



**AWAY
FROM
HOME**

a betrayer's confession

FARREN ALEKSANDR

“A refreshingly honest and compelling account of the place in between. Reading ‘Away from Home, Home from Away’ is a reevaluation journey of the importance of betrayal, the meaning of personal beliefs and the role of cultural values. Months after my first read I still constantly think and rethink many of the questions introduced in the book, questions which I will carry with me for years to come. If you pick up Ferren Aleksandr’s book, be sure that by the time you put the book down the world won’t look the same.”

- Hanan Kataw, the author of “Al-Dukan” (2016)

“Grey exists and it’s never this or the other. Betrayal is part of us, betrayal is freedom.”

- Mira Kfoury, MA Architectural History student

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A platform to talk about this book is: farrenaleksandr.tumblr.com. Shall there be anyone interested in having this book, one will be welcome to join the conversation there and the book shall be sent to one’s place. Once one has this book, it is very recommended to interact with the book personally and freely.

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for jase

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Others Ignorance is a bliss!

My childhood friend once told me I should not risk my heart. It is vulnerable, pure, and sacred; so precious I should not display it in public for people to love and hurt. However, I kind of like how Jase has always intuitively loved people. The first was her senior who broke her heart when she was graduating, and the next one her junior who, as you can guess, broke her heart when Jase herself was graduating. I told her she should have not let her go; she could have come to the school, texted her, skyped her, etc. The thing is... Jase had not idea that was any particular kind of love, so she left.

Anyway, I see how her intuition to spread love broke her heart. Do you think loving is a kind of betrayal in the first place?

For me, I think it has something to do with my upbringing. Dad often said that

I should not think about money because that was his part; all I needed to do was study, "learn as much as you can, for no learning leads you to nothing!" Then there occurred at least two betrayals from their side. One, I grew up a royal person that they would ask, "How could you spend that much money for your friends?" Two, I am now a long-life learner who believes that everyone stays young when they learn. I told my parents to take a language course for it would enable them to learn many things on the internet. I took them to the library, museum, gave them self-help books. But they said, "We're too old for that."

I moved out of my parents' house when I got into university. All the enlightenments at the classes, plus all the resistance from my parents which I identified as betrayals encouraged me to

betray them. Small ones in the beginning, major ones to them they led me. Do they know about any of them? No, not even until now. That happened on and on until I cannot identify if I am the betrayed or the betrayer.

This also happened to Jase, who by then had already been in a relationship with her boyfriend for three years. She learned from him that when you are so close to someone, you do not only feel like taking off your clothes but also your persona. She became so honest to him that whenever he saw her, what he saw was not skin but bubbles of emotions.

But one day Jase's volcano was unbearable it messed his head up. "Ah damn it! I don't want to go to university! I

mean, I have you to teach me about the world, why do I need to study abroad?" Thinking that he was the one hindering Jase from pursuing her degree, and worrying about Jase's future, Jase often caught him wandering around his forestry thought after their coition. Then it came the time when he finalised his scenario. With the assumption that Jase would stay with him no matter what, he came to her saying, "Let's call it off. I will always accompany you, but I cannot love you the same way anymore." Did Jase have any idea about his motive? Not a glimpse.

The word "devastated" was engraved on her chest. For months she betrayed her health and relationship with people, concentrating only on her work as if it was her only love container that would not betray her. 18 hours a day, seven days a week, coming to the office the earliest,

going home latest, sleeping with her cell phone next to her ear so as to be ready whenever her boss called to assist him from home. Did her heroic ex-boyfriend know any of that? No. Jase could not help but feel betrayed by for his betrayal.

Then, after some months, Jase found her first cure she got this text, "Hey, is it true that an architect can draw a straight line without a ruler?" It was from a high school girl whom Jase met at a language course she took as another distraction, a container of her spilled-over love.

The girl was not the first one to make the move actually; it was Jase who intuitively did it; she said to her after scrutinising her hands, "You play guitar, don't you?" Apparently the nails on her right hand were long and her left short. The next thing the girl did was asking her sister for Jase's phone number because

they had been friends a couple of weeks earlier. So yeah, the text came and was followed by a gazillion others for the next several months.

Did Jase tell her ex-boyfriend about the panacea she found? No. He was actually still around, but no, Jase was not even sure where she was; if she still loved him, if she wanted him back, or if maybe she was addicted to the girl, her drug, too badly. Jase started to ask what love is. Why did she feel like she could love girls and boys? Why is it that when she loved someone, she loved them so badly? Jase wanted to protect this girl. She loved her; that was all.

But anyway, she was betrayed again, not by the girl this time but their surroundings. The majority of people agreed that two girls loving each other too much was simply the road to hell. So Jase stepped

back, betrayed again. But maybe the same way I never really leave my parents, Jase neither leaves her ex-boyfriend nor her ex-girl-friend. I started to wonder the limit of human's love; and the limit of how far we can and should extend the border that defines all the words I just used.

Now you can recall hundreds or thousands of betrayals in your life. People selling things on the sidewalk betray the pedestrians in the name of their economy. Gloves protecting our hands from cold hinder us from feeling the skin of our loved ones. And internet, so wide a world web, prisons us in a bubble that physical people cannot get into and we do not wish to get out from. A freedom to proclaim a geographical area, namely of a country,

betrays the human's freedom to cross the borderlines.

But really, why do they call one geography east and the other west? For west is located in the east side of east. Can we tell where west and east are when we're on the north or south-pole? I mean, the most east of planet Earth is agreed to be the first one celebrating a new year, or even, every single brand new day. But if we think about it, the most west, that celebrates every new day the latest, could actually have one hour ahead of the most east instead of 23 hours back. So why is it agreed this way? What will change if the border between days that now lies between Indonesia and Papua New Guinea moves 15 degrees westward or eastward? Is it not only a matter of agreement? But what is the base of that agreement?

Let me give you another personal

example. A scholarship I got bounded me for only one thing: I am to go back to my country once I finish my study. I could say that that for me is the easiest criteria because I knew so well how much I loved the place and how therefore it is easy for me to decide to return. But hang on. Maybe we are talking about a different kind of love here.

Their understanding of "love of your country" is of the logical idea that because your country pays your tuition fee you have to go home to build it; you owe it your return. The love there is the idea of taking and giving. But for me, even without the tuition fee, had I managed to study here, I would have gone back the same intuitively and sincerely too. With this dispute they call me a nationalist, while I don't see myself that way. When I love someone or something, I give. Period. This

is where my idea of love (of a country), of nationalism, betrays my country's.

So an idea once prominent evolved to being ubiquitous, betrayed by its prominence. I picture Jase having a conversation with her friend about music genres. Her friend notes that the emergence of a music genre could be groundbreaking once, and yet could be not anymore at some point when the breaking of ground rose to nothing but more new genres.

Jase adds, "And weirdly, after they got all the separations of genres, they tend to unite them, make them eclectic in many different ways!"

"Exactly, so why do we regard the diverging and or the collaborative new ones as something special? We talk about what

is right or wrong about them. We celebrate one and dislike the other. What's their significance?"

The conversation was concluded with the fact that there is nothing right or wrong. So vague an answer, so neutral. Yet for them they feel like they have gone through something enlightening that evening. Hm... However, I wonder if that conversation reminded Jase about her high school friend's parents who prohibited the relationship she had. Yeah, she is right, how can man be so snobbish, judging what may or must not be done? Why can't black and white both be positive just like the celebrated diverging and converging of music genres?

Jase came to a time where she thought

she had had enough of love. Better living like a monk, she said to herself, desiring no single thing, hurt by nothing. Why not, right? For if there is no right or wrong, if choosing anything is okay, choosing nothing is also a fine choice.

Her family has started to ask what she would do after the degree, a typical question I myself will have too when I reach my late thirties. Answering that as if she did not know what they suggested by the question, Jase said, "PhD of course!" I wonder if Jase just disappointed her family. Did Jase betray the family's virtue of happiness that were marriage and descendants? Jase had her own idea of "marriage" which I may or may not elaborate here.

But anyway, Jase betrayed both her own wish to live like a monk and her family's to throw a wedding party. Yup,

she fell in love again and still did not think of marrying anyone.

Instead of locking herself up in her room, that idea of having enough of love made her go out and meet people. Thinking of having nothing to lose, being bulletproof, Jase had not realized where she was until she was amidst all the war. Serendipity in this case, for good or bad the word was, brought two guys down, victimized because they thought Jase liked them. Man! Jase was just being herself doing nothing special for no particular person! Can you leave her alone? Huh, but I can understand, you know. Jase (and maybe myself too) is the only one(s) able to see the bigger picture here; the guys had no idea what Jase was trying to do. Sorry, guys, for breaking your heart; Life is full of betrayals, no?

But then again. In a war there is a big chance to get shot. Especially when

your Achilles heel is compassion. There I
found what my favourite novelist calls as,
"A baby in a bulrush basket on a river".
That metaphor Milan Kundera himself warned
me not to use was the one Jase used to
explain to her new girlfriend what she
was for her. Jase liked how the metaphor
rendered a smile in her girlfriend's face,
"When you are as vulnerable as the baby
Moses on the Nile, how could I not pick you
up?"

Jase betrayed her ex-boyfriend, as
much as I betrayed my best friend and
Kundera's warning to keep my heart safe.
"A metaphor can give birth to love," he
says in the novel. True. And love gives
birth to betrayal.

I wish to end my betrayal story, but
I do not want kill myself, nor Jase. So let
us just call it a day.

Today is Saturday, 26 December 2015.

Last night I met Jase and she told me her
story. I wanted to end this by clarifying
the last bit of Jase's girlfriend's story,
but you might have guessed what happened
after that.

So I would rather note how Jase's
ex-boyfriend came out to her the last day
before she finally went abroad. He said he
had been too spoiled, thinking that she
would not leave him no matter what. He
was not wrong actually; Jase did and still
does love him. What he did not know was
the fact that Jase trusted him so much she
believed she was left and therefore needed
a cure. So yes, Jase betrayed him with her
girlfriend who ended up betraying her.

Friday, 15 January 2016. To make use of the Christmas holiday I decided to go home. The idea of that instead of travelling around Europe is debatable. I even questioned it as I was in the tube station to Heathrow. "Why am I doing this?"

But strangely, the same question occurred again when I was heading to my country's airport three weeks later to go back to London. Why do I have to leave home? Is it not nice enough? Twelve hours of sunlight a day, the evergreens, familiar faces. Have I gone weary that I felt I had to go? But I stepped on the plane anyway. The 15-hour flight and some more hours on the tube made the London air I breathed that day feel different.

Colder, vivid, I told myself, "Hey, welcome home!"

Ah!

No!

I'm sorry.

You were wrong, Farren.

You were confused!

These thoughts about betrayal,

you'd better forget it!

**There is no
such a thing
as
betrayal.**

The idea of betrayal happens when we negate an idea we previously held as right, something that we thought we wanted. Something that was better than the other thing. But if nothing is right or wrong, better or worse than the other, how can we negate them?

"We can never know what to want, because living only one life, we can neither compare it with our previous lives nor perfect it in our lives to come. ... There is no means of testing which decision is better, because there is no basis for comparison. We live everything as it comes, without warning, like an actor going on cold. And what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is the life itself?"

- Milan Kundera,

The Unbearable Lightness of Being

Jase's huge fight with her ex-boyfriend was filled with his argument that had he not betrayed her, she would not have worked that hard, joined the course and got accepted at the university and got the scholarship. But really? How would he know? I'm standing for Jase in this case. He hurt her; that is the fact, for good or bad.

Putting this pattern in my case of staying in my home country or being here in London: which one is better? I used to without hesitation stand for the first. But this feeling of going back to London signs me the beginning of calling this place "home" too. We don't say "I go back home," right? That will be redundant. So the idea of home consists not only of "as a place we stay in" but "as a place we go back to" as well.

Being in one home and not the other in one time is a fair thing to do. We simply cannot be in two places at the same time. It is like walking. We have two legs; The left is used to push the right forward and the other way around, is it not?

All the love Jase and I still have to people who betrayed us or whom we betrayed made them our homes because we can always come back to them. If the act of leaving is a betrayal so the act of coming back is an anti-betrayal. And if that is the case, what is significant in both acts but the deeper meaning they suggest in the end? Like the enlightenment about the music genres I suppose, which is good in itself, in spite of the neutral conclusion.

Being a human liking another human is like being a steel handrail getting hot by sunlight, or cold by rain, or mild by both. True that hot and cold are about taking and giving the heat. But who measures the heat? Our skin! Human's!

Think about hot and cold not as two entities opposing each other; they are not entities at all if there's no human measuring them. So we have to include our hands! The idea of hot occurs when there is a transfer of heat from the hot thing to your hand; and the idea of cold appears when the heat transfer is from your hand to the cold thing. So the positive and negative relation, the take and give, is not between the hot and cold things themselves, but between each of them and you!

Do you see where I am going with this?

Now ask yourself if man is the opposite of woman. Is that true? Identifying yourself to one gender and uncritically orienting yourself sexually to what you call the "opposite" gender is like identifying yourself as either hot or cold and desiring the opposite of what you are. In that sense, you are not being the human measuring the hot and cold!

Jase is a human. As much as you can touch and measure the temperature of things whether they are hot or cold, Jase can like and love anyone! When one of her friends asks her, "So where do you think you are inclined more to? Boys or girls?", I answer, "Can you choose one between Christina or Laura, considering the fact that you do not know both of them deep enough? Me, I can't choose between Christina's kind or Laura's kind. That is an even harder question." Jase loves someone as a person, not because of the gender categorisation.

I am not defending Jase. I only consider, acknowledge, understand, appreciate, embrace, things in life so as to enable me to move forward. A life worth living is the one that is reflected upon right?

Marriage for Jase
and settling down for me
have nothing to do with commitment
-,which is the effort
to hinder us from betraying our choices.

Shall I go back to my home country,
let me do it only because
I love the place,
not due to the scholarship obligation.

If Jase is going to marry someone
let her do that because
she loves the person,
not for the sake of reproduction
or governmental social stability.

Let us love. Would you?

FARREN ALEKSANDR

a confessor's betrayal

H O M E
F R O M
A W A Y

Away from Home

(a betrayer's confession)

Home from Away

(a confessor's betrayal)

Site	: the (15-hour Jakarta-London) flights
Topic	: being in between (betraying)
Mode	: autobiographical
Exploration	: potentials of autobiography, kinds of voice, story-telling modes, positionality, space on page
Form of piece	: artist's book + blog

“... it is through writing, as well as speaking, that thinking takes places.”

- Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing*

This site-writing project reflects my thinking process about an idea of betrayal which came to me when I was on the flights to and fro Jakarta-London. It manifests also my response to the challenges I encountered as I was realising the project. To make the project socially useful, how is it to make the idea live in people? When the topic is considered taboo in one context, how can I deal with it?

Through this note I will explain how this piece overcomes those challenges. This note is divided into three parts, each explaining the thinking process behind this project: the site and the topic, the response, and the artist's book and blog.

The site and the topic:

The (15-hour) flights and the state of being in between (betraying)

Flight is a place that is more often identified by time than space. 'Where are we now?' in a flight is usually answered by 'oh, we've been flying for ... hours' or 'it's ... hours to go.'

It is a weird feeling being in a flight. Especially when the view outside of the window defines no floor, wall, or roof, which maybe is why we don't bother location as much as track of time.

Flight is a time capsule. Vacuity. Maybe it is like the idea of the Little Prince and his desert, or Dante and St. Augustine in their exile.

The vacuity lead me to this thought about the flights themselves, flights that connected the two countries, Indonesia and UK, and about the notion of betraying one of them for the other. Do I betray my own country?

Mulling about it further, it actually applies to many other dualities as well. For example, staying in one's career path as a theorist makes one loyal to one affiliation (home), while changing direction to be a practitioners is usually seen as deviating (away); being a certain gender liking the opposite gender is normal (home), while the same gender abnormal (away); etc. And despite the deviation, isn't (at least) being reflective important?

“

The excavation of one's roots, one's own language and tradition, constitutes the most fertile terrain of inspiration.”

- Julia Kristeva, *The Anxiety of Interdisciplinarity*

Betraying in the end is a way to move on.

The response:

Exhibiting a culturally-taboo notion

An idea so simple, general, and obvious is usually the easiest one to overlook. In the case of the forgotten importance of betrayal, one is too used to what's normal¹ and therefore becomes uncritical about life itself, which unfortunately makes one loses one's sense in perceiving and judging the world.

For example. As I wish to talk about this notion of leaving my country to study, I'll be simply judged a betrayer. The idea of deviating (being reflective and critical) becomes viscerally unacceptable here. This is a huge problem to solve, and which is why this idea important to disseminate.

But the questions are: *how is it to make the idea live in people? And when the topic is considered taboo in one context, how can I deal with it?* The answer is rendered by these following notions:

“

The only acceptable goal of human activities is the production of subjectivity that constantly self-enriches its relationship with the world.”

- Felix Guattari

”

In Indonesia, poetry survived, simply because the bureaucratic regime doesn't have time to read poems. To them, poetry is useless ... But ah, that's the beauty of poetry.”

- Goenawan Mohamad²

What I draw from their notions are these two facts: subjectivity and situatedness play an important role to make one idea significant; and poetry (or any form of analogical literature) is a powerful way to penetrate people's mind. In conclusion, I response this challenge by making an autobiographical novel. Through this project I am using myself as “the terrain for privileged experiences and for the synthetic principle behind the work.”³

¹ This is what is suggested by Milan Kundera in his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*; a life that is too light (too comfortable) is unbearable.

² The founder of *Tempo Magazine*; the prominent figure of Indonesian fight for literature freedom, whose principle is, “You have to fight it... you cannot complain about it and not fight it.” In his era, he succeeded in fighting for freedom of press in

Soeharto's regime and therefore in promoting Indonesia's 1998 governmental revolution.

³ As was explained by Nicolas Bourriaud's in his text, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), “The artists go so far as to present themselves as worlds of on going subjectivation, or as the models of their own subjectivity.”

The artist's book + blog:

Expanding the idea to reach wider audience

Artist's book

Taking a form of autobiographical novel of Farren Aleksandr (my pseudonym⁴), the book consists of a part about Farren and her friend's (Jase) life betrayals and a part about Farren's revelation about it. There is also a hidden third part (epilogue) in the book which is the key of this project; Farren and Jase are actually the same person.⁵ This demonstrates Farren's (my) anxiety, fear, as well as urge to come out.⁶

1. Cover and binding:

The book has two covers which are upside down to each other. The main one, with a drawing of a hand covering the title of the book (which illustrates the insecurity of the book being opened), is marked by the more intricate part of the strap binder. The binder itself hinders the book to be fully opened, which yields the reader a personal spatial relation when reading it. In addition to that, the diagonal angle of it also symbolically renders the coordinates and track of the Jakarta-London flights.

2. Front matter:

A colophon, a dedication page, and 'this book is belong to' page.

3. Body matter:

The first part is written on tracing paper with a bold typeface, while the second, which is upside down underneath the first part, is on normal paper with a thinner typeface. This resembles the notion of surface (the story of events) and depth of thinking behind it. The upside down direction forces the reader to actually perform the idea of changing direction as in the act of betraying.

4. End matter:

This part is hidden on a folded sheet behind the colophon page.

Blog (www.farrenaleksandr.tumblr.com)

The blog consists of three pages. 'Home' is a page readers' reviews or comments; 'About' is a short overview about the artist's book itself; 'Talk to me' enables readers to contact Farren. The blog aims to deliberate readers in sharing their opinion. These different voices enrich each other and form a critical thinking, which with the help of social media, may extend the idea in the book to a wider audience.

⁴ Due to clash between the importance of the subject and my personal reluctance to come out, a pseudonym is used as the win-win solution.

⁵ This part allows people (who actually care to be critical about the idea) to really comprehend the whole sense and feeling of anxiety that a person can have about this situation.

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⁶ More than only as a mask to hide, this shifts of positions helped me to neutrally mull about the dilemma and to actually write the story.

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2016. London
MA Architectural History 2015-6
Module BENVGAH4:
Theorising Practices/Practicing Theory: Art, Architecture and Urbanism