing significance of collaborations between researchers, projects, and policy agendas (Andersson, 2017; Doering-White et al., 2017; El-Shaarawi & Razsa, 2019; Fassin, 2015).

These insights have spurred discussions between Efi and myself on the politics and ethics of research: when and how to name, anonymize, attribute words to, and collaborate with interlocutors; the significance of long-term engagement; whether and how to involve audiences, communicate with activists, and mediate with people in power or the media. In talking about how interlocutors were chosen, who was left out, and what they said about the process, we also talked about the connections and boundaries of research, involvement, and activism. We found that these three concepts meant slightly different things for anthropology and art: "research" might have connoted the disengaged parts of Efi's artistic practice; what happened away from the field; activism, understood as outward facing, was also different from involvement, which is her primary concern, even over and above her art, she often insisted.

On several occasions, she said she was neither an activist nor an artist producing art for art's sake. This seemed to exemplify what Kosuth means by art that is politically aware but not political art. For Kosuth (1991, p. 121), writing despondently in 1975, art could learn from anthropology how to reflect. But, differing from anthropology, it would engage with the culture it is situated in. Kosuth was pushing against the liberal consensus that abstractions are created in a world disconnected from nature, and that art is produced for audiences of critics. Instead, he advocates an art that makes culture abstracted and rethought anew as unfamiliar but that is, for that reason, better understood by an audience that is a public: a politically aware and thinking public. It is an art that pushes artists, researchers, and audience to rethink and question the separations between audience and subjects, spectators, objects, and consumers, and the complicities in creating conditions lamented, derided, and critiqued. And it is also a politics of frayed edges.

KOSUTH FOR REFUGEE STUDIES

Savvides's vignettes have a self-evident artistic meaning, akin to the first definition the *OED* provides, that of the corner illustration with its edges shading off. Of the 11 vignettes in the Richmond film, five show children playing, four depict the environment without people, and two show village residents going about their activities (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). They are meant to distill what "Richmond" means. But they also have a mise-en-scène aspect to them. The vignettes have a strong photographic quality, in that the camera remains still while movement is

recorded in the frame; sometimes the movement is of humans, sometimes of animals, birds, or leaves. Both work on the visual and sonic level, though the two are not always in sync. Visually, the cuts between frames are definite and punctuated, yet the frames are connected sonically, through the sound of the wind that is harsh and constant. Almost bothersome, it acts as the edge that shades off.

Here, as connections between the frame and the outside begin to happen, questions of method can be formulated: What imagined and affective connections are excluded from the frame? The sense of the outsider looking in, all too familiar for anthropologists, and ever so slightly discomforting, permeates the film. We are invited to wonder, in these vignettes, about the visibility of the camera to the subjects, the relationships indexed by rare glances toward the lens, the proximity of observer and observed (suggested by the clarity of human voices over the relentless wind). In other words, we are invited to observe, through the eyes of the artist, the minutiae of daily life in Richmond and at the same time to imagine observing her and to ponder her participation in those daily lives.

Thus, as both practice and presentation, Vignettes of the Camp is an ethno-graphic project. And insofar as it is (also) an artistic project, that tension invites questions about the negotiations that art like this involves. What kind of analysis is entailed by the choice of including certain vignettes and not others? What knowledge about the place and the people depicted does that choice represent? What relationships does the practice of filming require? What are, in ethnographic terms, respectively, the contours of cultural specificity that this writing on film communicates? Viewing the film is a methodological exercise that becomes ethical insofar as it involves evaluating the power dynamics that separate those lives from the artist's life, as well as from the audience's lives, especially since the audience is largely expected to be unfamiliar with Richmond and the villagers' plight.

Discomforting affects are elicited by gazing into moments that straddle the private-public (that is, events that take place in public space but in someone else's space nevertheless). Such affects are discomforting because the audience knows that the sole difference between this mundane everydayness and its own, the reason why the film exists on this screen, at this moment, is the predicament of refugeehood. Savvides's work does differ from much of the acclaimed artwork about refugees—from Weiwei's life vests transported from Lesvos to European capitals (Arda, 2019), to Buchel's controversial exhibit in Sicily of the shipwreck off Lampedusa (Brooks, 2020; Nedeljkovic, 2021). It differs in presenting people not only within but also beyond the refugee condition. In this case, children could be making toys of discarded materials anywhere; that this is a place of ruins and unhealthy living conditions, a place of "slow violence" (Birey, 2021), is the reason we watch. Is interest enough, though? As a documentary, Vignettes of the Camp assumes an amount of knowledge about Richmond that is not readily accessible. Its appreciation as a work of art, therefore, hinges on the conceptual labor of collecting that knowledge.

This labor consists of three modes: Savvides's own ethnographic research, which entails engagement with the field; her

FIGURE 5 An installation piece with drawings in the main gallery and *Vignettes of the Camp* playing in the adjacent room. *A Territory without Terrain*, exhibition at Larnaka Municipal Gallery, Cyprus, August 2, 2021. Foreground artwork: *Untitled*, 2021, installation with a series of drawings (22×30 cm / 28.5×30 cm); drawings: burned matches, water, acacia decoction; structure: wood planks, polyester corrugated sheets, paint, plaster, thread, 816×254×240 cm. (Olga Demetriou) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

work in producing, curating, and presenting her works in ways that engage her audiences; and, of course, the work of viewing, which is inevitably conjectural. The first two modes are practices that amount to an artistic ethnography that expands outward from the vignette-as-method. In other words, the vignette-as-method acts also as a guide to a closer observation of the ethnographic practice that this artistic approach entails.

In an exhibition she held in 2021 (Savvides, 2021), Vignettes of the Camp was presented alongside her drawings of the location as well as another film she produced on Richmond in 2016 (see Figure 5). Emmanuel, after the name of its protagonist, a resident of the village, who was born and raised there, is very much akin to a video interview. Emmanuel had spoken as a teenager in 2016 about the tribulations of living in limbo in the village. In the exhibition, this film acts as background to the knowledge that the audience of the Vignettes may lack. Emmanuel shares thoughts, worries, and complaints in a stream of consciousness. Of the villagers Efi is in contact with, Emmanuel could be considered, in anthropological terms, a key interlocutor. In the six years she has been visiting Richmond, Efi has befriended several youngsters, and like a few of them, he was born there, raised there, attended the nearby school, made friends, and experienced the discrimination by and bureaucratic indifference of both Cypriot locals and British personnel of the base. His account on camera is not a one-off story for the record. It attests to sustained interaction in daily tasks and life events into which the camera-bearing artist was invited and welcomed.

Other videos, also exhibited, show aspects of another family's preparations for the trip to England: girls on daily chores of washing and preparing luggage; family members moving in and out of a living room where the TV plays to an absent audience

(see Figure 4); social media–style reels of the teenage girls in their corridor. These interviews and videos, some of the participants told me later, "simply" happened, "on the spot." Videos, of both the artist and her "subjects," have continued to circulate after the refugees' resettlement, and as both sides kept in touch after the villagers moved. As mentioned earlier, Efi has continued to return to the place too, documenting and observing the changes once abandonment had set in.

On one such return, she spent the whole day inside the empty houses, taking photos of every tiny thing and every corner. "It was a bit obsessive," she told me afterward. "You would find it depressing," she continued across our Zoom call. "The plants are overgrown, the streets and pavements unkempt, nature has completely taken over. The wind is harsh, as you know, and the landscape is now harsh too" (see Figure 6). The drawings of the place that she produced convey this harshness through the materials used to make them: burned matches to reflect the scorching sun and yellow paint made from the Richmond's acacia leaves as they noisily flutter in the wind.

This approach to the Vignettes as project and vignetting as method suggests an orientation toward witnessing that autoethnography has been developing (Adams et al., 2015). Even though the director never steps into the frame, she seeks to "link [her] world … with the world of others … [drawing] narrative power from the concept of witnessing" (Khosravi, 2010, pp. 5, 8). The viewer should know that this place exists, or that it existed: "It is important that we documented the camp," Efi said in one of our conversations after most of the villagers had been transferred to various parts of the UK. As Mai (2018, p. 13) has done in his autoethnographic "assemblage of modes of representation (interviews, ethnographic observation,

FIGURE 6   *Agave Americana I*, by Efi Savvides, 2019. The house where a family of Richmond residents lived shortly before they were transferred to the UK, September 14, 2019. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

documentary filmmaking),” the process in which Efi is immersed in producing Vignettes of the Camp “draws on personal and intersubjective processes as heuristic and hermeneutic tools … and affects that are generally embedded in the private dimension of people’s lives” (Mai, 2018, p. 13). This evocative autoethnography magnifies “minor” or private events and stages serendipitous insights from the field that transverse the space between art and social analysis. In this sense, her filmographic vignettes work in a similar way to Khosravi’s (2010, pp. 52, 58, 89, 105) “biographical vignettes,” connecting stories in an evocative way that helps us see more clearly the injustices they examine.

For another part of her project, Efi sought out former villagers who had lived there as families of British military personnel in the heyday of Richmond in decades past and discussed their memories with them. She put them in touch with current residents, initiating conversations between them. This development of the project, which resembled participatory action research, was partly spurred by curiosity. Having come across old photographs and media references to Richmond while inhabited by military families, she wanted to hear stories of what it had been like. But she was also motivated by a witnessing orientation, one that bears self-reflexive resonances. “Once [it is] demolished,” she said, “we won’t know the layers of history of this place.”

The “we” she uses here is a shifting one. I would like to think that in the first instance, it refers to the collaboration of those who have in different ways become involved with “documenting” Richmond—myself, the lawyers, the artist, residents

past and present. The second instance, though, is a communal one: we as Cypriots will not know unless we document. The first and second collectivities are at once juxtaposed (those who document and those who do not know) and coinciding (we document so that we know and so that others know). And in those interstices, the othernesses that make Richmond what it is research-wise, a refugee settlement on a British military base, become inflected as part of the meaning that it is “our” commitment to interpret. The connections, entanglements, and uncertainties of subjectivities that anthropology would have perhaps insisted on are here rendered simple for the purposes of a cause. This artistic use of the vignette as method, which bypasses training in ethical dilemmas and in the evolution and complex politics of representation, remains, however, committed to an ethics and politics of reflection that resonates with anthropological practice. It is engagement with these ethics and politics, rather than their critique, that has the most to offer.

NAVIGATING THE POLITICS OF ENGAGEMENT AND AWARENESS

The politics of witnessing comes forth most forcefully, perhaps, in another of Savvides’s films, entitled Judgment Day. In this previous project of hers, she followed the hunger strike of a family of stateless Kurds from Syria, in their quest for Cypriot citizenship beginning in 2014. The resulting video installation consists of three visual feeds running in parallel alongside audio from discussions with one of the strikers, Akid. The videos were

FIGURE 7 *Right frame*: Far-right nationalists march in front of the Presidential Palace on the 43rd commemoration of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus, July 20, 2017. Hunger strikers (*foreground, seated*) watch in silence with their parents. *Left frame*: The second feed juxtaposes the march to Akid's father's walk along the same route carrying placards that had been used to count the days during his sons' 67-day hunger strike. From the film *Judgment Day*, by Efi Savvides, 2017–18. Three-channel video, color, sound, 50 minutes. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

filmed over several months, during which she visited the strike daily, helped in its day-to-day running, held conversations with all family members and recorded long streams in which Akid, one of the sons, shares his thoughts in free-flowing interviews. During these interactions, she has also liaised with lawyers, activists, politicians, and government officials on the specifics of the case and the technicalities detailed in each of the decision letters the family received.

In one of the film's most hard-hitting scenes, the family is seen in a moment of respite, relaxing in their plastic chairs just next to the fenced perimeter of the Presidential Palace park where they were camped for their protest, watching the busy street on the other side of the metal mesh (see Figure 7). We hear chants from a distance and then watch as a march passes by, of far-right activists, shouting slogans against politicians, against enemies, and against the forgetting of martyrs and heroes sacrificed for the nation. The march seems oblivious to the citizenship-seeking hunger strike; the strikers seem uncertain about the meaning of the march. One of the three channel feeds is blacked out so that the viewer concentrates on the frame showing the march. There, the two protests are juxtaposed while the ethnographic gaze is turned toward both, planted securely on the hunger strikers' side of the fence. It is a subtle politics that perfectly exemplifies the artist's use of ethnography in art.

It is in this sense that Savvides's work applies Kosuth's ideas to refugee studies—her art is politically aware but not political. In the political economy of art in Cyprus, the production of works often depends on state funding, and it is to some extent policed. Up until now, at least, only art that relates to the Cyprus conflict has been censored (Davis, 2023). Artists have been denied funding already pledged, threatened with having their works withdrawn from exhibitions, or faced disciplinary proceedings in their professional environments.

Meanwhile, the state has not attacked art about migrant and refugee communities, even as it has disciplined activists on these very same issues, shutting down organizations on bureaucratic pretexts and while funding exhibitions on themes of borders, resistance, migration, and statelessness.[5] It is in these venues, sparsely visited as they are, that politically aware art can engage with audiences. Seen against the monumentality of conflict-focused documentary forms (Davis, 2023), Savvides's subtle politics is about forcing her audience to reflect on the banal: Where are the frayed borders we are not seeing?

Equally subtle is the role that ethnography as practice plays in this politics. Years later I asked Akid if he remembered the scene with the far-right march. He did; he remembered it well. He had had a sense of what they were about. When he heard the chants from a distance, he peered over the entrance of the park, sized up the crowd, and devised a rough strategy of what he might do to protect his family if they came inside. He then went and sat on a chair beside the others, not telling them anything so as not to alarm them. It was reassuring that Efi was there, observing and recording, but they had not told each other that.

This ethnography consists of the unsaid and of continued engagement, extending beyond the end of "projects." After Judgment Day was released, Efi followed the strike until it eventually dissipated and the family was conferred citizenship. Today, she still follows the different members' lifepaths and plans. In 2020 she produced, with Akid's brother Akef, a three-minute film entitled Belfast—a collaborative effort recognized in the local competition 50 Shorts (Hadjiandreou, 2021). On her direction, Akef recorded his walks through the empty streets of the town that the family eventually moved to, and where he spent the harsh pandemic lockdown, imposed in Cyprus in March 2020, which overturned his plans for onward migration to Ireland to work with friends. He collected these alongside recorded snippets of conversation with the friends in Ireland, which Efi then produced. During the hunger strike, Akid created an installation inspired by exchanges with Efi on the tradition of arte povera. In later exchanges between the three of us (Demetriou et al., forthcoming), Akid reflected on this piece and the interaction with the art scene that it occasioned as one that offered "access to a world that felt other than Cyprus, where racism did not exist."

This sustained engagement over many years, the documentation of the minutiae of daily life, the collaboration with the people concerned—these are ethnographic aspects premised on

engagements that exceed the bare-life moment of the refugee condition. It is not that power relations do not exist in these projects, nor indeed do I suggest that ethnography is power leveling as such. But they offer an agentic qualification that connects the method to the ethics and politics of the research and practice. And this inheres as much in the long-term engagement with subjects before and during the life of a project as in the relationships that are sustained after it has ended. The ethics implied here comprise a reflective disposition toward time that harks back to my point about vignettes as ethnography—for indeed, both Belfast and the scenes from Judgment Day operate as vignettes. And insofar as they can be instructive to anthropology, they remind us that although there is very often a before, there is most importantly an after to what we do. And it is this afterlife of fieldwork that animates the ethnographies we write when we have left the field. Vignetting begins when we imagine the field before we have stepped in it, and continues to happen as that initial scene setting is repeatedly belied in the field, that continues to reshape our vignettes, in our head and in our writing, long after we left and long after we have published.

This temporality, as it applies to our "finished" projects as well as to the short encounters of Marcus's second projects, is something that anthropologists can reflect further on. This is perhaps exacerbated by funding temporalities that require "projects" to begin and end on particular fixed dates and careers to move through them. Moreover, today's professional environment looks quite different from what Marcus described of second projects over a decade ago. The pressures are also exacerbated in a wider context by the need to attend to, document, and respond to the effects of successive global events—events that, in being recognized as "crises," acquire a temporally bounded reading and render the situations and populations we study transient and temporary. This is starkly the case with work on refugees as they move between bureaucratic structures, in and out of camps, through borders, across networks. Yet the most salient feature here is that refugee experiences are dominated by the stillness of waiting, the frustration of immobility (Conlon, 2011; Kallius et al., 2016; Lubkemann, 2008; Malkki, 1996; Sanyal, 2018; Schuster, 2011).

The assumptions of transience that frames our engagements, then, might better reflect crisis as a discourse (Roitman, 2013) than as a way of being. Recognizing this would allow us to refocus ethnographic work with refugees on lasting engagements that envision an afterlife to fleeting encounters in camps, hot spots, and detention centers. Much of the ethnography of these sites today chooses to turn to humanitarian workers, the space itself, or to the organizational structures that determine refugee movements. This is, I assume, because these are the only locations where we can presuppose some stability, a continuation of relations, a proper ethical commitment to subjects taking shape. Yet if we instead assume that chance encounters can be a beginning rather than the whole story, we might question the assumptions of transience that sustain refugee subjectivity as an emergency form of being. Paying more attention to vignetting might require that we become more attentive to emergent relations rather than relations in emergency.

The scrutiny over ethnography in refugee studies is valuable for showing the relevance of our work to an increasingly complex and inhospitable field of knowledge—which is so for political reasons (Demetriou, 2022). Anthropologists cannot reside in Moria or other closed centers, or even in open reception facilities. Today, one cannot easily replicate Malkki's (1996) paradigm-setting ethnography or Schuster's (2003, 2011) decades-long sociological-ethnographic documentation of Afghan displacements through Asia and Europe and back to Afghanistan (see also Schuster & Majidi, 2013, 2015). Pathbreaking ethnographies have shown us how to trace trajectories (Andersson, 2014), interpret materialities and their assemblages (De León, 2015; Hamilakis, 2017; Kirtsoglou, 2018, 2021, forthcoming), approach populations involved in refugee reception (Cabot, 2014; Papataxiarchis, 2016; Rozakou, 2017), and think about the entanglements of people and space (Avramopoulou, 2020; Navaro, 2017; Panourgia, 2019). These are, through their thematic foci, exemplars of ethnography as vignetting and the ethical commitments this entails.

What can be further analyzed in such accounts is how such other actors, outside anthropology, are also reflexive agents and how they might engage in ethnographic practices that have something to tell us, rather than serving as first-order narratives to measure against an ethnographic scale.

Seen against influential artworks that have come to signify the "refugee crisis" through visuals of bare life (life vests, boats, tents), the depictions Savvides offers are political insofar as they are ethnographic. Her depiction of waiting in Richmond happens not in the stillness of motion (people sitting around in centers or looking out of windows, waiting in queues, etc., as documentary tropes often have it), but in things going on. It's just that they go on in ways that are familiar but in a place that is extraordinary. The tragedy inheres in this disjuncture and in its being easy to miss. The imagery elicits a familiar affect that resembles this waiting. "I considered that people would be bored with the film," she said in an answer to my observation that the camera in Vignettes, on its immovable tripod, is used as a photographic rather than a motion tool. "I actually wanted even more boredom but compromised for the sake of the audience." But she wanted the boredom of watching the film to instill the feeling of boredom that Richmond villagers live with, a feeling of "waiting for something to happen—and it never does. I wanted viewers to feel the inertia." One may wonder if this is the same order of feeling, but forcing reflection on the audience is the point: Kosuth for refugee studies.

The vignette is boredom, and boredom is made extraordinary through it, as it becomes the refugee condition. In the scales of abstraction in the development of her art, from video interviews to stills to the Vignettes, reflection moves at an ever-slower pace. The story that confronts us is not a story of how refugees fled; it is one of agency and endurance once they have arrived. This is how a Kosuthian ethnographic art makes boredom the affective vehicle through which reflection on others becomes a condition that haunts spectators and forces them to become engaged.

FIGURE 8 *Agave Americana II*, by Efi Savvides, 2021. The space where a house once stood in Richmond village, April 11, 2021. After the family living in the home depicted in Figure 6 departed for the UK, the house was demolished. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

THE FRAYED EDGE

"Do you honestly find this place beautiful?" asked Leyla, another Richmond resident Efi introduced me to, on the first of many walks around the village and its surrounding fields. We were standing on a cliff across the fields where she grew up as we took in the panoramic views of the plain below stretching out to the sea. This was not a question about the beauty of the landscape; it was the search for an orientation in the imminent future: Should she want to go to England, now that the possibility was within sight? Would it have been better to stay? The exhortation to honesty drew on the intimacy previously established with Efi and that my interlocutor expected of me as her "friend from England." If it was geography that mostly distinguished us, I should have something beyond niceties, something honest, to say on things that mattered. What did my knowledge of Cyprus, of Richmond, and of the UK have to offer to the dilemma at hand?

Suddenly, the landscape we were looking at, a perfectly vignetted visual of Richmond, acquired a set of fuzzy edges that reached out to affective connections with others (Efi as intermediary), to future orientations, and to disciplinary, methodological, and ethical commitments (could I really offer a reliable answer?). It acquired the depth that remained understated in Efi's visuals as she communicated to me the affect that the harshness of the landscape exuded when she photographed and drew it (see Figure 8).

I never asked my interlocutors in Richmond what they thought of Efi's work. They sometimes mentioned how a scene just happened when she asked if they wanted to speak on camera and words just flowed, or how her presence and caring approach at difficult times were important. Savvides's observation and documentation of people living lives in parallel to the legal process I was interested in became imperceptibly a site of observation and arguably of participation, as collaborations developed. This exercise in meta-ethnography was about attending to the relevance of materialities in their different guises, the subtle ways that people were negotiating otherness and vulnerability, the practices of coordinating multiple political projects with other actors, and the discourses that framed and provided coherence to action and interaction. It also showed the commitments and engagements entailed by such work, in both practice and presentation. As anthropologists, instead of holding others' work up to disciplinary scrutiny on our terms exclusively, we might also recognize it as an ethnographic practice—one that, whether it attempts to do so or not, can speak across projects and amplify our understanding and the service it is put to. Vignetting the discipline need not necessarily mean that we put less ethnography into our collaborations; it can also mean more of it.

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ENDNOTES

[1] I use pseudonyms throughout the article to refer to my interlocutors and research participants, with two exceptions: in reference to Efi Savvides, the artist I focus on, and to her interlocutors when such reference concerns their role in artworks that are publicly available and where anonymity has been waived.

[2] The specifics of the case, which I could not do justice to here for lack of space, are the subject of other work (Demetriou, n.d.).

[3] *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1993), s.v. "vignette."

[4] I have in mind exhibitions like *Hostile Terrain 94*, curated by Jason De León (https://www.undocumentedmigrationproject.org/hostileterrain94); *Transient Matter*, by Yiannis Hamilakis (https://blogs.brown.edu/transientmatter/); and *Moving Objects*, by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (https://refugeehosts.org/2018/06/08/moving-objects-heritage-in-and-exile/). These are by no means the only examples.

[5] KISA, the oldest migrant rights NGO in Cyprus, has faced intensifying bureaucratic harassment in recent years. It was deregistered in 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021). By comparison, an indicative list of past exhibitions of the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre includes multiple exhibitions themes around migration (NiMAC, n.d.). And yet migration, refugeehood, and internal displacement from the conflict have been tightly imbricated on legal, spatial, and affective planes (Demetriou, 2018).

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