Afterlife Reverberations

Practices of Un/naming in Ethnographic Research on Assisted Suicide

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Abstract Can ethical choices outlive the people who make them? In order to explore this question, this article draws on ethnographic research on transnational assisted suicide to question afterlife implications of practices of un/naming, particularly the use of anonymisation and pseudonyms. Assisted suicide is organised around a specific politics of naming that animates its fight for social and political recognition but which contradicts anthropology's once long-standing disposition towards anonymity as a form of protecting research participants. This dissonance creates a situation where one of anthropology's main tools of protection risks jeopardising the political struggles and fight for recognition of the same people it seeks to protect. Against this background, this reflection argues that empirically researching death and dying requires an additional sensitivity to un/naming practices. Thus, I propose the notion of afterlife reverberations, that is, the affects and expectations that ripple in the aftermath of a research participant's death from their research choices made in life.

Keywords anonymity – assisted suicide – research ethics – pseudonym – un/naming

Introduction

"We need a British Brittany Maynard", the words echoed inside the large library room where about 30 people gathered for the assembly general meeting of a UK-based charity that advocates for increased awareness of end-of-life choices. These words, uttered by a member of the organisation, resonated with several of the people attending the meeting, most of whom agreed with the proposition while others seemed confused by it. Brittany Maynard's case was well-known in the right-to-die debate after she made her own story public with the intention of pushing for further legalisation of aid-in-dying in the United States. Maynard, who was diagnosed with terminal glioblastoma when she was 29 years old, decided to move from her home state of California to Oregon, where she died using the provisions of the state's Death with Dignity Law. "We need a high-profile case", the voice continued, "I don't want anyone to die, less so young people, but it's a way to draw attention and push for legislative change". At the time Maynard's case became public, five US states allowed some form of aid-in-dying, and the attention generated by her case gave motion to legislative debates across the country, which culminated in the legalisation of aid-in-dying in several other states, including her home state of California.

As anthropologist NAOMI RICHARDS (2014) points out, the right-to-die debate in the UK has been dominated by high-profile cases that generate attention by emphasising individual suffering. Despite taking place in a different jurisdiction, Maynard's case followed a similar logic: by exposing her struggles with glioblastoma and her journey towards aid-in-dying, Maynard was able to influence public and legislative debates in the US and overseas. The legalisation of aid-in-dying is a deeply contentious issue that is prone to political, legal, medical, religious, and moral controversies. In this troubled environment, people's individual suffering is often invested with political and moral meanings (RICHARDS 2014: 17) that can animate such controversies and push for institutional response. Thus, the implications of having a "British Brittany Maynard" are twofold: on the one hand, it indicates the ability of high-profile cases to attract public attention and effect change, and, on the other hand, it highlights the importance of making one's own name and trajectory public. Over the years, several litigations on the right-to-die revolved around individuals who made their names, stories, and suffering known to the wider public (Menezes 2011; Richards 2011; Ward 2015), a move that acts to personalise the right-to-die debate by attaching names to it and, consequently, life stories. This holds the potential to attract greater public and political sensibility to the issue. Thus, Maynard's case speaks to a politics of naming that sits at the heart of the right-to-die debate, holding the potential to raise public awareness, stir controversies in different domains, and push for legal and legislative changes.

When the suggestion of having a "British Brittany Maynard" was brought forward, I was observing the meeting as part of my fieldwork on transnational assisted suicide[1], which I carried out from 2015 to 2017 in Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. As the meeting unfolded and the discussion about the need for a high-profile case continued, I noticed the irony of making notes about a meeting on the centrality of naming while unnaming everyone involved in this discussion. Whereas anthropologists have long relied on practices of unnaming, such as pseudonymisation and anonymisation, to protect their research participants, this irony left me wondering how to reconcile the need for protection in a research field that relies on naming to push for social and political legitimation. The question underlying this thought was how to compose an ethnographic description that protects the people involved in the research when our main tool of protection risks undermining their own fight for recognition. Whereas the need for naming or the impossibility of unnaming in certain research contexts have already been widely discussed (Nelson 2015; Thomson 2021; Walford 2018), ethnographic research on end-of-life complicates this further since many participants will not live to see the research outcome—and, as a result, will not experience the consequences of their decisions regarding anonymity.

As Julia Rehsmann and Veronika Siegl argue in the introduction to this special issue, exploring beginnings and ends of life can pose new questions that challenge "long-held traditions and taken-for-granted research practices" (2022: 5), including un/naming decisions. In this article, I delve into this unplanned irony of unnaming everyone during a meeting on the importance of naming to reflect on methodological and ethical questions raised by navigating a research space that is situated at the margins between life and death. This is a space where the anthropological imagination of what constitutes ethical practice needs to be reevaluated and rearranged in accordance to a new set of commitments and expectations that continues to reverberate and have real life implications after the death of the people who made them. In such cases, where participants are unable to respond or react to the research outcome, ethical commitments need to be reshaped to include possible implications that continue to unfold after their death; implications that continue to affect the researcher, the deceased, as well as their family members and friends.

Over the course of my research, I have met several individuals involved directly or indirectly in aid-in-dying, such as campaigners, professional assistants, and people who are applying for assisted suicide and may or may not opt to carry out the procedure at some point. I asked each participant to sign an informed consent form where, among other things, they had to indicate their wish to be anonymised or have their real names used. Against the background of this highly contentious issue that often relies on high-profile cases to advance its agenda, most participants opted for the latter option. Most participants, however, were also aware of the likelihood that they would no longer be alive to see how their names were employed. They would not be able to protest how their names were used or to comment on the final version of the text. They would no longer be alive to see the implications of a decision they made while living, but which would continue to reverberate and produce effects after their death. To explore the uneasy dimension of research ethics that emerge in between life and death, this article proposes the notion of afterlife reverberations, that is, the concerns, affects, and expectations that ripple in the aftermath of a person's death from their research choices made in life. To explore afterlife reverberations is to question whether ethical choices can outlive the people who made them, challenging an imaginary of research ethics that was consolidated upon the expectation of reciprocity, protection through anonymity, and, fundamentally, of being alive.

If being alive is taken for granted in anthropology's imaginary of research ethics, what are the afterlife reverberations triggered by research spaces where death and dying are no longer something to be avoided, but someone's ultimate goal as the result of an intricate process that can be empirically apprehended? In order to explore afterlife reverberations in this special issue dedicated to ethical and methodological challenges of doing ethnographic research at the beginnings and ends of life, the following reflection will first set out its larger framework. This introduces the broader context of assisted suicide and the possibility of empirically researching and experiencing the death of others that its legalisation facilitated. Subsequently, I will address the so-called name problem of assisted suicide, exploring the centrality of naming practices as a key factor in attracting public attention and effecting change through legislative and/or legal pathways. I will base my reflection on the naming problem on the trajectories of research participants who shared their life stories with me, in particular Margot and Paul[2], and use their experiences, struggles, and successes as a guide for this narrative. Finally, I will discuss afterlife reverberations as another layer of ethical reflection that emerges from doing ethnography at the margins between life and death.

Researching the Death of Others

"You're the most important person in Margot's life here", I heard Dr Preisig saying to me as Margot was offering her final goodbyes. We were in a flat in the outskirts of Basel, Switzerland, when moments after this statement Margot died while holding my hand. The flat was spacious yet empty, comfortable but impersonal. Its white walls were flooded with natural light coming through the windows that overlooked a rather grey industrial zone. And as the sound of multiple voices in the room gave way to a deep silence, Margot took her final breath, dying the kind of death she expected and hoped for—one she considered to be safe, fast, and painless, taking place before her quality of life deteriorated any further. While Dr Preisig was checking Margot's pulse, I was simply there, standing next to Margot and trying to hold back my tears. Margot was pronounced dead while we were still alive, waiting for the police to come to deal with the aftermath of her dying. For people involved with aid-in-dying in Switzerland, this is routine. The police always come afterwards to ensure that the death occurred due to assisted suicide, which can be legally performed, thus discarding any possibility of foul play. And while this situation was unfolding around me, that is, while the police and the state prosecutor were verifying all documents of Margot's application process and the coroner checked her body, I was trying to reconcile my roles as someone who was both being *there* and *with*. As a researcher I was *there* witnessing what seemed to be a rich research event, but I was also being *with* Margot, my friend who died holding my hand just a few minutes before.[3]

Switzerland is often the main destination of people applying for organised assisted suicide worldwide, particularly due to the coupling of a favourable legal environment and the work of several specialised organisations, at least three of which accept non-Swiss citizens and residents as members. The friction caused by this local legislation with the mostly unfavourable legal environment beyond Swiss borders often leads to the transnational mobility of people who leave their home countries to achieve their aspirational death in Switzerland. Defined by the anthropologist MARA BUCHBINDER (2021: 6), aspirational death refers to the "aesthetic, affective, and ethical preferences that inform orientations to dying as a matter of personal choice and careful choreography". In the present context, aspirational death is employed to reflect on notions of good death that are articulated within each individual situation—the best death possible given the circumstances. Crossing national borders to achieve an aspirational death was precisely Margot's case when she travelled from Germany to Switzerland to receive Dr Preisig's assistance. Despite its prominence, Switzerland is one piece in the complex tapestry of aid-in-dying that emerged in the 20th century and has gained special traction since the 1980s. At this time, several European jurisdictions started to consider the legalisation of aid-in-dying, be it through judicial or legislative paths. Since then, several European countries have legalised some form of aid-in-dying, such as the Netherlands (in 1984 by court ruling, followed by state law in 2002), Belgium (2002), Luxembourg (2009), and Austria (2022).

Notwithstanding this legal trend, medical aid-in-dying is not a new phenomenon. In fact, as FRANCES NORWOOD (2018: 461) argues, medical professionals have been helping people to die at least since the beginning of modern medicine. What is new is not the practice itself but its incorporation into state law, including the possibility of non-medical assistance. It is against this background that, as noted by BUCHBINDER (2021), death becomes something that can be legally done rather than something that merely happens. The gradual emergence and consolidation of aid-in-dying also gave rise to new research spaces where the production of specific kinds of death can be empirically captured, including, but not limited to, palliative care and assisted suicide (ANDRADE NEVES 2020; BUCHBINDER 2021; LEMOS DEKKER 2018a, 2018b, 2020; MENEZES 2004; NORWOOD 2006, 2007). For instance, Margot's aspirational death was not one that would just happen by chance, but one that needed to be carefully orchestrated and actively produced through human and pharmaceutical intervention in an organised setting. The circumstances of her aspirational death, which involved a lengthy application process, ended up facilitating the possibility of participant observation throughout the entirety of this process and during the procedure itself (ANDRADE NEVES 2020). Yet the emergence of such research spaces where people cross the border between life and death also poses a challenge to an imaginary of research ethics formulated around the expectation of life and living and not the anticipation of death and dying.

When we accompany the death of others in such research spaces, what tools are available to us to create an ethical research environment that protects participants while being attentive to the real-life implications of their wishes? For instance, reflecting on her experience of doing research at the end of life, MARIAN KRAWCZYK (2017: 2) points to the ambivalence of having an "ethically robust" process of consent while simultaneously questioning the appropriateness of her own presence in the field. "I have come to believe the ethical considerations regarding the presence of the researcher in such situations", she writes, "should not only include the participant's capacity to provide consent but should also be informed by the relationships that have developed between the researcher and the participant" (ibid.). These research relationships are developed and shaped against the background of different anticipations of death and dying—that is, different expectations between researcher and participant regarding the temporality of their own death and dying. In research situations that take place in close proximity to death and dying, how effective is anthropology's usual ethics repertoire of informed consent and practices of unnaming? How does one provide protection to participants through unnaming when their names are crucial elements in their own fight for recognition and political legitimation? Essentially, how can anthropological research be ethical when the foundations of what we assumed to be ethical principles are turned upside down by empirically researching the death of others?

The Name Problem

The effectiveness of high-profile cases like Brittany Maynard's relies on the articulation of individual suffering into the public sphere, where its visibility can elicit affects and give renewed motion to public debates. As RICHARDS (2014: 17) argues, "personal stories are now instrumentalized, by both 'sides' of the right-to-die debate, in order to generate media coverage and public sympathy for a cause". In fact, the reliance of high-profile cases on publicising individual suffering and personal stories is underlined by a politics of naming that is vital in the larger right-to-die debate and which mirrors the choices regarding anonymity made by most participants in my research. While conducting fieldwork, I asked research participants to sign an informed consent form in which one of the questions was devoted to un/naming preferences. It questioned: "The participant wishes to remain anonymous in any publications based on the interviews/participation in the research", followed by "yes" and "no" boxes. To my initial surprise, partly due to a naive and unreflective disciplinary expectation towards unnaming, most participants crossed "no", indicating they did not wish a pseudonym. In the conversations that followed, they often reaffirmed their preference to have their real names employed. Whereas a politics of naming sits at the heart of the larger right-to-die debate and reverberates with individual choices regarding naming preferences, it contradicts anthropology's long-standing principle of anonymising research participants as a form of protection.

One of said high-profile cases was Paul Lamb's, a former builder who got paralysed from the neck down in the aftermath of a car accident. Several years after the accident, Lamb joined Tony Nicklinson in a legal fight for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia in the UK. Nicklinson, who suffered from locked-in syndrome, died six days after an unfavourable High Court ruling (RICHARDS 2014). After his death, Nicklinson's former solicitor and his widow contacted Paul Lamb and invited him to join the case, which they intended to continue. At first, they suggested he could join the case anonymously as "L" to protect his privacy. As Lamb recounted to me, he initially agreed to be disguised as L, which made him feel like a "James Bond character". Shortly afterwards, however, the solicitor approached him again to ask whether he would be willing to "come out in the open", claiming that everyone thought L was a fictitious character. As Lamb was unsure about what "coming out in the open" entailed, the solicitor speculated that probably some people would contact or come to see him. Once again, Lamb agreed, and while fearing the worst, he ended up feeling surprisingly overwhelmed by demonstrations of support. His and Nicklinson's case gained traction and, although rejected again, helped to inform the right-to-die debate in the country.

Paul Lamb and I met during my fieldwork at his home in Leeds. When I visited him prior to the interview, he signed an informed consent form in which he indicated his wish to have his real name used. He was no longer willing to be L. Lamb's preference reflected his previous trajectory from anonymity to publicity, from having his identity concealed to having his real name disclosed both in the legal proceedings and the media. What right did I have to disguise Lamb once again, wrapping his identity under another pseudonym, when his political and legal fight was based precisely on him leaving L behind and publicly assuming his own identity? As JULIA VORHÖLTER (2021: 15) argues, concealing the identities of research participants has been a central ethical principle of anthropological research, but its main goal of not harming research participants risks overshadowing the complexity and moral ambiguity of anonymity. VORHÖLTER argues that a balance needs to be found between respecting a participant's interests and wellbeing and anthropology's high ethical standards. In Lamb's case, where "coming out in the open" was a crucial step in his trajectory, unnaming him under the guise of protection would be a violent act that undermines his ongoing political struggle and jeopardises his own personal interests.

Lamb, alongside the vast majority of participants in my research, opted against the use of pseudonyms to represent them in the final text, paving a situation where the standard disciplinary practice of unnaming participants clashed with their own preferences to be identified. Upon reviewing all informed consent forms and reflecting on my process of establishing consent, the feeling of protection I was expecting to accomplish for myself and participants alike was met by the realisation that the tools I had to offer went against their own instruments for social and political recognition. In retrospect, similarly to the experience described by KRAWCZYK (2017: 2), while I also perceived my process of consent as "ethically robust", its guiding assumptions did not take into consideration the specificity of this field, thus failing to anticipate the dilemmas and implications of a field where some participants are expected to die during the research. I was relying on informed consent forms and frequent conversations to understand the living and dying circumstances of each participant and to place their individual preferences into the wider context of the research. As the informed consent form becomes synonymous with the principle of respect for autonomy (HOEYER & HOGLE 2014: 350), it ends up creating an "illusion of the ethical" (CANNELLA & LINCOLN 2007: 316). It creates a false expectation that main ethical concerns can be addressed and resolved within the margins of a standard document that reflects a specific idea of what research ethics looks like; an illusion that obfuscates ethics as a relational, complex, and ongoing process that requires constant attentiveness to the ordinary (Das 2015). After all, as Lambek (2015: 34) puts it, being attentive "includes being responsive, being awake, being engaged in and with the world".

According to Weiss and McGranahan (2021), "[t]he use of pseudonyms is partially that of an inherited disciplinary custom deployed unreflectively". Indeed, my default position of what constituted an ethical research practice clashed with the politics of naming of assisted suicide, turning the expectation of ethical practice into the frustration of ethical violence—the enforcement of certain ethical standards over the participants' own interests. While discussing futuring trans* in Pakistan, the anthropologist Omar Kasmani (2021: 97) notes that "acts of naming and unnaming, be they partially, ambiguously, or situationally adopted as individual, multiple, or collective iterations, constitute manifest labours of affective world making". Indeed, following Kasmani's reflection and applying it to my research context, acts of un/naming needed to be resolved individually against the larger background of the research, balancing the politics of naming of assisted suicide with different interests and real-life implications. Whereas requests for anonymising were immediately respected, requests for the use of real names were considered case-by-case.

For instance, returning to the description of Margot's death, the complexity and ambiguity of un/naming practices can be further explored. In her informed consent form, Dr Preisig opted "no" for having a pseudonym, while Margot signalled "yes", but added a note: she wanted me to use her first name as pseudonym. Margot's choice was a compromise shaped by political and personal factors, as she wanted to contribute personally to what she saw as an ongoing political struggle for the recognition and legalisation of assisted suicide, while minimising the possibility of exposing her family. In this sense, Margot's choice encapsulates an interplay between her own anticipation of possible afterlife reverberations in regards to her family and the political dimension of assisted suicide, where naming plays a fundamental role. In Dr Preisig's case, similarly to Paul Lamb's, it would be difficult to anonymise her, as she is a public figure who often takes part in media debates on assisted suicide. Her involvement with aid-in-dying and professional engagement with the issue made her request to use her real name easy to follow, as anonymising her would conceal her years of political struggle and activist work. To anonymise her properly, the organisation she founded and the city where it is based would have to be anonymised as well—as it was the only organisation of its kind in Basel at the time.

Also Margot's individual decision needed to be placed in a collective context, against which it became clear that the information she provided over the course of the research would potentially lead to her identification and, consequently, to the identification of her family. Margot, however, would no longer be able to re-evaluate her choice, as she knew from the outset of our relationship that she would likely die a death by appointment before the conclusion of the research. The name problem of assisted suicide, thus, is twofold: Firstly, assisted suicide operates following a publicising logic, where conveying identity is fundamental to advance its political agenda and fuel its struggle for recognition. This logic, however, challenges anthropology's ethical apparatus, as the discipline's main tool to secure protection and disguise identity undermines the participants' struggles for legitimation. Secondly, in a research context where participants often die a voluntary and planned death, the afterlife implications of their preferences expressed in life need to be taken into consideration, as they will no longer be able to change their minds and reconsider their choices. This leads to the fundamental issue my article is concerned with: doing ethnography on death and dying requires additional sensibility to practices of un/naming, as participants' choices need to be evaluated against the anticipation of their death and ethical commitments need to be expanded to include its possible consequences—their afterlife reverberations.

Afterlife Reverberations

While guaranteeing anonymity has become a standard practice in anthropology, we employ it by making assumptions that are often misguided or incomplete. Even though Margot asked me to use her first name, I did not. Margot is a pseudonym I created after her death. As Weiss and McGranahan (2021) suggest, practices of naming and unnaming, in particular the use of pseudonyms, have real life implications that go beyond methodological issues. Margot's real first name alone would not be able to convey her identity. It was a common name after all. However, in conjunction with other elements of her life story, such as place and year of birth, professional trajectory, and family background, people close to her could easily assume her identity. For instance, it could be suspected easily by her family, who expressed no desire to know the details of her death—a wish that Margot respected in life, but risked jeopardising in death. Margot had already anticipated possible afterlife reverberations when she made what she considered a good compromise between personal and political dimensions in her choice regarding the use of her first name. However, she would no longer be around to (re)evaluate whether this compromise actually worked to her liking. She would no longer be able to deal with the impact that her death and her taking part in the research might have on her family. With her death, the ethical commitments established between us changed, as it was now up to me to assess possible implications that her death and my narration of it might have on her family—an assessment Margot would not be able to evaluate or protest against.

The ambivalence of making a final decision about un/naming a deceased person that may either validate or go against their preferences expressed in life is a key ethical challenge of doing ethnographies at the end of life, as the proximity of death rearranges our ethics landscape to take into account the impact of someone's death on decisions communicated in life. In her book about stories of aid-in-dying in the US, Mara Buchbinder (2021: 17) argues that there is "something discomforting about using stories of one person's tragedy for professional gain". This discomfort, however, is compounded when combined with unnaming decisions that often need to go against the participant's preferences, particularly in the aftermath of their dying. Whereas, as Buchbinder (2021) notes, their death and tragedy are a source of professional gain for the researcher, the retelling of their stories holds the potential to shift the debate on a topic that not only is highly controversial, but also illegal in most jurisdictions across the world. However discomforting this process may feel, ethnography holds the potential to both contribute to and fuel a wider debate by providing an intimate account of death and dying. If we employ pseudonyms unreflectively as a sign of disciplinary inertia, are we not, as Sara Shneiderman (2021) suggested, undermining "ethnography's potential as an instrument of recognition?"

Un/naming choices are crucial and have real life consequences. As Jason Throop (2014) pointed out, our ethical commitments tend to change according to un/naming decisions. Would I still be willing to write about Margot's life if I used her real name instead? Would I enjoy the same intellectual enthusiasm to explore intimate moments in life, or the intimacy of closely being with her in dying, if the audience was aware of her identity? In the aftermath of my research, when translating several life and death stories into a final narrative, I respected everyone's wishes for disguising their identity. When it came to individual preferences to employing real names, however, I reflected on the potential real-life consequences of their individual choices, keeping in mind that individual decisions can have collective effects. This is precisely what the notion of afterlife reverberation entails, the consideration of ethnographical concerns, expectations, and affects that ripple after someone's death and may affect the research and the lives of those who stayed alive in ways that were previously unforeseen. To consider afterlife reverberations is to open oneself to vulnerability and uncertainty, embarking on a journey that seeks to reconcile the lived past with the unfinished present from affects that continue to blossom and reverberate after death.

Margot was eager to tell her life story before her appointment in Basel, and I was eager to hear it. And over the course of several interactions, which included joining her for her last dinner, she did it. She composed a narrative about her own life, one that articulated her trajectory with her desire to die a specific kind of death. Her story was now mine to recount, but––and she was well aware of this––she would no longer be able to hear my version of it. How can I create a narrative that is based on life stories conveyed to me by people who knew they would not be able to verify it? If, on the one hand, to consider afterlife reverberations is crucial to reflect on the impact of a participant's death during the research, on the other hand such reverberations may have different intensities according to the relationships that were developed over the course of the research. Intimacy, thus, is an indispensable element to calibrate afterlife reverberations. For instance, in the aftermath of Margot's assisted suicide, I left the organisation's flat on foot. I wanted to walk to the closest train station and board a train to the city. I felt the need to get some fresh air and be alone while I tried to mend the pieces of everything that had happened that morning—and the months before. But as I walked to the train station, the funeral home car drove past me and honked, offering a ride. I wanted to be alone but could not resist the irony of crossing paths with Margot once again and accepted the offer.

When I arrived in the city, I had nowhere to go. My flight back home would only depart a few hours later. Lacking better ideas and emotionally exhausted, I decided to go to the nearest fast food place. As I hung my coat over the chair, I felt an envelope in my pocket that I knew was there but had forgotten existed. Margot gave me this envelope just before her procedure but asked me not to read it until she was gone. I treasured the envelope in my pocket, somewhat conflicted about it. I was curious to read it, yet I knew that reading it meant Margot was dead. When I felt the envelope, everything came back to my mind, all memories of our brief but dear friendship. I was no longer able to hold back the tears I had successfully hidden all this time. When Margot and I first met, we did not know each other's faces. She had sent me a photo of herself by post, but it did not arrive in time. So I made a suggestion to her: when I arrive at the restaurant, I will raise my green cell phone to the air, so if you see it, let me know. She did see it and waved back at me. The envelope was also green, the same green. So was the ink she had used to write the letter.

"To intimate", beautifully argues LAUREN BERLANT (1998: 281), "is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures". In her final message to me, Margot made a simple choice that took us full circle right back to our first contact. She communicated this intimacy not with words, but with colour and affect. She gave another life to our friendship after her death, bringing back memories and making me reflect on our past trajectory and future possibilities, imbuing in me a sense of responsibility that highlighted even further the importance and challenges of considering afterlife reverberations. At the time of her procedure, although I was the only one present who knew Margot from before, we by then had known each other for just a few months. In the weeks and months that followed our first meeting, Margot would regularly call me and send me letters. At the time, she was still applying for the procedure, so her death by appointment was something she anticipated but was unsure of. More than knowing how she wanted to die, Margot knew until when she wanted to live. She drew a line between what was acceptable to her and what was not, indicating that if this line was about to get crossed, she would act to avoid it. She would schedule her appointment and begin her final journey to Basel. After we met for the first time and our relationship unfolded, Margot realised she wanted me to be there with her as she released the flow of the lethal medication down the cannula and into her vein; as she walked into the flat and out of her life. Doing intimacy during encounters that include a person's transition from life to death can place the researcher in distinct roles and lead to different waves of afterlife reverberations. The intimacy I developed with Margot over the course of several encounters and interactions throughout the research intensified the afterlife reverberations from her death, as I had to reflect on her ethical choices by anticipating its future implications; a reflection process that was calibrated by our relationship and the kind of intimacy we developed.

Our friendship unfolded over the course of her death process, in between her initial application and the final procedure. When the latter took place, I was not just there, observing everyone's actions and witnessing her final moments. I was *with* her—not only as an indication of physical proximity, but also, and fundamentally, of a particular affective dimension that emerged out of doing intimacy in the context of contrasting life and death temporalities, of contrasting finitudes. While addressing the context of palliative care during the COVID-19 pandemic, DRIESSEN, BORGSTROM & COHN (2021: 17) emphasise the importance of palliative professionals conveying a perception of "being with" the patients as a key aspect of doing intimacy and building trust. Being with, in this sense, implies conveying a sense of genuine interest that goes beyond the professional obligation of being there. While, on the one hand, being with relies on intimacy and trust building, on the other hand, as MOLLY FITZPATRICK writes in this special issue, being with also demands a constant negotiation of the ethics of such relationships. As a mode of engagement that can be both "uncomfortable and riddled with complex ethical considerations" (FITZPATRICK 2022: 2), being with is an intricate form of care that is shaped by intimacy. And this intimacy of being with, in turn, affects the stakes and intensity of afterlife reverberations.

My relationship with Margot evolved within the framework of my research on assisted suicide, where we also established the terms of her participation and her conditions for consent—including in regards to naming. While this is customary in ethnographic research, what is specific to this context is the anticipation of her death by appointment, which brings with it the certainty that her ethical choices would outlive her—and that she would have no opportunity to review, contest, or even regret them. The conditions of her participation would likely be affected by her death, rearranging the ethical configuration to include new commitments, responsibilities, and expectations. My ethical commitment with Margot was both professional and personal, as a researcher and friend, as someone who was there and with.

Final Remarks

The legalisation of different forms of aid-in-dying has enabled the emergence of research spaces in which a specific form of death can be legally done and, thus, empirically apprehended as a complex process that involves a whole range of different actors. One of these research spaces, organised assisted suicide, is a highly controversial subject whose legal quality is frequently being debated and contested in different jurisdictions. To advance its pro-legalisation agenda, people involved in the right-to-die debate often follow the logic of so-called high-profile cases, where individual suffering is articulated away from the private and into the public sphere. Brittany Maynard is one of such high-profile cases, and so is Paul Lamb. They opted to publicise their names and individual trajectories in order to give traction to the public conversation—Lamb, for instance, made the choice of ceasing to being L and assumed his own name. Underlying the logic of high-profile cases lies a politics of naming that is crucial to eliciting public affects, stirring controversies, and pushing for legislative change.

Thus, when it comes to political and legislative struggles of assisted suicide, acts of naming can be crucial to advance the debate. But whereas assisted suicide relies on naming to fuel the debate, anthropology often follows a long-standing preference for unnaming research participants with the aim of protecting their identity and respecting their privacy. This dissonance assembles the background to this article: the kind of ethical sensibility that emerges when assisted suicide, with its naming preference, and anthropology, with its unnaming imperative, meet in a research space located at the intersection of life and death. In this text, I have reflected on my experience of doing ethnography on the end-of-life to explore the ethical implications of this dissonant encounter. I argue that the discipline's primary tool for protection can exert ethical violence by jeopardising the struggle for recognition of the very people it seeks to protect. While this implication can be shared by other fields and research areas, I have directed attention to the specificity of assisted suicide as a research field: the likelihood that participants will die a voluntary death over the course of the research, which raises questions on accountability and rearranges the ethical commitments established between participant and researcher during life. In the foreground, lies the question of whether ethical choices can outlive the participants who made them.

In order to explore this question, I proposed the notion of afterlife reverberations to address the continuous affects and effects that ripple in the aftermath of a participant's death, where ethical choices need to be reevaluated under the light of their possible implications to the researcher, to participants' family and friends, as well as to the participants themselves. While afterlife reverberations need to be considered in research contexts where participants die an aspirational death, the intensity of such reverberations is adjusted by the intimacy established between researcher and participants. At the risk, as Shneiderman (2022) has warned, of poisoning anthropology's potential as a tool for recognition, being open to afterlife reverberations also means rethinking and reordering the ethics landscape of anthropology to account for the implications of death and dying during the research and its aftermath. Whereas the individual dies, the ethical subject lives on. But following a participant's death, their ethical preferences expressed in life need to be considered and reflected upon under a different light. When carrying out ethnographic explorations at the end of life, I propose that afterlife reverberations be explicitly discussed with research participants, anticipating the possibility that their deaths may trigger previously unforeseen dilemmas that hold the potential of reshaping their agreed upon ethical commitments.

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Notes

1 Throughout this article, I have chosen to use the term assisted suicide to refer to the specific form of aid-in-dying described here, while aware of the politics of language animated by the term suicide. The term assisted suicide puts emphasis on the self-administered dimension of the practice, contrasting it with physician-administered procedures, such as euthanasia. These procedures, despite their mutual dis/connections, usually enjoy different legal status within the same jurisdiction. For instance, whereas assisted suicide can be legally performed in Switzerland, euthanasia remains a criminal offence. Therefore, clarity is key to avoid ambiguity. To quote an interlocutor who was discussing her views on terminology, "we don't like the term, but assisted suicide tells you what it is". While the association with suicide can be controversial, the term assisted suicide directs the focus to self-administration, which is crucial to avoid a shadow of suspicion that could lead, in the extreme, to assistants being criminally prosecuted.

2 Whereas the text reflects on un/naming practices through anonymity choices, it should be noted that the discussion can be further expanded onto other naming practices, such as the differential use of first and last names. As Margot Weiss suggests, textual representation through first or last names often indicates a split between interlocutors and scholars, thus reproducing "disciplinary hierarchies" (2021: 949). In the present text, the use of first or last name in the case of interlocutors was decided following the interplay of anonymity choices, possible afterlife reverberations, intimacy, as well as narrative roles. Using Dr Preisig's last name and title, for instance, was thought as a way of highlighting her role in this dynamic as a medical professional.

3 For a thorough discussion between being there and with see Molly Fitzpatrick's contribution in this special issue.

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