AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

HOW TO RESEARCH INACCESSIBLE AND UNDER-STUDIED AREAS: THE CASE OF HAWIJA, IRAQ

by
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【感谢我开明的父母，给予了我选择的权力，支持了我想做的事情】

ABSTRACT

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What are the alternative methods the scholars have utilized amid field inaccessibility due to conflict and post-conflict contexts? What methodological and ethical challenges researchers should be cognizant of when adopting a distant approach? What methods can be adopted to investigate regulatory systems in Hawija from afar based on its local context? This study explored distant methods and proposed a methodology for my originally planned field research on Hawija that was voted down due to security concerns. I reviewed the methods adopted by the scholars encountering empirical infeasibility in the Middle East and North Africa. By categorizing their choices of methods into three groups, this thesis analyzed their associated methodological and ethical challenges. In addition, to develop a practical methodology for conducting the planned research from afar, I resorted to local NGO staff and researchers possessing research experience in Hawija to inspect local context and logistical challenges. By proposing a combined approach of "glocal" collaboration and online interview, this work made methodological contributions to study conflict and post-conflict contexts, and more specifically, to investigate legal pluralism in areas of limited statehood.

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CHAPTER 1

FIELD INACCESSIBILITY AS THE TWIST IN THE PLAN

My originally planned for master's thesis was to study the judicial landscape and the empirical legitimacy of regulatory systems in Iraq's Hawija district. It was provisionally titled "Who Complied with What (&Whom) in Hawija from 2014 to 2017: Regulatory Systems in Areas of Limited Statehood," when Kurdish forces took over the governorate and fought against ISIS amid Iraqi army's withdrawal (Figure 1). It planned to adopt an interpretivist ethnographic approach to conduct field research in Hawija in order to examine the various judicial systems that were simultaneously operating during this period by the state and multiple violent non-state actors. While being warned by my supervisor of a potential disapproval by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) due to security concerns, I continued formulating the proposal and submitting it for IRB review process, hoping that addressing all ethical concerns in methodology would allow me to obtain an IRB approval. However, this topic was turned down by the thesis committee at proposal defense stage for its members believed that the fieldwork in Hawija bore security risk. This risk could induce unpredictable review times and outcomes from the IRB. While field inaccessibility posed as a twist to my plan, it is never an incidental event in academia. Noticing that discussions on regulatory systems in Hawija remain a research gap, I decided to continue the topic from a different angle through developing a methodology to accommodate the inaccessible field induced by conflict and post-conflict contexts.

This chapter serves as an introduction to my thesis on "How to Research Inaccessible and Under-studied Areas: The Case of Hawija, Iraq." Composed of five

sections, the introduction starts with two sections depicting the factors, including field inaccessibility and institutional restrictions, leading to my field access inability. In the section "Field Inaccessibility in the Middle East," I listed the elements (triggering inaccessibility) that have been mentioned by scholars when trying conducting field research on the Middle East, such as conflict and post conflict contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc. In the "Institutional Restrictions" section, I elaborated on the nature of the Institutional Review Board and its criticisms. Following that, I introduced research questions, objectives, and significance to explain why I aimed to produce a methodological proposal for research in Hawija. Last, but not least, I elucidated the methodology that I adopted for this thesis and presented a thesis outline.

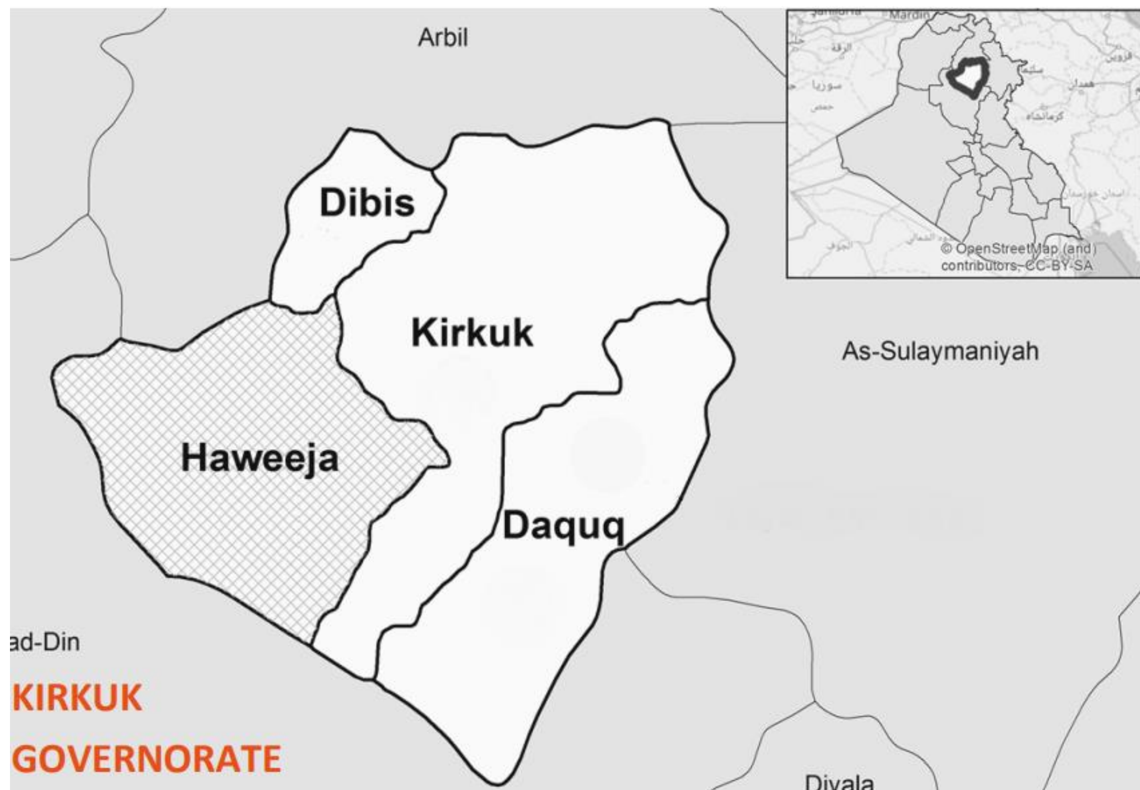

Figure 1. Map of Hawija/Haweeja, Iraq (PAX 2019: 1, edited by the author)

1.1. Field Inaccessibility in the Middle East

Before the 1970s, political scientists studying the Middle East were largely marginalized as they were caught in an awkward position (Lynch 2022: 9). These scholars' limited access to "quality public opinion research, meaningful election results, or reliable economic data" impeded them from impressing the discipline of political science that concentrated on "quantitative, formal, and behavioralist approaches" (Lynch 2022: 10). Hence, the discipline of political science valued theoretical sophistication more than regional knowledge at that point. Meanwhile, the disciplines relying on ethnographic field research were so predominant in Middle Eastern studies that forced the area studies to exclude quantitative approach (Lynch 2022: 10). It was not until the 1990s and 2000s that a new generation of political scientists appeared with the possession of both theoretical sophistication and regional experience (Lynch 2022: 11). While this generation pushed for development of field studies in political science discipline, the upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 triggered a reconsideration of "the field's most well-developed theories" (Lynch 2022: 17). In addition, with the influx of young intellectuals with deep and long experience from the region to the West amid post-uprising backlashes, the political science field flourished with regional knowledge (Lynch 2022: 27). Although the uprisings provided an increased access to the region for political scientists, their instable aftermaths have constituted the uncertainty and risk that made ground research less feasible. While the inaccessibility induced by conflict and post-conflict contexts which I encountered have long been discussed by scholars with limited outcomes, the recent travel restrictions triggered by COVID-19 pandemic have put an emphasis on the necessity to address field inaccessibility due to its widespread impacts on academia. In addition to these two

main factors, institutional constraints and natural disasters arouse some concerns to scholars researching the Middle East and North Africa region. Hence, this section addresses field volatility triggered by three main causes, conflict and post-conflict context, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other factors including host country's authorizations and environmental hazards.

1.1.1. Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts

Conflicts populated by state and non-state armed actors targeting civilians have posed new challenges for field researchers (Malejacq and Mukhopadhyay 2016: 1011). The Middle East and North Africa region is witnessing a growing amount of intra-state conflicts tying "particularistic sub-national claims" to macro-regional dynamics," which expand beyond its state borders (Constantini and Milton 2021: 27). In addition to the protracted conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, other areas, such as the Sinai Peninsula, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon, have undergone varying forms of uncertainty and volatility (Constantini and Milton 2021: 27). These conflict contexts exacerbate the challenges of fieldwork in several ways due to "the absence of principles of rule of law and individual legal protection as well as…the fragmentation of authority, the presence of violent confrontations, and unpredictable developments" (Malthaner 2014: 176). These conditions not only disrupt research plans and investigators' control over research processes but also make researchers and participants more vulnerable in the field (Malthaner 2014: 176). Multiple scholars had suffered from the hostile environments. Kylie Moore-Gilbert, an Australian political scientist at Melbourne University, was accused of "being a Mossad agent, an MI6 agent or a spy for Australia" and imprisoned for 804 days when attending an academic conference in Iran (2022:

Doherty). Fariba Adelkhah, a Franco-Iranian researcher specialized in Shiism and post-revolutionary Iran, was imprisoned for five years when conducting research in Iran (SciencesPo 2023). Giulio Regeni, a Cambridge PhD candidate, for example, was killed when conducting research in Egypt (Clark and Cavatorta 2018: 2). All these incidents indicate the challenges faced by those researching in the Middle East. More importantly, these incidents are related to the socio-political dynamics of the region. For instance, Clark and Cavatorta believe that the killing of Giulio Regeni in Egypt highlights the risk associated with politically sensitive topics when "the shifting terrain after the uprisings…has influenced the ability of scholars to conduct research [in the Middle East]" (2018: 2). They add that "since the Arab Spring, human rights activists and scholars alike have been banned from entering Egypt or put on watch lists at Egyptian airports" (Clark and Cavatorta 2018: 2). Ahram also reflects on the rise and fall of social science in Iraq by relating the development of social science discipline on Iraq to its history: the closed nature of the Ba'th regime in pre-2003 Iraq made field research unfeasible; the 2003-2011 US occupation increased the level of field accessibility leading to an unprecedented advancement in social science research on Iraq; and the 2011 US withdrawal reintroduced political instability and risks to scholars which marginalized Iraq in social science field again (857-858: 2016). Malthaner's (2014) experience in Lebanon resonates with Ahram's reflection as well. While the Israeli offensive and the following tension between Hezbollah and Prime Minister Signiora's coalition in 2006 hindered him from traveling to the country, the "victorious" aftermath created opportunities for him to access more information because people from the South became willing to share their experience (2014: 176). According to the aforementioned examples, the hostile environments created by the intertwinement

between political science and politics can limit scholars' physical access to populations and restrict their research capacity (Gailloux el al. 2022: 2-3). Therefore, field instability has held scholars back from proceeding with their research on conflict and post-conflict context.

More importantly, field inaccessibility shows the imbalanced concentration of fieldwork across the globe because political dynamics, such as "closed borders, political repression, and military conflict," have rendered and continue to render field impracticality (Kapiszewski 2015: 45). According to a survey conducted by Clark, an overwhelming number of political scientists studying the Middle East took issues of feasibility into consideration when selecting countries for fieldwork (2006: 418). Few researchers chose conflict zones for fieldwork due to practical challenges, such as "the impeded ability to travel and discuss politics freely, access to relevant individuals and materials, and the ethical concerns related to putting interviewees in danger" (Clark 2006: 418). In addition, Clark's study shows that "countries experiencing the most acute political upheavals are least studied in terms of in-depth field research" (2006: 418). Hence, compared to the attention given to those countries in a stable condition, research on conflicted countries in the Middle East has been heavily constrained.

This imbalance should not be neglected because field inaccessibility in these countries can cause topics on conflict and post-conflict contexts to be under-researched, whose impacts can extend from the academia to practical sphere. Taking Hawija as an example, although it is not an active combat zone, multiple institutions have voiced concerns over its security environment. Center for Civilians in Conflict states that taking advantage of its geographical landscape, ISIS "has been regrouping and returning to the insurgency-style tactics the organization used prior to 2014" (2019: 8). Since

2018, Kirkuk governorate had witnessed an increased number of attacks and activities of ISIS (Center for Civilians in Conflict 2019: 13). The International Crisis Group resonated with the Center's 2019 report by claiming that attacks from ISIS, whose "activity [was] concentrated in rural parts of Hawija]," were escalating in 2020 (2020: 15). The perception of Hawija being a dangerous district is also reflected in the government-imposed curfew that foreigners can only access the field from 9am to 2pm (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Despite those local NGOs and journalists remained optimistic about the security situation in Hawija when I evaluated its safety risks in Spring 2023, the circulated perception of ISIS infiltration in the field could pose an unpredictable security risk to me as a foreigner. The volatility induced by this post-conflict context prevented me from accessing the field. Except for NGOs' security reports targeting the governorate in general and an investigation on airstrike, no academic work has been produced specifically on governance mechanisms in Hawija. This hindrance of understanding and accommodating local context can impede efficient governance and peace building missions in the district or even the governorate because Hawija is located within a contested region between the Iraqi federal government and Kurdish regional government. Therefore, it is necessary to explore new ways to proceed with the investigation of regulatory systems in Hawija amid field inaccessibility.

1.1.2. The COVID-19 Pandemic

While the conflict and post-conflict context-induced field inaccessibility has motivated a few scholars to address "the difficulty of developing rapport with interlocutors, an absence of shared sensations, barriers to conveying the nuance of a question or perceiving the full meaning of an answer during an interview, and reduced

or non-existent opportunities for observing social environments," the globality of the COVID-19 pandemic has demanded wide-ranging reflection on methodological hurdles from researchers (Gailloux et al. 2022: 1-2). Gallioux et al. state that the pandemic extended to affect "interviewers, participants, community stakeholders, and volunteers…even [those] relatively privileged ones" (2022: 2). The rapid shrinkage of physical space led by "global travel restrictions, social distancing guidelines, and public health guidance" was not a challenge posed solely to the Middle East and North Africa (Lawrence 2022: 155). However, the pandemic still has an uneven impact on researchers. Those quantitative studies relying on existing data did not experience the blow as heavy as those qualitative ones that interact with human subjects across the world (Lynch 2022: 29; Madimu 2021: 1). Chayanika Saxena, for example, who was a PhD student planning to conduct fieldwork on Afghan refugees and migrants in New Delhi and Kolkata, was locked out of her field due to the imposed lockdowns by the Indian government (2023: 322). While she opted to communicate with the respondents through digital technologies, the insufficient and inefficient nature of online access led by "patchy internet connection, lack of appropriate apparatuses…and a general reluctance to speak on camera for the apprehension of being recorded" forced her to terminate the study (Saxena 2023: 327). Leigh Lawrence, a researcher from the UK, was forced to leave China where she was conducting ethnographic fieldwork due to COVID restrictions and settled for online interviews (2022: 155). As the pandemic-related measures jeopardized field studies, unexpected circumstances could cause deviation or even the collapse of in-situ research plans, especially for those adopted a qualitative approach. This worldwide impact, which was not limited to the Middle East,

has made the presentation of contingency plans pragmatic and urgent among researchers.

Despite that some scholars could resume their fieldwork after getting a COVID-19 vaccine, others had to terminate or abandon their fieldwork due to the travel restrictions posed by national policies or closed borders (Krause et al. 2021: 5). Therefore, different stipulations on social interactions amid the pandemic affected populations in various ways. Meanwhile, research participants also suffered from COVID exposure risk during physical interaction in the field. Their fears of infection could discourage them from engaging in empirical fieldwork (Gailloux et al. 2022: 3). What's more, Saxena spotted the geopolitics in the pandemic which "reinforced the differences between the national Self and the external 'Other' (2023: 328). The involvement of geopolitics in the pandemic could modify the researcher's positionality and even terminate research by declining the 'Other's requests. In addition, the pandemic brought other side-effects to academia, such as frozen travel budgets and limited research funding (Krause et al.: 2021: 1). Therefore, the impacts of the pandemic that could lead to disruptions of field accessibility went beyond travel restrictions. Scholars should take all the side-effects into consideration when proposing alternative plans.

1.1.3. Other Factors of Field Inaccessibility

In addition to conflict and post-conflict context plus COVID restrictions, researchers studying the Middle East face other factors leading to field inaccessibility, such as host country's authorizations and environmental hazards. While some countries enjoy a high level of stability, their authoritarian practices and arbitrary nature can

deteriorate rule of law and threaten individual protection. For instance, Matthew Hedges, a PhD student from the UK, was alleged to have spying activities and sentenced to life imprisonment when conducting research in the UAE (Charles et al. 2021: 2). Similar to the measures in conflict and post-conflict contexts, researchers have to ensure their own and participants' safety. Moreover, authoritarianism can affect researchers' findings by luring them into nonsensitive topics and offering them easy access in return (Clark and Cavatorta 2018: 7). These access authorizations can be used by authoritarian regimes as a bargaining chip. Declining that can result in obstructing access to the field.

Moss et al. list the complexities of getting research permits as one of the challenges of fieldwork as some countries require foreign researchers to apply for research permits before entering the field (2019: 89). Obtaining research authorization from the host country of the research field, such as Turkey, could mean granting state access to data which include details of research participants (Moss et al.: 2019: 89). Other than the ethical dilemma induced by the permits, researchers studying the Middle East suffered from declined authorizations. Janine Clark's survey indicates that "eleven percent [of the researchers] stated that they had been denied permits or authorizations" and that "22% of the researchers noted that they at one point had difficulties gaining entry to the countries of research or obtaining visas due to the perceived political sensitivity of their topics by the host governments" (2006: 418). Even arriving at the host country where the research site is located cannot guarantee unrestricted movement. Zina Sawaf, for example, an anthropologist researching women in Saudi Arabia, not only failed to obtain research approval from the Ministry of Social Affairs, but also faced daily surveillance and gender segregation imposed by religious police (2017: 17,

22). Nevertheless, Sawaf was still able to continue her study by finding her way through the restrictions in the closed and exceptional field (2017: 18). Hence, host country's requirement of research permits can affect field accessibility in the Middle East and North Africa. However, the control over research authorization does not rule out field access possibility. The places and stages where access disapprovals are enforced affect research plans in various ways.

Although scholars like Krause et al. (2021) and Gailloux et al. (2022) briefly mention natural factors, such as climate change and environmental hazards, in their studies, little research has been devoted to the field inaccessibility induced by natural disasters in the Middle East. While contextual dynamics and travel restrictions play an important role in upending fieldwork plans, factors from the investigator's side can also obstruct access to fields by imposing institutional restrictions.

1.2. Institutional Restrictions

1.2.1. What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB)

IRB, which is an ethical review committee in an institution, was mandated by the US Department of Health and Human Services to "protect the rights of research participants" in 1981 due to "past practices committed in the name of research" (Musoba 2014: 1). Kim presents its ethical codes as the following:

> "1) the risks are rational and minimized in relation to the anticipated benefits to the subjects based on a risk/benefit analysis; 2) the choice of subjects is equitable; 3) informed consent is obtained from each potential subject or a legally responsible representative unless waived in harmony with the law and guidelines. This should be documented on the consent form; 4) when subjects are likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, additional safeguards are needed; 5) appropriate monitoring and observation with continuing review should be scheduled when collecting data to ensure the safety of the subjects, protect the privacy of participants and to maintain the confidentiality of data" (2012: 8).

The US federal policy stipulates that all studies involving human subjects must either receive approval from the IRB based on the ethical codes or be exempted from IRB's regulatory review (Walker 2016: 309). Thus, all researchers investigating human subjects need to apply for IRB review to address ethical risks associated with their studies before proceeding with them. However, this regulation that was meant to "[bind institutions] to administer any federal research funds [they] receive by federally mandated standards," has exposed social science researchers to two main challenges (Bledsoe et al. 2007: 594). Firstly, while the IRB was initially designed for medical and clinical research, its review was later exported to social science and qualitative research (Hamilton 2005: 193). Secondly, local IRBs, like the one at the American University of Beirut[1], were designed not only to protect human subjects, but also to protect institutions from litigation as a result of causing harm to human subjects during research (Hamilton 2005: 191). While the IRB was established for ethical reviews on research plans before implementation, its extension of application and fear of risks make the approval obtainment an exhaustive process to investigators. For decades, criticisms have revolved around the IRB review in the field of social science.

1.2.2. Criticisms of the IRB

Medical and clinical studies are fundamentally different from the social science ones. Medical studies, according to Hamilton, are "frozen-solid" because they involve "a single researcher with a small number of subjects, much lower financial stakes, fewer lawyers and politicians affecting the system, and far fewer conflict-of-interest issues" compared with studies from social science fields (2005: 195). Moreover, the IRB

[1] Since the American University of Beirut (AUB) receives support from the US federal department, it contracted with the US government to set up an IRB review in 1994.

review cannot accommodate the fact that ethical decisions involved in qualitative research are not a “one-time event” but an “ongoing process” (Musoba et al. 2014: 4). In addition, Musoba et al. argue that the medical-based IRB reviews can be ill-fitting for social science studies because it does not understand qualitative approach (2014: 4). Non-experimental field research requires researchers to enter participants’ spaces where they may be unfamiliar with (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008: 490). Researchers must deal with the settings, persons, times, and documents that they do not have control of (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008: 490). This absence of control demonstrates that “the relational character that lies at the heart of field research, especially when participants are seen, and treated, more as partners than as subjects” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008: 490). For instance, when applying for approval of my fieldwork in Hawija, the IRB administrator requested me to clarify the number of participants in the application and consent form. One on hand, I could not presume how many local inhabitants would respond to my interview request before reaching the field site and navigate the network. On the other hand, I couldn’t decide on the exact number before starting data collection as the information I would gain from the interview might push me to change research objectives and methodology. Determining a number at the proposal stage could be absurd. Thus, the uncertainty and power dynamics in the field indicate a fundamental difference in research design for experimental and non-experimental studies. Other than the logical differences, IRB principals, such as selection and exclusion of participants, obtainment of informed consent, research benefits, and data protection, may not fit ground realities (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2008: 490). For example, when I intended to adopt snowball sampling strategy through which I will ask the identified participants to refer contacts to me for interviews, the IRB deemed it as unacceptable due to its

coercive potential. Instead, it proposed to pass invitation flyer through NGO that does not possess any undue influence on lay people, and then wait for those interested participants to contact back. This measure can weaken the study sample as it may recruit the most engaged and the least isolated NGO service users (Fletcher 2019: 384). What's more, in a culturally conservative community like Hawija, local inhabitants may not have the initiative to contact a stranger to seek research participation. The requirement of informed consent may also fail to accommodate the participants from the cultures where "information sharing largely takes place through oral rather than written routes, and through family and informal networks rather than written documents" (Makhoul and Nakkash 2017: 285). While professional associations, such as the European Commission (2021) and American Sociological Association (2018), have developed their own codes for social science to address the distinction between the two research types, Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea argue that the interface between these professional codes and IRB policies is unclear, which is to say that IRB policies may claim superiority over associational codes (2008: 490-491).

Other than failing to develop regulations accommodating social science disciplinary practices, the IRB continues to be criticized for its fear of litigation. Universities setting up IRB offices do not simply mean to follow the federal policy. These institutions, which regard reputation as their most important assets (Musoba et al. 2014: 2), find the IRB an essential ally whose ethical regulations can shield them from legal risks. This mutual goal has extended IRB's role from research ethics regulation to "research governance and risk management" (Musoba et al. 2014: 2). Therefore, IRB's mission includes not only protecting human subjects in research, but also guarding universities from liability, by which it is given the green light to stop, delay, or change

research (Hamilton 2005: 191; Bledsoe 2007: 594). Bledsoe et al. dismiss the power of IRB as the censorship that it imposes upon studies solely addresses institutions' needs rather than research situations (2007: 639). The discrepancy puts investigators in trouble because it discourages research and distorts academic value (Bledsoe et al. 2007: 618). Bledsoe et al. state that some researchers "alter their course not because of any real risk they perceive to their subjects but simply to pass IRB muster" (2007: 619). Moreover, the onerous IRB review reflects the current frustration with conducting research in high-risk environments. Its overdue need for a re-calibration has caused researchers focusing on high-risk environments to "abandon promising avenues of social science field research based on the assumption that permission would never be granted" (Taarnby 2013: 212). While Taarnby believes that IRB's current evaluation standards are only applicable to fieldwork conducted in "permissive to semi-permissive environments" (2013: 212), Bledsoe et al. express that its potential delays and intrusive review tendency has indeed deterred researchers from conducting field projects (2007: 619). My IRB review application on fieldwork in Hawija, for example, was confronted by an extensive list of concerns, consisting of twenty-three questions and comments, to address and a two-week processing time whenever I submitted new information (personal interview, 1 June 2023). In addition, while the IRB raised safety concerns when realizing that I planned field research in Hawija, its decision may not accurately reflect field contexts. For example, Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Russian-Israeli academic at Princeton University who is believed to be kidnapped by an Iran-backed militia when conducting research in Iraq, has gained research approval and funding from her institution (Tucker 2023). Thus, IRB's evaluation could hardly serve as a reference. All these factors discouraged me and my thesis committee from striving for a long due and

inconclusive result. Hence, obstacles associated with the IRB have triggered devastating impacts on academia where student careers were disrupted, tenure clocks were set back, and intellectual essence were blunted (Bledsoe et al. 2007: 594). Researchers have opted to circumvent the challenges by compromising their research objectives. Nevertheless, the evasion should not be taken for granted because under-studied areas remain marginalized and important research insights continue to be neglected due to institutional restrictions.

1.3. Research Questions, Objectives, and Significance

While field inaccessibility and institutional restrictions prevented me from traveling to Hawija to conduct my originally planned research, I was unable to substitute the planned topic with desk research because the examination of regulatory systems in areas of limited statehood (ALS) remains under-researched. Nevertheless, research difficulties do not justify the abandonment of this topic. Although the academics have recently stopped viewing ALS as an exotic exception but as part of daily life, little outcome has been shown on the programmatic level (Santini et al. 2021: 7). The international community continues to regard building sustainable state institutions as the core of peace-building missions because formal state actors are seen as a necessity for peace and good governance (Call 2008: 1498). However, this monolithic perception of sovereign state as the sole legitimate actor indeed jeopardizes peace and contributes to insecurity and tensions (Call 2008: 1498-1499). Governance in the Middle East has frequently been conducted through involving de facto powerholders, such as tribal leaders, religious figures, etc. (Ahram and Lust 2016: 24-25). Due to the existence of shadow state, navigating ways to accommodate the co-

existence between de jure and de facto powerholders and understanding the dynamics where the role of de jure actors is compromised can be helpful to realize peacebuilding missions. Therefore, the topic of regulatory systems in Hawija cannot be simply abandoned.

On the other hand, while I tried finding a way through field inaccessibility in Hawija, the discussion of research methods vis-à-vis inaccessible and under-researched areas remains a gap in scholarly literature as well. Scholars, such as Adam Dolnik (2013), have proposed methodology manuals for ethnographic research in high-risk environments without taking field inaccessibility into consideration. Hence, before continuing the research on legal pluralism in Hawija, I decided to divert my topic from investigating regulatory systems in Hawija to addressing research methods adapting to inaccessible and under-researched areas in the Middle East and North Africa. Through examining the distant methods that researchers have used to accommodate inaccessible fields, I argue in this thesis that I as a researcher can launch planned investigation on regulatory systems in Hawija from afar. In addition to proposing alternative methods for under-researched fields, I would like to resume my research on regulatory systems in Hawija by dedicating this thesis as a methodological proposal for future academic work. Hence, the research objectives are the following: 1) what are the alternative methods that have been utilized by scholars amid empirical difficulties; 2) what methodological and ethical concerns researchers should be cognizant of when adopting a distant approach; 3) what methods can be adopted to investigate regulatory systems in Hawija from afar based on its local context.

This thesis designates "inaccessible" areas as conflict and post-conflict contexts where researchers cannot launch empirical studies due to safety concerns. Whereas

"under-studied" areas refer to the research fields that cannot be supplemented by desk research due to the poverty of available resources, such as popular views and official data. Other obstacles, such as COVID-19 travel restrictions, will not be addressed in this research since lots of scholars have discussed alternatives to field inaccessibility induced by travel restrictions. More importantly, data management and protection in conflict and post-conflict contexts is at another level as "the right to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality becomes of utmost importance" on one hand and compromised on the other (Owor 2022: 7-8). Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the following question: how to conduct research on inaccessible and under-studied areas in the Middle East and North Africa?

1.4. Methodology

Acknowledging the reality of field inaccessibility, I tailored my master's thesis to methodology development to fill the gap on researching inaccessible and under-studied areas. On one hand, Wedeen, who emphasizes the importance of incorporating interpretivist ethnography approach into political science field, declares that this approach "involves researchers witnessing and participating in everyday life in ways that attune them to phenomena that otherwise might dodge their purview" (2022: 57). Nevertheless, other scholars have conducted distant research due to practical difficulties. In this research, I resorted to the methodology of mapping, referring to "a type of structured conceptualization method designed to organize and represent ideas from an identified group," and engaging, referring to in-depth consultations with the identified group (Rosas and Kane 2011). The identified group from where the ideas were organized are political scientists, anthropologists, and social scientists without

access to the fields due to security concerns. I specifically identified scholars from the field of Middle East due to the customary and contextual similarities existed between Iraqi Hawija and their field sites. After spotting the scholars based on the selection criteria, I categorized them into piles according to their methodologies and analyzed each category. In addition to relying on secondary sources, such as scholars' publications, published interviews, personal biographies, reviews on their work, etc., I conducted in-depth online consultations with them to collect data on their research motives and experiences as a supplement to the published works on their methodologies. Semi-structured consultations with open-ended questions were utilized: 1) Facing the inaccessibility of an under-researched field, why do you believe that this topic should not be compromised; 2) Why did you (the scholar) choose this specific research method; 3) What were the obstacles associated with the research method of your choice. In addition to that, I consulted them on methodological and ethical issues specifically associated with their methods, such as sample selection and data protection. According to the criteria, I selected eight scholars who had experience conducting distant research in the Middle East and North Africa amid field inaccessibility.

Simultaneously, I reached out to relevant stakeholders and informants in Hawija to get information about the local research context. The qualitative data extracted from the scholars' work and consultations were analyzed based on the local context in Hawija, for example, how feasible it is to launch online/remote interviews with target participants (i.e., local residents and officials). This process let me practically examine the distant methods proposed by some scholars. It also exposes me to the realities in Hawija that stimulated logistical challenges within distant research process and allows me to develop an adaptable methodology.

Based on the scholars' selection criteria, the ethical and methodological challenges presented in this study may reflect only the research scenarios in the Middle East and North Africa region. As the number of scholars resorting to distant methods is small, the obstacles they proposed in distant studies may not be exhaustive. Moreover, since the research method proposed by this thesis is tailored to a specific topic, it may not be applied to other fields or contexts. I also face additional challenges in the proposed methodology for Hawija other than those mentioned in this study: my lack of Arabic proficiency can trigger poor access to legal documents in Arabic. Plus, a narrow personal network in the field can induce limited access to local inhabitants and judicial personnel. Furthermore, my identity as a Chinese distinguishes me from other scholars' positionalities. Among the eight scholars who I investigated in this study, two of them are descendants of Arabs while the rest are from the West and five of them are female. Perhaps the reactions of local inhabitants in Hawija to me will be challenging due to my nationality, gender, age, educational background etc. Since I could not find a scholar sharing a similar positionality, I should take this variable into consideration when producing research work on this area. I first investigated whether the selected eight scholars encountered similar challenges or not and how they dealt with them. On the other hand, to examine local research context in Hawija, I contacted the local NGO staff, researchers (who had conducted research in Hawija), and journalists (who had worked there) to see what they did specifically to overcome the obstacles in a Hawijian context.

Ethics are always an important element for research on conflict and post-conflict contexts. Kapiszewski et al. states that "researchers studying areas ridden with military conflict, ethnic strife, or violent crime must weigh a complex set of concerns, from

personal security to ethics…" (2015: 45). As my future research on regulatory systems in Hawija will be subjected to IRB's ethical codes, I will not only seek participants' informed consent and allow cessation of participation, but also employ data protection measures to ensure interlocutors' safety. Nevertheless, as what Guillemin and Gillam indicate, there is a distinction between the "procedure ethics" that "[seek] approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans" and the "ethics in practice" that "arise in the doing of research" (2004: 263). Thus, through examining various distant methods proposed by the scholars, I sought to explore their associated ethical challenges in practice while taking the local research context in Hawija into account. These measures could support me to formulate a methodological proposal consisting of a comprehensive ethical consideration for future research on Hawija.

1.5. Thesis Outline

Through presenting my personal experience with the inability to study regulatory systems in Iraqi Hawija, chapter one aims at introducing the background, objectives, and significance of this research. There have been a variety of factors, such as field inaccessibility and institutional restrictions, that impose limits on empirical studies. Therefore, the research plans to focus on the conflict and post-conflict contexts-induced unfeasibility to fill the research gap on distant approach. So, how to research inaccessible and under-studied areas? To answer to this question, let's reflect on three main research objectives: 1) what are the alternative methods that have been utilized by scholars amid empirical difficulties; 2) what methodological and ethical concerns researchers should be cognizant of when adopting a distant approach; 3) what methods can be adopted to investigate regulatory systems in Hawija from afar based on its local

context. To address the objectives, I applied the Mapping and Engaging methodology by reviewing the previously enacted distant methods and consulting relevant scholars on their experience with research from afar. In addition, I interviewed scholars who have researched Hawija to take local context into consideration and tailor the methodological development to the district.

Before elaborating more on field inaccessibility, chapter two introduces the development of fieldwork in political science discipline through describing the local, ethnographic, and interpretive turns that a growing number of researchers prefer focusing on ordinary people than elites, launching long-term fieldwork than short-term field trip, and studying participants' subjective meanings than taking their own premises for granted. While lots of scholars lay emphasis on the necessity of empirical studies, conflict and post-conflict contexts have disrupted their field accessibility and forced them to seek alternatives. The chapter then shows some substituted methods adopted by scholars and provides detail on their project contexts. To further analyze these methods, chapter three categorizes them into three groups, "glocal" collaboration, remote methods, and ethnographic imaginations, according to their methodological foundations and ethical considerations. Through relying on secondary sources and consultations with the scholars, I examined these categories' associated concerns and exposed new aspects in method selection, such as the extent of personal networks in the field, the nature of required data, and the effect of method combination. While these two chapters demonstrate that inaccessible and under-studied areas can be researched, their addressment of methodological and ethical considerations is insufficient to develop a methodology tailored to the examination of regulatory systems in Hawija.

Hence, to ensure proposed methodology's comprehensiveness and practicality, I resorted to the project examining the 2015 Dutch airstrike on Hawija to learn about its local research context in the following chapter. This project is composed of two studies respectively adopting "glocal" collaboration and remote methods' social media analysis. By examining the limitations mentioned in the studies and the consultations with key project personnel, I became aware of the logistical obstacles, such as the curfew imposed on foreigners, and opportunities, such as the recognition of reliable intermediaries, in the field site that can contribute to the formulation of methodology. After being cognizant of the challenges associated with each distant method and the field site, I dedicated chapter five to compiling a methodology on the proposed investigation on Hawija's regulatory systems that operated during the 2014-2017 period. However, the choice of methods is rooted in my planned research objectives. Thus, I firstly introduced the theoretical framework of state formation in Iraq and reviewed previous studies on judicial provisions. Since the proposed objectives of judicial landscape and the operated regulatory systems' empirical legitimacy consist of both factual information accumulation and perception collection, I decided to adopt a combination of "glocal" collaboration and online interviews to proceed with the research on Hawija. While I was able to address some challenges in the proposed methodology, there are still some unsettled concerns before implementing the research, like the technical difficulties, participants' memory duration, my positionality, and funding availability. All these factors can make the proposed methodology susceptible to modification.

Chapter six concludes on the topic of how to research inaccessible and under-studied areas. Through regarding distant methods as practical choice and addressing

their associated challenges, this study developed a proposed methodology tailored to the investigation of the regulatory systems in Hawija. Nevertheless, it may not be applied to other regions because local research dynamics are different from site to site. Moreover, the factor of “conflict and post-conflict contexts” that is adopted in the research is subjected to limitation as its broad definition did not illustrate the detailed level of risks while grouping all relevant contexts in one category. Hence, future researchers seeking alternative methods should take their respective field realities into consideration.

CHAPTER 2

FIELDWORK AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

This chapter is an introduction about fieldwork, which reviews scholarly production ranging from the importance of fieldwork in political science to the obstacles of field inaccessibility. Since the examination on regulatory systems in Hawija, which has been voted down, planned to adopt an interpretivist ethnographic approach to explore its judicial landscape and the empirical legitimacy of the systems, this chapter follows the logical flow from fieldwork in political science to alternatives to fieldwork amid inaccessibility. It is composed of two sections. The first section "Ethnographic Fieldwork in Political Science" discusses political scientists' gradual adoption of long-term, immersive fieldwork through the explanation of local, ethnographic, and interpretive turns. Before proceeding with the section of "Alternatives to Fieldwork," I concluded the first section by elaborating the example of Lisa Wedeen, a political scientist who emphasized the necessity of fieldwork while suffered field inaccessibility induced by conflict and post-conflict contexts. The substituted method she adapted to pave the way for the subsequent section which starts with reviewing the concept of field in fieldwork. Following that it expands on the alternative methods tailored to the inaccessibility induced by conflict and post-conflict contexts, which have been adopted by other scholars focusing on the Middle East.

2.1. Ethnographic Fieldwork in Political Science

This section attributes the development of fieldwork in political science to three main changes: local, ethnographic, and interpretivist turns. These turns indicate a

changing tendency in the discipline that researchers start laying more emphasis on ordinary people than elites, long-term field work than short-term field trip, and participants' subjective meanings than their personal premises. It is noteworthy that boundaries cannot be drawn upon these three turns as they are interdependent and simultaneously bolstering one another's development in political science. However, all of them share a common trait which highlights the importance of fieldwork while implicating field access.

2.1.1. Local Turn

Until the early 2000s, few political scientists had written on field work (Kapiszewski et al. 2015: 1). The research techniques they utilized were borrowed from other disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology (Kapiszewski et al. 2015: 1). The scholarly literature produced from these two disciplines barely addressed political science concerns (Kapiszewski et al. 2015: 2). On the other hand, political scientists hold a skeptical view of field immersion for it can oppress the "objectivist truth" (Kapiszewskil et al. 2015: 11). Hence, the methodology of field work has long remained as a research gap without unified guideline in political science.

However, the local turn, which diverted the attention away from the elite level to grassroot level, had pushed the subfields of political science to produce studies via field work. The peacebuilding field, for instance, witnessed its first and second local turns respectively in the 1990s and early 2000s during when it shifted away from the "liberal peacebuilding project" to advocate the central role of local people in peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2015: 857; 859). Scholars in this field recognize that "knowledge of the subnational context is necessary for the design, planning, and eventual implementation

of peace interventions" (Millar 2018b: 597). Thus, some of them started incorporating ethnographic methods into peace studies (Millar 2018b: 597). Transitional justice also experienced a local turn which highlighted the importance of "local-level knowledge and initiatives" (Kochanski 2018: 26). Multiple scholars endorsed a bottom-up approach to investigate victims and the actual communities where crimes were committed (Kochanski 2018: 30). In addition to that, a focus on everyday concerns has replaced the focus on state and institutions (Gready and Robins 2014: 340). Instead of applying universal norms and stands in the field of transitional justice, some practitioners and social anthropologists adopt the notion of legal pluralism which is aligned with local conception of justice (Kochanski 2018: 32). While studies on conflict and post-conflict areas usually count on elite interviews and documentary analysis rather than investigating those who experience conflicts, the emergence of the local turn impels them to "engage with individuals and communities in conflict affected and post-conflict societies and to try to understand their experiences of conflict, violence, transition, and peace" (Millar 2018a: 253-254). As the subfields of political science gradually immersed themselves in fieldwork, the wave pushing for local turn in political science intensified. Scholars, such as Talal Asad, who is an anthropologist relying on fieldwork, advocates for political science's adoption of local turn because the discipline's concerns with "the functioning, maintenance and change of society as a whole" can neglect the decisions that are made in other concrete social systems, such as families, kinship groups, and associations etc. (1970: 6). Hence, the theoretical development in the post-WWII era laid a foundation for the acceptance and promotion of fieldwork in political science.

Although the idea of local turn was initiated by various subfields that conceptualize the term "local" in manifold ways, all these definitions imply a tendency of "go to the source." This turn in political science did not remain unimpeachable. Scholars, like Oliver P. Richmond (2011), Roland Paris (2010), Thania Paffenholz (2015), and Isabell Schierenbeck (2015), criticized it due to its romanticization of the local, creation of binaries between global and local level, and promotion of illiberal customary systems. Nevertheless, this transition of focus is still necessary in political science discipline because it benefits researched populations by dismissing the traditional narrative which diminishes conflict-affected communities as "victims" and giving them a voice (Mitchell 2013: 1250). All these examples indicate that political science's adoption of the theory-driven local turn has gradually pushed itself to accept a different direction of approach, which is the bottom-up tendency. More importantly, its embrace not only motivates the utilization of fieldwork, but also affects the ethics and methods that are applied in the field, which is further explained in the following part.

2.1.2. Ethnographic Turn

While fieldwork has been adopted as a methodology in political science, scholars' conceptualization effort made its ethical concerns surface. Some of them endowed fieldwork with a spatial notion referring to "working in a different environment or space" (Hall 2010: 8). This notion which ties "the field" to cultural and environmental otherness has contributed to the exoticization of the field (Hall 2010: 8). Chambers believes that the exoticism revolving around the spatial notion can be attributed to the entanglement in colonial mindset of racial hierarchies (2020: 290). Multiple scholars called the exoticism of the field into question. The over-emphasis on

traveling to other space for research has been dismissed by scholars (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Zeleza and Kalipeni 1999; Clifford 1997) as "academic tourism" that encourages "the researcher to act like a stranger or a tourist in a foreign land and to treat the common as exotic and the taken-for-granted as unusual" (Hall 2010: 7). In addition, exoticism triggers a "hierarchy of purity of field sites" that "fieldlike" is more appropriate than "homelike" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 13). Regardless of the essence of their fieldwork, those who were once in the field are granted representative authority and the credibility as capable researchers (Lecocq 2002: 274). This exoticism that entrenched hierarchical relations between foreign researchers and local inhabitants aroused ethical concerns in field work. Moreover, it can grant these researchers a "fieldwork holiday" attitude. Some experts, for example, tagged themselves with "the legitimacy and expertise of first-hand knowledge" based on a one-week stay in the field (Abaza 2011 Jadaliyya). While their handling of changes and developments in the field is superficial, these experts' research outcome can affect the external perception of local inhabitants and shape policies (Abaza 2011 Jadaliyya). Millar resonates with Abaza's critique on short-term field trips. He argues that a researcher's three-week stay in the field, which is equipped with nice hotels, air-conditioned restaurants, and a large SUV, may prevent them from perceiving the real sanitization condition or healthcare system on the ground (Millar 2018c: 14). These "short-term 'field-trip' based interview research" do not equip researchers with a deep understanding of the local context and hinder their capability to interpret the answers they receive (2018b: 599-600). Therefore, scholars dismiss the "drop-in" style of field work and favor a long-term engagement that requires the establishment of rapport with interlocutors to address its ethical considerations.

In addition to the call for a lengthy and immersive fieldwork, the previously mentioned local turn motivates an adoption of ethnographic rather than formal methods in political science. While multiple research methods are applicable when conducting fieldwork with the local, Krause recommends an ethnographic approach with the local residents in conflict and post-conflict contexts because a local turn associating with formal research methods can intimidate the vulnerable individuals (2021: 332). Ethnographic methods serve as better options than the formal ones since they ensure the well-being of respondents by accommodating them in their contexts and daily routines (Krause 2021: 332). Atkinson is also not convinced by the "quick and clean" formal qualitative method (2006: 132). He imposes significance on long-term participant observation as it documents "multiple forms of social action," "local culture," "repeated minutiae," and "slow performance of everyday life" (Atkinson 2006: 134). Furthermore, Millar believes that comprehension of the context of people's lives cannot be gained by utilizing formal methods, but an ethnographic approach that can gear researchers with the interpretation capability to understand people's world (2018c: 10). Therefore, he proposes the advantage of time, chance, and change associated with ethnographic fieldwork. Sufficient time in the field allows researchers to possess a "greater amount of knowledge regarding and engagement with the people and communities" that are studied (Millar 2018b: 600). This long-term immersion can expose researchers to the interaction with an increased variety of actors and institutions plus to the experience with both the good and bad things in society (Millar 2018b: 600). More importantly, long-term fieldwork brings "the opportunity to experience, observe, and investigate change" (2018c: 16). Kapiszewskil et al. demonstrate that this immersion is less likely to be subjective due to the honesty aroused by contextual

engagement and the thoroughness led by continuous presence (2015: 11). Thus, ethical considerations and data contextualization continue pushing political scientists towards the acceptance of ethnographic fieldwork. While the ethnographic turn briefly touches on its advantage of contextualized interpretation, the following part elaborates more on the application of interpretivist ethnography and pushes the necessity of fieldwork in political science to the next level.

2.1.3. Interpretive Turn

While the ethnographic turn seems to blend in with the interpretive turn due to its innate nature, it can also be used in positivist presuppositions (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2013: xxiii). Meanwhile, the interpretive approach includes a variety of methods in addition to ethnography, such as narrative analysis, oral history, discourse analysis, etc. (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2013: xxiii). Therefore, while the ethnographic and interpretive turns interweave into each other, they are ideas possessing disparate concepts.

The interpretive turn in social science, according to Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, was fueled by the English translation of continental philosophical works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (2013: xiii). The turn not only comprises a linguistic consideration but also consists of an appreciation for "the centrality of meaning in human life in all its aspects" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2013: xiv). Those philosophers who turned to continental traditions for hermeneutics and phenomenology inspired anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists to adopt an interpretive approach to the human sciences (Bevir and Rhodes 2015: 12). Yanow and Schwartz-Shea demonstrate that this turn is "a turning toward a rehumanized, contextualized set

of practices" (2013: xiv). Lisa Wedeen resonates with this view and distinguishes interpretivism from positivism (2010: 255). Positivism, which applies scientific rationalism to human behaviors through reducing them to "relationships of cause and effect," is rooted in the assumptions that "human beliefs and actions are identifiable as brute facts, stripped of meaning and hence analogous to classical mechanics," that "scientific explanation seeks general causal laws," and that "the goal of scientific knowledge is prediction" (Lawler and Walder 2023: 222). Hence, some scholars believe that a positivist approach is limited. Interpretivism, on the other hand, "[forswears] generalizations or causal explanations" (Wedeen 2010: 255). It dismisses all these epistemological foundations and puts emphasis on subjective meanings rather than brute facts (Clarke 2009: 29). Colin Hay adds that interpretivism deems specific case-based explanation rather than covering laws (2011: 172). In addition to its distinction from universal rules, interpretivism situates knowledge in power relationships and socially made world to scrutinize the meanings behind discourses. Wedeen supplemented the idea of socially situated meanings with an example of the word "democracy" which implies not only what citizens' view of a polity but also the changing nature of its grammar throughout history (2009: 80; 87-88). Therefore, endowing a reader with the role of interpreter introduces a fusion of horizons, which barely reflects the writer's explanation. To reach the vantage point of the writer, Hay argues that "…understanding is the key to explanation of social and political phenomena…" (2011: 172) This understanding requires embedded research which grants interpretivists the access to the authentic beliefs and meanings through a time-consuming process (Hay 2011: 173).

Wedeen, for example, attributes her successful studies on Yemen and Syria to her long-term commitment to field observation and interaction with inhabitants and

places because the interpretivist involvement in daily life can eschew the reproduction of flawed power relationships (Wedeen 2009: 86). Her publication *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance* (2008) was made from her eighteen months of fieldwork in Yemen lasting from 1998 to 2004 during which Wedeen conducted both open-ended interviews and casual conversations with inhabitants in the field (2008: 17). In addition to that, she investigated source materials ranging from cassette tapes of Friday sermons to NGO surveys (2008: 18). Her work of *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (1999) further reflects her proposition of interpretivist ethnographic method. This piece of work was produced out of her extensive field work as well as archival research in Syria and France. By launching participant observation, open-ended interviews plus discourse analysis, Wedeen successfully explored "the advantages, costs, and political significance of public rituals" and supplemented them with "a symbolic interpretation of the actual content of Asad's cult" (1999: 25). Hence, her interpretivist production cannot be separated from deep and long-term immersions in the field.

Based on the developments in the discipline of political science, interpretivist ethnographic fieldwork does possess unrivalled advantages in terms of its ethical and methodological considerations. Its application in my originally planned research on regulatory systems in Hawija may accumulate invaluable findings on violent non-state actors' role in state formation. Nevertheless, to realize its methodological benefits and run a successful research project on Hawija also requires a major premise—field access. The failure to maintain the premise has prevented me from launching an investigation on Hawija. Believing that I am not alone facing this impasse, the next section explores how other scholars have addressed the obstacle of field inaccessibility.

2.2. Alternatives to Fieldwork

Wedeen's successful work on Yemen and Syria should also be attributed to her privilege and capacity of being able to conduct interpretivist ethnographic research in the field. Following her trip to Syria in 2010, she could not resume her fieldwork since 2011 but conducted "subsequent fieldwork in Lebanon, Turkey, parts of Europe, and the United States, as well as long distance with Syrians still inside Syria" (Jadaliyya 2019). Other than multi-sited fieldwork, Wedeen resorted to online social media conversations and personal networks for communications and counted on cultural products for ethnographic analysis (Mende 2020). While losing field access, she supplemented interpretivist fieldwork with film studies and literary criticism as these fields were exemplary of a broad social logic (Simmons and Smith 2019: 257). Wedeen believes that "…Syrian films, videos, television serials, comedies, and other artistic works by regime- and opposition-oriented cultural producers [were] not simply as evidence for a point, but also as a way of thinking with and through their cultural products" (Simmons and Smith 2019: 258). Rather than regarding these artists as informants, Wedeen considers them as political theorists whose artifacts "expand the space of the interpretive encounter to help diagnose current impasses" (Simmons and Smith 2019: 258). Therefore, Wedeen's example reflects another question which is the definition of "field." While she encourages the adoption of ethnographic fieldwork in political science, her alternative methods composing of off-site fieldwork, online communications, and cultural products as a substitute to the field indicates that studies simultaneously covering local, ethnographic, and interpretive turns in their essence do not have to be field based. Based on Wedeen's case, being physically present at the "field" is not an essential toolkit for producing interpretivist ethnographic analysis.

Suiting one with an ethnographic sensibility and site-intensive methods that allow sustained and intensive interactions with research targets works as well (Jourde 2009: 215). While a fieldwork on site would have been ideal for her to produce work on Syria's authoritarian resilience and sociopolitical developments, field inaccessibility did not suspend her from researching the "field" or publishing the work *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgement, and Mourning in Syria* (2019). Therefore, prior to exploring alternative methods amid field inaccessibility, this section starts with the discussion on the concept of "field."

2.2.1. The Field of Fieldwork

Since the extended period of fieldwork, which is not predominant in the discipline of political science, is customary for anthropologists (Grijalva 2021: 376), the preponderance of discussions on the conceptualization of "field" were contributed by them. Nevertheless, there is no such thing as a disciplinary barrier between anthropology and political science when it comes to research methods.

As what Olivier Labussière and Julien Aldhuy indicate, field and fieldwork as a relational set can be changed by the methodological and theoretical challenges directly connected to lived experience (2012: 583), such as conflict and post-conflict context, COVID-19 travel restrictions, host country's authorization, and environmental hazards mentioned in the previous chapter. This disruption has led academics to critically reflect on the spatial notion of field that praises "research conducted in 'difficult' and '[distant]' regions" (Spector 2019) and dismisses remote fieldwork. Postill, for example, argues that "there is nothing inferior or illegitimate about researching local issues remotely" (2016: 67). The accusation of remote anthropology for its thin

descriptions and lack of "adrenaline kicks" is absurd because ethnographic fieldwork does not necessarily mean to possess these kicks (Postill 2016: 65). Real-time experience carries different tempos and emotional qualities (Postill 2016: 65). In addition, thick and thin descriptions are decided by anthropologists rather than field experience (Postill 2016: 66). Hence, Hagberg and Körling state that criticisms of the remote approach mistakenly diminish the discipline of anthropology to the method of participant observation (2014: 145). Not only the methodological conceptualization of "the field" is susceptible to change, but its epistemological meaning is also subjected to adjustment.

Since the mid-twentieth century, anthropologists who were influenced by Marxism started diverting their focus from subaltern subjects to "urban spaces, factory floors and forms of proletarian resistance" (Chambers 2020: 291). George Marcus adds that the following emergence of multi-sited ethnography challenges the perception of a conventional single-site location and positions itself in interdisciplinary work (1995: 114). All these changes have reminded academics that "'fieldsites' are not disassociated spaces of abstract study but are deeply entangled in historical/contemporary connections and in (often very personal) relationships between ethnographers and 'the field'" (Chambers 2020: 290). Furthermore, Hall proposes six different types of spaces of field, including temporal, physical, regulatory/political, ethical, social, and theoretical/methodological spaces rather than considering all field space as spatial sites (2010: 8). With the development of the digital world that has pushed for the expansion of fieldsite definition, online and virtual spaces emerged (Chamber 2020: 291). Murphy argues that the designation of field research as "the systematic study, primarily through long-term, face-to-face interactions and observations, of everyday life" has neglected its

technological pervasiveness (2008: 849; Bailey 2007: 2). Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, for instance, consider social media hashtags as fieldsite when researching the Black Lives Matter movement (2015: 4). All these disciplinary developments push the boundaries of "field."

The physical notion involved in the field inaccessibility that this thesis is based on reflects merely one of its many dimensions. Hence, the empirical/physical inaccessibility does not imply that the "field" is under blockade. Instead, it reveals that there are alternatives to accommodate the physical inaccessibility, which is further discussed in the following part.

2.2.2. Alternative Research Methods

While field inaccessibility as a challenge to researchers is nothing new, most of the scholarly works on alternative methods were produced during and for the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Krause et al. (2021), Gailloux et al. (2022), Tapiwa Madimu (2021), Leigh Lawrence (2022), Thomas Chambers (2020), etc. Nevertheless, scholarly literature on substitute methods tailored to conflict and post-conflict contexts is limited because many of them concentrate on addressing the challenges in the field without taking inaccessibility into consideration, such as the works produced by Clark and Cavatorta (2018), Moss et al. (2018), Stefan Malthaner (2014), Anas Audeh (2023), Grimm et al. (2020), etc. While scholars like Sten Hagberg and Gabriella Körling (2014) and Laborde et al. (2018) have discussed their alternative approaches amid conflict contexts, there have been some scholars, who opted for distant approach, focus specifically on the Middle East and North Africa, including Agnes Favier (2018; 2019; 2020), Virginie Collombier (2019; 2020), Antonius Robben (2010), Marieke Brandt

(2017a; 2017b; 2023), Mervet Alhaffar (2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b), Juline Beaujouan (2023), Kheder Khaddour (2020), and Reinoud Leenders (2012; 2020). Although some of them focused on the same region or encountered field inaccessibility induced by the same conflict, their ways of data collection are different. This research analyzes the methodologies adopted by these eight scholars concentrating on the Middle East and North Africa.

Agnes Favier, a political scientist focusing on wartime and post-conflict Syria, has produced multiple projects when encountering inaccessibility to the field. For the study on the post-2017 Syria which [identifies] the main challenges and dynamics faced by those who were seeking to govern IS-liberated territories, Favier developed it through three objectives, including an analysis on "how competition between rival international actors and their local proxies in the fight against IS [had] further accelerated territorial fragmentation in Syria," a discussion on the "modes of local governance employed by the [Kurdish Democratic Union Party] leaders in predominantly Sunni Arab areas," and an assessment of the risks of IS's and other jihadists groups' survival in Syria (Favier 2018: 3). The methodology applied by Favier in this study was

> "…based mainly on interviews [she] conducted in November and December 2017, face-to-face and over Skype, with Syrian activists and journalists from Raqqa and Deir al-Zor governorates [by then] living in Turkey and Europe. Other key sources include: Skype interviews led by a Syrian researcher…with Kurdish personalities and activists based in Syria; open sources…, including media close to the Kurdish Self-Administration and Facebook pages of the newly-established local councils in Raqqa governorate in 2017; the author's close monitoring of the situation in north eastern Syria since 2014; and, the author's regular meetings with Western and Turkish policy-makers based in Turkey." (Favier 2018: 4)

Favier's study on the 2018 local elections explores Assad regime's attempts to rebuild state institutions and reassert its political power (2019: 4). In this project, Favier

examined the reconstitution of the regime's local power networks, the organization and results of the elections, and the prerogatives of local administrative units (2019: 4). To address the objectives, Favier relied on

> "…existing literature, government sources…, and online media monitoring. The [Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria research] team also carried out case studies of several areas across the country…using direct monitoring and information collected by researchers inside Syria, and interviews with inhabitants conducted by the team via Skype and WhatsApp" (2019: 5).

Another of her studies on Syria focuses on the 2020 People's Council Election which was a parliamentary election that could affect the 2021 presidential election and reflect the regime's priorities (Awad and Favier 2020: 3). Hence, Awad and Favier analyzed the profiles and trajectories of the elected members of parliament to explore changes in the regime's networks and social base (2020: 3). Their project drew on the sources like

> "…official statements made by members of the Higher Judicial Committee for Elections, official data published by the Baath Party during its internal process to select its candidates, data published by candidates of various political affiliations and constituencies about themselves, and news coverage of the elections by official and pro-regime media outlets, Moreover, [they] conducted interviews and discussions, mostly online, with 90 individuals with direct or indirect contact with the winning candidates. They also carried out extensive monitoring of the personal and public Facebook pages of victories MPs and certain other candidates. They reviewed content previously published about MPs in print and online, including from the websites of certain ministries, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry and trade unions, available copies of the Official Gazette, and specialized archival websites such as directories of businesses and establishments licensed in Syria" (Awad and Favier 2020: 3-4).

Favier resorted to the recruitment of local researchers, online media monitoring, online interview, and content analysis when empirical work on conflicts and politics in Syria became unrealistic. According to the research topics and objectives, her three studies (respectively on governance dynamics, local elections, and parliamentary elections) include both analysis of factual information and public perceptions. While most of her methods served as information collection tools, the online interview was a composition

of both. For instance, in the study on the post-2017 contextual dynamics, Favier resorted to online (via Skype) and off-site (via face-to-face interaction outside Syria) interviews to collect perceptions on governance challenges. One of her other studies on the 2018 local elections relied on local researchers for interviews to collect inhabitants' perceptions on election organization and results (Favier 2019: 7-9). Whereas in the study on the 2020 parliamentary election, Awad and Favier conducted interviews and discussions with individuals to collect information, such as backgrounds and religious affiliations, of the winning candidates (2020: 13). Nevertheless, distinguished from the previous two cases, these conversations were collecting information because Awad and Favier cross-checked them with data from the official media and media pages of the candidates (2020: 3; 32).

Reinoud Leenders, a political scientist who investigates the Syrian conflict, was challenged by the authoritarian governance and the mass violence triggered by the armed conflict (Leenders 2022). In the study investigating the motivations and mechanisms of the popular mobilization in Syria, he looked at Dar'a province's dense social networks through

> "…digital sources, especially social media and YouTube footage uploaded by Syrian activists, that have been carefully assessed for reliability and authenticity to the extent possible. In addition, [he used] more conventional sources, including human rights activists' accounts, telephone or Skype conversations with activists and residents from Dar'a, Arab media accounts, official statistics on socioeconomic conditions and crime, and opposition reports on casualties" (Leenders 2012: 420).

In this research, Leenders utilized both social media analysis and online interviews to collect both factual information, such as an event retrospection and Dar'a's social networks, and public opinions, such as the perception of Dar'a region. To cross-validate the data collected from social media sources and interviews, he contextualized them

based on literature review and previous field experience in Syria (Leenders 2013: 283). In another study focusing on foreign sponsorship of pro-government militias, Leenders worked with Antonio Giustozzi to examine sponsors-proxies shifting relationships by

> "[recruiting] local researchers (former journalists) inside Syria who between 2013 and early 2018 conducted interviews with about thirty senior and mid-ranking members of a number of key militias as well as members of the Syrian armed forces and government, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)" (2022: 615).
> "[These] local researchers were tasked with gathering information via semi-structured interviews about the organization and functioning of the militias, about the role of external advisers and leading officers, about their relationship with the different branches of the Syrian security and military apparatus and, more generally, with the Assad regime, as well as about their international connections and the nature of support they received from foreign sources" (2022, Appendix 1: 2).

Different from his study on Dar'a's social networks, the interviews used in analyzing sponsors-proxies relationships aimed for information rather than perceptions. Hence, to cross-check, contextualize, and supplement the interviews, Leenders and Giustozzi noticed the bias that might be induced by "the tendency to minimize any problem faced by the regime and its allies" and "the tendency to deny frictions between the regime and Iran or Russia" (2022 Appendix 1:2). They adopted target selection to identify open and frank interviewees and reveal assumed rivalries between militias (Leenders and Giustozzi 2022, Appendix 1: 2). In addition to that, they reviewed militia' social media pages plus previous media and academic reports on them for triangulation (2022, Appendix 1: 3).

From Mervat Alhaffar's perspective, a decade of conflict and COVID-19 pandemic not only imposed travel restrictions on her scientific research, but also aroused her interests on fragmented governance and health systems in Syria (Douedari et al. 2021: 2). Thus, she opted to conduct remote interviews with participants from different military-controlled areas to examine its health systems (Douedari et al. 2021:

2-3). These online interviews, conducted by Alhaffar and her team, were all dedicated to perception accumulation. For instance, in the study on women's lived experiences and perspectives of healthcare in opposition-controlled areas, Alhaffar et al. adopt a qualitative approach to conduct 20 in-depth remote interviews via WhatsApp and Messenger with fifteen health workers and five service users (2022a: 1). Another of her research focuses on exploring "community perspectives of COVID-19 and health authority responses" in terms of the experiences of marginalization, power, and resistance across Syrian government-controlled, autonomous administration-controlled, and opposition-controlled areas (2022b: 4). To achieve the research objectives, Alhaffar et al. utilized remote semi-structured interviews with "adult men and women using health services" in these three areas (2022b: 4). Last, but not least, Douedari and Alhaffar collaborated with other researchers to study "community perspectives on challenges and potential solutions to reduce COVID-19 transmission among displaced communities in opposition-controlled Northwest Syria (Douedari et al. 2020: 1). In this research, they conducted 20 semi-structured remote and in-person interviews with "adult men and women living in IDP camps in opposition-controlled Northwest Syria" (Douedari et al. 2020: 1).

Similar to what Alhaffar has done, Juline Beaujouan's study also concentrated on perceptions. Beaujouan, a political scientist who studied COVID-19's interplay with conflict factors and dynamics in Northwestern Syria, had never been there due to the imposed COVID-19 and institutional restrictions (Beaujouan 2021: 6; personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). To proceed with her research, she collaborated with local researchers to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local practices of peace, including political trust and social cohesion, and on the role

of civil society" (Beaujouan 2021: 6). To remotely collect data in northern Aleppo and Idlib governorates, she was

> "…assisted by colleagues working inside Syria as well as in Jordan and Turkey. Researchers conducted 62 in-depth interviews with members of local civil society, local political representatives, military personnel, and grassroots communities. Most of these interviews were conducted via telephone to lessen the risks associated with Covid-19. Some participants were met in person when the de-facto governments loosened Covid-19 restrictions in early 2021 and the study could be conducted safely in this way" (Beaujouan 2021: 7)
> "50 additional testimonies were collected via an online survey specifically designed to collect people's perceptions of political trust and social cohesion during the COVID-19 pandemic. This method guaranteed a higher level of autonomy and safety to grassroots communities participating in the research" (Beaujouan 2021: 7).

While both Alhaffar and Beaujouan formed a research team for their studies, Alhaffar, who is from the region possessing local networks mainly conducted the interviews herself. Whereas Beajouan, who's not from the region, depended on local researchers for interviews.

Coincidentally, the COVID-19 eruption and security concerns also put Kheder Khaddour's research on the dynamics of the Iraqi-Syrian borderlands and the Syrian-Turkish borderlands on hold (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). Due to field inaccessibility, Khaddour, a nonresident scholar at Carnegie Middle East Center, collaborated with local civil society organizations that provided him with contacts and helped him analyze information in local contexts (Carnegie Middle East Center 2020). Khaddour's case is different from Beaujouan's. Although both opted for collaboration with local actors, Khaddour was collecting factual information instead of perceptions for his research on the borderlands. Moreover, in contrast to all other scholars mentioned in this thesis, Khaddour's production was not academic but professional to serve as reference for think tanks. The different regulations that he was subjected to during his research will be addressed in the next chapter.

In addition to the conflicts in Syria, there have been other regional vibrations posing empirical challenges to scholars. Virginie Collombier, a political scientist focusing on Libya from the Middle East Directions Program at the European University Institute (EUI), was initially able to travel to Libya for field research when the project was launched in 2015 (EUI 2023). However, due to the deteriorated situation and the COVID-19 pandemic, she could not visit Libya after her last field trip in Spring 2018 (Collombier 2020: 2). To examine political Salafism's and quietist Salafism's relationships with "politics and state institutions in times of turmoil," she analyzed "the strategies that [these two currents] have pursued since 2011 and during the various phases of the conflict—which were characterized by regime and state collapse (2011), competition for the reconstruction of political authority (2011-2014) and a division between state institutions and political authority (2014-2019)…" (Collombier 2020: 2). To achieve these objectives, Collombier relied on

> "…desk study of existing literature on Salafism in Libya and beyond together with continual monitoring and analysis of political, social and security developments in Libya since 2011…In addition, the research…also involved numerous written and oral interviews conducted remotely by phone and through social media platforms with Libyan civil society activists, religious scholars, former government officials and academics from across the country or established abroad. While the followers and leaders of the two Salafi currents could not be interviewed remotely, the analysis presented here also stems from regular monitoring of a variety of social media platforms associated with different Libyan Salafi groups" (2020: 2-3).

To address the rejection of online interview, Collombier established a mentorship program to recruit Libya-based junior analysts as intermediaries (personal communication, 18 September 2023). This mentorship program trained the analysts to "engage with local actors, conduct interviews, observe developments on the ground," and produce field-based work (EUI 2023). In contrast to Beaujouan who also collaborated with local researchers to collect data, Collombier aimed to collect factual

information through collaboration instead of perceptions. Hence, interview was not the only method that she adopted for the study.

While Collombier has previously resided in her field site, Antonius Robben, an anthropologist working on an ethnography on the Iraq war, has never been to his field (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). He was unable to access the country due to the violence induced by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein (2010: 3). To study "the everyday realities endured by the Iraqi people and how they are affected by political forces beyond their reach," he applied ethnographic imagination method whose imagination is "derived from [one's] fieldwork in other conflict areas and is contextualized and influenced by… [his] politico-moral convictions" (Robben 2010: 5). He immersed himself with the sources on Iraq, including newspaper articles produced by war correspondents, status reports provided by NGOs, communiques announced by insurgents, blogs posted by inhabitants, broadcasts aired online, and interviews conducted with refugees (Robben 2010: 9). Additionally, he counted on "existing ethnographic studies about violence and suffering, [his] own field experiences of conflict areas, the example set by multisited research, extensive interviews, and cross-cultural comparison" to analyze the Iraq War (2010: 5). Therefore, when encountering field inaccessibility, Robben adopted ethnographic imagination method as a comparative approach to show the likenesses between Argentina's Dirty War and the Iraq War, then contextualize them with sources collected from Iraq to infer realities on the ground.

On the other hand, anthropologist Marieke Brandt, who worked on an ethnography on the grassroots dynamics of the Houthi conflict in the Sa'dah region, Sufyan and al-Jawf in northern Yemen faced an obstacle like Robben (2017a: 506). To

“reconstruct the conflict’s development by giving full play to its local drivers,” she initially utilized “a combination of literature- and fieldwork-based approaches” which was a triangulation of

> “…qualitative content analysis, qualitative social science methodology (ethnographic fieldwork) and digital anthropological approaches…Qualitative content analysis consisted of literature-based analysis and archival work. The investigation of the state-of-the-art, that is the available, body of ‘Western’ and Arabic scientific source material focused on the historical roots of the Houthi conflict and the course of the Sa’dah wars. This provided an overview of the main trends and milestones of recent history and of developments in the research area” (Brandt 2017b: 5).

While she was able to access the field between 2011 and 2015, she was deprived of her empirical research capability due to the 2015 Houthis’ seizure of Sana’a and the launch of Saudi-Emirati bombing campaign (Anthropology News 2020). Brandt could not adopt Robben’s approach because the comparison proved unfeasible for her case which needed personal exchange (2017b: 2). Hence, she opted for digital fieldwork which granted her with

> “…a continuous online exchange with [her sources] in the field, with whom [she] had worked to establish solid relationships of trust since 2003…At times [she] have spent hours per day chatting with [her] informants based on Yemen’s north, preferably in the late evening and at night, when they were free for conversation (Brandt 2017b: 6).

This approach allowed her to reconnect with “many of [her] sources in Sa’dah via Facebook, followed by WhatsApp, Telegram, and the like” as alternatives to face-to-face communication (Brandt 2017a: 506). Facebook allowed her to establish new contacts in her research field, whereas WhatsApp enabled her to chat with people for hours long conversations and transcribe the content (Brandt 2017a: 508). Distinguished from Alhaffar’s and Beaujouan’s studies, Brandt’s study on grassroots dynamics aimed for objective truth instead of perceptions by relying on a collection of competing oral narratives and representations for cross-validation.

The aforementioned narratives on field inaccessibility indicate that there are two main obstacles forcing the scholars to opt for distant research: field insecurity and COVID-19 travel restrictions. While field insecurity remains a problem which enforces inaccessibility to some scholars focusing on certain geographic areas, COVID-19 pandemic made the option of distant research more realistic and urgent (Amano:2023 100). However, this research focuses solely on alternatives accommodating conflict and post-conflict contexts. These scenarios possess exposure and intimidation risk that needs adaptive measures. As a result, the methods utilized by scholars facing insecure fields are different from those solely encountering COVID eruptions. In addition, based on the presentation of alternative methods, a rupture of field access does not mean the collapse of research projects. There are a variety of feasible approaches to the field amid empirical challenges.

Since this research concentrates on under-studied areas that demonstrate the poverty of existing literature, I mainly analyzed the methods for collecting primary sources. I found that some scholars had adopted the same approaches in their respective projects, such as online interviews. Whether or not combining online interviews with other methods reflects the nature of their research objectives. Multiple scholars, who sought factual information, took measures to cross-validate the data that they collected from interviews. For those who were exploring perceptions in the field without the necessity of triangulation, such as Alhaffar and Beaujouan, they adopted target selection strategies to reduce biases. Therefore, the choice of methods is linked to research objectives. After elucidating the project context and the alternative methods that were utilized by scholars amid empirical incapability, the next chapter focuses on their associated methodological and ethical challenges. Addressing these challenges is

important for increasing project feasibility and ensuring research personnel and participants’ safety in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

CHAPTER 3

DISTANT METHODS

This chapter, composed of three sections, presents findings on methodological and ethical considerations associated with various distant methods. While the previous chapter introduced each scholar's contexts of research projects, this chapter aims to categorize the methods. It explores their respective advantages and obstacles through utilizing literature review and consultations. I categorized them into three groups, including 'glocal' collaboration, remote methods, and ethnographic imagination, according to their methodological foundations and ethical considerations. For example, the formulation of partnership with local researchers involved in "glocal" collaboration must address the ethics of the perpetuated inequality between the Global North and the Global South. The macrocomparison of distant cases reflected in ethnographic imagination must be reviewed based on case selection availability. Last, but not least, the overwhelming reliance on digital technologies in remote research must tackle data protection ethics. However, I want to clarify that these three categories are not mutually exclusive because "glocal" collaboration and ethnographic imagination also count on digital technologies along with their respective approaches. I believe that taking these alternatives into consideration can provide suggestions for my research proposal on regulatory systems in Hawija on how to guarantee project ethics and feasibility.

3.1. "Glocal" Collaboration

As a substitute for field research, multiple scholars turned to 'glocal' collaboration by forming partnerships with (or recruiting) local researchers to produce

field-based studies. While these scholars utilized different measures and interacted with different local actors in "glocal" collaboration, they all formed partnerships to proceed with their studies. For instance, Leenders recruited local researchers inside Syria to conduct interviews with militias for him (2022: 615); Beaujouan relied on local researchers for interviews to collect data in Northwestern Syria (2021: 6); Khaddour counted on local civil society organizations' staff to access local contacts and information (Carnegie Middle East Center 2020); Collombier dealt with Libya-based junior analysts for field interviews and ground observation (EUI 2023). These scholars all utilized "glocal" collaboration by partnering with and relying on local intermediaries to collect data from the field when facing unfeasible access. In addition to overcoming the challenges of field inaccessibility, this partnership possesses various advantages. Collombier shared in the consultation that the collaboration not only provided her with the needed primary sources, including interviews and field observation, but also addressed her positionality as a Western women researcher studying a sensitive topic on Salafism (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Therefore, "glocal" collaboration can compensate for the absence of field observation to some extent and increase the flexibility of researchers' positionality in the field.

Another advantage, which involves some ethical critiques on the nature of partnership, was brought up by scholars during consultations. On one hand, the "partnership" that is formed between international scientists who are "typically from highly resources countries," and local partners who are typically from "low resource settings or countries" has been criticized as parachute research (Bosurgi 2022: 1). The ethical problem accompanied with this partnership is the perpetuation of inequality between international scientists and local actors, including both local researchers and

residents (Egbetokun n.d.). International scientists left "almost nothing of persistent value behind for [these local actors], other than say, renumeration for time and logistics" (Egbetokun n.d.). While local researchers are marginalized, external investigators become "heroes" with little knowledge about social, political, and economic contexts in the field (Egbetokun n.d.). On the other hand, scholars, such as Beaujouan, Collombier, and Khaddour, address this ethical concern by imposing an importance on "glocal" approach. While the partnership does not necessarily empower local communities through raising their voices in the research, Khaddour believes that it has provided him with information, events, and understanding based on a local perspective (Carnegie Middle East Center 2020). It displays reciprocity by connecting local actors to global research centers that possess a wide audience and exposing local understanding of dynamics to global stage (Carnegie Middle East Center 2020). In the consultation with Collombier, she also stressed the importance of involving Libyan colleagues in the research because it is not only about continuing her project on the politics of armed forces in post-Qaddafi Libya amid field inaccessibility but also about making sure that "the Libyan perspective is taken into account" (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). She laid emphasis upon their perspective because it will enhance the external understanding of "what is happening in the country, where the country is heading, what people are experiencing in living, and what consequences that these developments may have or will have on the regional environment" (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Beaujouan resonates with the views on the exchange of privileges and incorporation of alternative perspectives by considering the collaborative research as embodying "a set of values and practices that are expressed through different languages, worldviews and work

ethics" (2023: 204). She regards the collaborative research as a (re)negotiation process between the Global North and the Global South where the dominant (European) epistemologies must be reframed (2023: 208). To ensure the inclusiveness of the knowledge co-production, Beaujouan emphasizes the importance of engaging local collaborators from the starting point where "all research partners are included before the research is approved" and "the experience and contextualized knowledge of local partners are taken into consideration by academic institutions" (2023: 207). More importantly, she continuously discussed her research design and investigation process with her partners to avoid the epistemological premises (2023: 208). These were the measures taken by Beaujouan to ensure an equal and complementary stand in shared knowledge production. Hence, by constantly recognizing and addressing ethical concerns to avoid falling into the trap of parachute research, scholars can benefit from "glocal" collaboration through obtaining the capability to understand and elaborate local perspectives in their studies when the field is inaccessible.

Meanwhile, since scholars are aware of the potential unequal relations between the Global North and the Global South in the post-colonial context, they intend to give more weight to local priorities than short-term objectives of the international sponsors. However, Wood raises new problems that local researchers may have their own objectives differing from principal investigators' agenda, which may introduce bias and inaccuracy in data collection process (2013: 301). In addition, Owor raises questions on the qualification of local researchers vis-à-vis the selection process and their understanding of methodology (2022: 6) These unqualified researchers, for instance, may lack a sense of judgement on the extent of information they should obtain from the interviewees (Owor 2022: 7). Moreover, since they are the brokers in the field who are

controlled by a principal investigator, the patron, they may engage in unethical research behavior to meet the latter's expectations (Owor 2022: 6). Owor also voices concern over target selection because local research may repeatedly reach out to the same participants on similar topics that can trigger a negative impact on data quality (2022: 7). Therefore, it is necessary for principal investigators to address the challenges raised by research collaborators when opting for "glocal" partnerships. While Collombier and Beaujouan both addressed these obstacles in the following sections, Khaddour stated that these hurdles might not be applied to all "glocal" collaborations.

In terms of the diverse objectives between principal investigators and local researchers, Collombier didn't find it a problem because her research is meant to rely on "Libyan voices and Libyan way of framing" (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). During the research, she did possess questions that did not correspond with her Libyan colleagues (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). However, this was not a problem as the research collaboration was a learning exercise to her as an outsider (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Instead of forcefully conforming local researchers' objectives to her research agenda, Collombier demonstrates that they should "have the space to develop the research and frame [it the way] they see [it] relevant" (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). She found the real problem of objective discrepancy was not rooted in the research collaboration, but the publication process due to the irrelevance between the understanding of external audience and the confronting views from the field (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). From Beaujouan's perspective, her advantage of having a wide network of local researchers and extensive project activities accommodated the discrepancy as they could opt out from activities

that required a neutral standpoint while involving in others that were neither political nor academic (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). By dividing the project into several activities and setting up different modes of engagement, she circumvented the negative impact of biases and perceptions on the research (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). By imposing different weights of significance upon local narratives, both scholars found a way through the obstacles of diverse objectives that emerged in the partnership.

Concerning the selection process and qualification of local researchers, Collombier and Beaujouan both relied on their personal networks that have previously been built on various occasions to recruit local researchers. Counting on the contexts in Libya and Syria, both reached out to different population groups that did not necessarily equip with research experience but had extensive knowledge of local context (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023; personal interview with Beaujouan , 20 September 2023). They both emphasized the importance of having prior contacts on the ground: Collombier stated that “having people on whom you can rely on to identify people and put you in touch has been very important”; meanwhile Beaujouan expressed that if she did not know gatekeepers or networks, it would have been hard to ensure data transparency and research quality (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023; personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). Although both scholars have local connections through previous field experience or personal networks, they both pointed out the difficulty of building trust when losing field access (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023; personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). Collombier said she was unable to conduct in-depth interviews or have sincere conversations with whom she did not have prior contact or build trust, let

alone asking sensitive questions (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). She added that the lack of face-to-face interaction restricted the expansion of interlocutor network and impeded firm response to requests (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Beaujouan voiced the challenge of building trust between her and her colleagues in the field as well. More importantly, she also attributed this obstacle to the "patriarchal" culture in the field where she was positioned as a young, European woman (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). Based on the description of Collombier and Beajouan, "glocal" collaboration without the possibility of face-to-face interaction does pose a challenge to researchers. Building trust is a fundamental component in the connection with local researchers and interlocutors, for they should expect the consequences of the lack of rapport.

After the selection process, both scholars retrained the locals to be "researchers." Collombier launched methodological training by focusing on specific cases and research topics to build their capacity because it was difficult to simultaneously launch theoretical and practical training (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). She also provided question formation support to identify entry points of interview (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Since the trainees were capable of data collection, Collombier devoted more efforts to data organization, structuring, and analysis trainings, which supported them to draw conclusions out of the gathered information (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). In Beaujouan's study, her "glocal" methodology was not solely about "[including] locals to collect data and use whatever [she] need[s] from them," but engaging them "from the very beginning to the very end of the project" (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). Therefore, in addition to training on research standards plus writing

and research skills, Beaujouan gave some trainees the freedom to produce blogs in any language and on topics they were interested in (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). To offer them a platform of expression and praise their voices, she co-wrote an academic paper with a trainee based on her blog. She hoped that the "glocal" collaboration could equip local inhabitants with essential skills to empower themselves by having them train others, do more research, and access more platforms (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). On the other hand, both scholars took measures to ensure the quality of data collection as well. Collombier, for example, assisted local researchers on reviewing and revising the questions they intended to ask (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Moreover, when the situation was allowed, she either remotely joined interviews or evaluated recordings to check the methodology (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). To reduce biases and balance communal representation, Collombier closely monitored the background of interviewees (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). Meanwhile, Beaujouan adopted a pilot test by "[asking] every single person involved in [the] stage to go to one of the targeted populations to run interviews" (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). By reviewing the questions and answers, she could polish the questions and gave them feedback on their skills (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). While two scholars adopted different approaches, they both tried to monitor data quality and even went beyond the projects to equip local researchers with necessary research skills.

Distinguished from Collombier and Beaujouan who were collecting opinions from the field, Khaddour, who works for a think tank and focuses on information gathering for his border projects, believes that the ethics of "glocal" collaboration

cannot be applied in his research (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). Through relying on international civil society organizations as intermediaries for connecting with their local employees, Khaddour counted on them as field assistants to collect non-sensitive information that did not appear online but should have been displayed by local municipalities, such as the annual budget for the municipality (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). Therefore, unlike Collombier and Beaujouan who trained local inhabitants to be researchers, Khaddour considers these assistants as neither researchers nor local inhabitants, but informants who can collect high quality information from stakeholders and judge its accuracy (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). This role restriction made the partnership shallow, from where Khaddour was only able to extract specific answers supplementing the study rather than formulating a "detailed and in-depth research" based on the collaboration (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). From Khaddour's perspective, he was granted a greater level of flexibility by think tanks without being subjected to IRB reviews compared to academic institutes. However, this limited partnership with local assistants and field inaccessibility exposed him to the scarcity of observation and incomprehension of conflict mechanisms. This posed challenges to his studies on micro-research of tiny towns in Syria and Iraq (personal interview with Khaddour, 28 September 2023). By criticizing his own methodology, he proposed to entrench the collaboration through training students from the region to conduct field-based studies without the interference of intermediaries (personal communication, 28 September 2023).

When facing field inaccessibility, "glocal" collaboration presents to principal investigators as an option by allowing them to continue their studies. By serving as

intermediaries, local partners endow new positionality to the investigators because the intermediaries are primarily responsible for establishing relations with interlocutors. Moreover, depending on local partners' familiarity with the contexts, principal investigators can enhance their understanding of local perspectives that they might not have previously observed. However, this reliance on local partners can lead to an ethical concern, referring to the exploitation of the local while leaving nothing of persistent value behind. Hence, the question of how to maintain an equal and complementary stance in the process of collaboration should be addressed by investigators in their methodologies. In addition, varied studies may acquire different extents of trust-building based on research objectives (whether collecting facts or perceptions). Collombier and Beaujouan, who intended to collect perspectives from the field, found trust-building via distant methods challenging when formulating partnerships with local researchers and conducting interviews with participants. Whereas Khaddour did not find it a problem as he relied solely on the gatekeepers, the two civil society organizations he knew from the past, without the need to expand local connections. More importantly, he was focusing on the collection of factual information which is neither sensitive nor personalized. Hence, not only his dimensions of partnership are shallow compared with Collombier's and Beaujouan's, but also the required research capabilities from local partners are more flexible than those two who had provided research training. Therefore, when prospective researchers seek alternative methods amid field inaccessibility, they should address the methodological and ethical concerns of "glocal" collaboration based on their project objectives.

3.2. Remote Methods

While the former section on 'glocal' partnership is also a form of remote research to principal investigators since there is an absence of in-person interaction, this section solely focuses on the research relying on digital technologies to "access and interview participants" (Douedari et al. 2021: 2). It refers to "any research in which participants and researchers do not interact in-person" (Douedari et al. 2021: 2). In this section, I merged remote research adopting formal methods with digital anthropological fieldwork because their utilization of digital technologies possesses similar methodological and ethical concerns.

Researchers count on remote methods when faced with field inaccessibility due to its safe and diverse nature. It allows them to conduct research on conflict and post-conflict dynamics while protecting them from potential risks in the field (Douedari et al. 2021: 3). The utilization of digital techniques in remote research also offers scholars effective and economical ways to reach both old and new participants when they exit the field (Konken and Howlett 2022: 855). Meanwhile, remote methods present them with field diversity as they include marginalized voices and account for regional diversity when traveling to multiple areas is impractical (Douedari et al. 2021: 3). Alhaffar, for example, applied "cross-category" snowball sampling where she first approached the participants whom she had personal contacts with, snowballing from them to identify the potential others (Alhaffar et al. 2022a: 5). Then she tried reducing bias by engaging those from different genders, geographical locations, and backgrounds to collect diverse perspectives (personal interview with Alhaffar, 3 October 2023). Meanwhile, Brandt adopted digital anthropology that enabled her to access sites in real-time and gain new insights during observation (Postill 2016: 67). Digital anthropology,

according to Tom Boellstorff, is a technique to "[research] the virtual that permits addressing that object of study in its own terms" (2012: 40). Distinguished from the remote approach adopting formal methods, digital anthropological fieldwork is an online participant observation (Boellstorff 2012: 40). By opting for digital anthropological fieldwork, Brandt replied upon the networks of friends that she previously built during her five years of residency in the field, which were later extended to include "politicians, administration officials, police, and military officers" (2017a: 507). By forming a dossier of contacts and depending on the use of telecommunication, Brandt did not consider field inaccessibility as a rupture of ethnographic research because she could still reach her research area (2017a: 508). She indicates that the blooming of technological tools, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, etc., circumvented the obstacle of massive relocation in the region amid the war in Yemen (Brandt 2017a: 509). In both cases, scholars launched data collection based on their existing contacts in the field, then snowballed their networks to reach a bigger or diverse population. Thus, compared with the "glocal" collaboration which needs one or two gatekeepers as intermediaries (like the case of Beaujouan and Khaddour) from the field, online interviews or digital communication approach that formulates a direct interaction between principal investigators and interlocutors requires a more extensive field network. This may cause difficulty for the investigators who have neither been to the field site nor established exiting contacts.

Other than including a diverse group of participants, remote research through digital technologies may pose several challenges to researchers as well. First, although it enables representation of diverse perspectives, it may entrench inequalities in the field as it deliberately excludes those who possess poor internet access or those who fall out

of researchers' pre-existing personal networks (Douedari et al. 2021: 3). Second, it becomes difficult for researchers to grasp local realities and understand contextual dynamics through remote methods (Douedari et al. 2021: 3). Being unaware of local situations may induce additional risks to research participants (Douedari et al. 2021: 3). Moreover, remote research lacks the capacity to observe a complete interview context as interviewers could hardly notice non-verbal cues in conversations (Konken and Howlett 2022: 854). Other than the absence of paralingual cues, Ulmer and Cohen also point out the challenges posed by "netspeak," referring to "the special language, abbreviations, and expressions used to communicate online," which may not be mutually understood between researchers and participants. (2016: 546-547). More importantly, when researchers utilize text-based communication in addition to online interview, the asynchronous quality of messages can be demanding as the conversation may fail to keep pace with the logic of turn-taking and linearity (Ulmer and Cohen 2016: 549). Therefore, online interaction via digital technologies can pose some "blind spots," such as a narrow process of target selection and a limited comprehension of field plus interview contexts, to investigators. When collecting perceptions and information, investigators must address these intervening factors in their methodologies.

Regarding the ethical guidance of digital fieldwork, which is a novel field compared with conventional ethnography, the IRB is not capable of comprehensively standardizing the data generated from online activities (Ulmer and Cohen 2016: 552). Digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, are endowed with data protection obstacles because they are linked to mobile numbers which can hinder data security (Douedari et al. 2021: 7). Douedari et al. add that "though content is encrypted, WhatsApp is owned by Facebook, a company which makes excessive use of user data" (2021: 7). Alhaffar

resonated with the challenges by showing that multiple obstacles could simultaneously happen. She gave an example that when trying to address digital security concerns by conducting interviews with an end-to-end encryption, she had to compromise with those who faced technical difficulties, such as the elderly, without downloading security measures (personal interview with Alhaffar, 3 October 2023). In addition, she voiced the difficulty of building trust in conflict-affected areas via remote methods (personal interview with Alhaffar, 3 October 2023). Distinguished from conducting focus group discussion in the UK where "people would feel secure to share their opinions," it was difficult to build rapport and trust among participants when they were not located in the same physical space while concerning about the risk of exposure (personal interview with Alhaffar, 3 October 2023). On the other hand, Brandt holds a different view because the absolute anonymity provided by online platforms equipped her with "completely unobserved conversational situation (Brandt 2017: 508). This enabled "[her] sources to communicate freely, to engage in open dialogue without fear of reprisals or other limiting concerns, and to do so without having to censor themselves" (Brandt 2017: 508). Hence, in addition to presenting data protection measures in methodologies and to participants via the consent form, investigators must take local realities into consideration: if the participants have the means to follow the data protection guidance and how to accommodate their needs. Meanwhile, remote methods can trigger a similar predicament as the "glocal" collaboration, which is difficult to build rapport with interlocutors when investigators cannot physically interact with them. This can have an impact on studies examining sensitive topics or collecting perceptions. Thus, investigators should devote more efforts to establish trustworthy relationships while expanding field networks.

Other than digital applications that are used in online communications, Leenders examined social media posts for social phenomena comprehension. He combined it with online interviews to collect both factual information and perceptions on Dar’a province’s dense social networks that motivated the popular mobilization in 2011. Leenders believes that the digitalized technologies displayed stories more effective and accessible compared with traditional approach (2013: 283). However, social media monitoring possesses an inevitable obstacle. The digital world that is susceptible to manipulation, censorship, and attacks poses a difficulty for scholars to identify fake information from the real ones. For instance, Russian government’s crackdown on free expression has witnessed “a vast range of ‘ordinary’ users fighting to protect the Kremlin’s discursive dominance online” (Kalsaas 2023: 9). This obstacle was also reflected in Leenders’s case, which can discourage researchers’ reference to digitalized material because both activists and regime incumbents could “distort or fabricate facts” (Leenders 2018: 283). Nevertheless, Leenders states that this pitfall could not overshadow the value of the digitalized material that exposed people’s perceptions because he avoided the pitfall through careful consultation and utilization of the information (2018: 283). More importantly, Leenders emphasized in the consultation that “[he] did not really use social media to corroborate [his] own claims on what was actually happening or taking place in terms of factual analysis, with much more in terms of what did participants think, what did they proclaim, what did they argue, and how did they present themselves” (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). In addition, while social media is not accessible to all Syrians, it can reduce urban bias by diverting academic and media coverage from cities to remote villages (Leenders 2018:

284). From Leenders' perspective, social media monitoring is a feasible alternative to collect perceptions in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

While Leenders expresses an overwhelming optimism to social media analysis, Sandberg and Rossi raise more concerns on the method used by Leenders regarding the absence of ethics-based engagement with the producers of data in post-research data storage (2022: 8). More importantly, there is a lack of existing scholarly literature on digital fieldwork since most of the discussion focus on the role of digital media in social life rather than addressing its methodological and ethical challenges (Ulmer and Cohen 2016 :542-543). Fuhrmann and Pfeifer voice concerns over the ethical core of "do no harm" in terms of "transparency, anonymity, and the appropriate archiving of fieldwork data" in the digital sphere (2020: 179; 2020: 190). Huang et al. also bring up the ethical questions of "access to a site of enquiry," "participants' informed consent," "data management," and "relationship management" (2023: 161-162). In the digital world, the publicness and privateness of personal data can be regularly modified due to various factors (Fuhrmann and Pfeifer 2020: 183-184). Bassett and O'Riordan designate publicness as the "data from the covert observation/archiving were already publicly available," including books and newspapers (2002: 235). Meanwhile, Huang et al. define privateness as "the data from the overt observation/archiving were gathered in access-restricted online spaces where information was shared publicly within the space" (2023: 164). For example, social media posts can be publicly available only to a specific/known audience for a certain period. Even if social media posts were set on an unconditional public mode, the process of collecting and presenting them in studies can boost their exposure, which may cause unpredictable effects on participants (account owners). Therefore, Huang et al. believe that participants' informed consent should be

obtained when collecting data from private digital world than the public one (2023: 164). Furthermore, while the boundary between the two has been addressed by Huang et al., they failed to take the shifting degrees that could happen during and after the data collection process into consideration. Part of the shifting degrees is that publicly accessible information could be switched to private mode due to platform regulations, social media contexts, and users' preference (Fuhrmann and Pfeifer 2020: 183-184). Whereas Leenders dismissed the differentiation and stated in the consultation that "if social media are accessible publicly, then I assume that those sending these messages want them to be publicly heard, then I assume reasonably that they have a consent in me using them for academic purposes" (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). Nevertheless, the publicness and privateness in various social contexts also reflect substantial differences in digital culture (Kalsaas 2023: 8). Kalsaas uses Russian internet users as an example, who "likely have significantly high 'expectations of publicity' than their American or Norwegian counterparts" (2023: 8). Therefore, when collecting data from digital media, researchers should take the epistemologies of publicness and privateness from different social contexts into consideration. Whether and how to obtain consent form in social media analysis remain unsettled to investigators.

Additionally, a high standard of data archiving is necessary for ethical procedures because sensitive information that are collected from vulnerable populations and stored in unsecured computers leaving digital trails could result in potential risks amid digital surveillance (Ulmer and Cohen 2016:553). Huang et al. reflect on their data management process and suggest to "fully [anonymize] all participants," "not record their tactics of avoiding authorities' censorship and sanction," "prevent any tracing back

to participants own online pseudonyms or real-life identities" 2023: 166). Alhaffar, for example, explained to me that their research team stored the data on the school server where they anonymized all the recordings and transcripts through assigning them with different ID numbers while storing the consent forms in a different place (personal interview with Alhaffar, 3 October 2023). On the other hand, Leenders was not concerned about data protection as he followed the university guidelines on "storing confidential or semi-confidential information and data…by password-protected storage in Dropbox" (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). The challenge posed to him was that he did not save the social media footage but the links because he assumed that these sources would remain online (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). Nevertheless, lots of Syria-related online footages, including those of protests, were removed by Google based on concerns over the proliferation of terrorist content online (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). To address the obstacle of re-checking footage sources for the research, he either resorted to Wayback Machine for web archiving or looked for alternative footage (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). Therefore, to address the risk of losing social media data due to the volatility of the digital world, investigators need to save the data by its content rather than the links alone. While the leaks in Leenders' studies did not trouble him with data storage and protection, researchers should not neglect the risks and harm associated with social media analysis at post-research stage (Sandberg and Rossi 2022: 11).

In addition to that, Fuhrmann and Pfeifer claim the use of anonymous profiles on social media platforms which conceals the identity of researchers and interlocutors is controversial because it links to the ethics of trust and informed consent in scientific

research (2020: 188). Interlocutors involved in the ethnography could think that "researchers and other actors may be directly or indirectly associated with security institutions" as the atmosphere of suspicion has circulated due to the presence of undercover figures in media interactions (2020: 189-190). Huang et al. address this concern of relationship management by arguing that it should not be rooted in deception (2023: 167). The researchers should disclose their real names and contacts in the informed consent process (Huang et al. 2023: 167). Therefore, despite that the IRB did not standardize data collection in the digital field yet, multiple scholars applying digital anthropological fieldwork have brought up its methodological challenges and provided ethical guidance. However, as the online world is elastic, there are more methodological and ethical challenges pending to be overcome. Although digital formal methods and digital ethnography can serve as alternatives in the information age, cautions should be taken when utilizing this approach.

3.3. Ethnographic Imagination

Ethnographic imagination is subjected to various meanings. According to Qian, it "is rooted in a specific context and reliant on the collective experience of stakeholders, while also connecting broader perceptions of everyday life and the sociocultural insights of participatory observation" (2022: 4). Based on the relation between historical context and individual biographies, Willis believes that the "imagination" is not an elusive but grounded imagining (2000: iix). Anthropologists, such as Wesselhoeft, define the "individual biographies" of ethnographic imagination as "empirically observed" (2023: 117). Whereas Robben considers it as a research method instead of as a conjunctive process. He designates the imagination as a layer in

macrocomparison of distant case studies and as "the leap of analytic and interpretive faith required to explain phenomena that cannot be studied directly through ethnographic fieldwork" (2010: 3). Robben believes that the lack of studies on the Iraq War and the lives of Iraqi people due to the dangerous conflict must be overcome (2010: 3). What motivated him to resort to ethnographic imagination was that the unfeasibility of empirical research was nothing new because some scholars encountered the same challenge and counted on distant approach during the WWII to investigate the USSR, Republic of China, Eastern Europe, plus Germany and its occupied territories (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). Hence, accompanied by the available resources on violence and conflict studies developed in the 1980s, Robben told me that he was able to "extrapolate from the fieldwork experience of the anthropologists who [studied] violence [to Iraq]" and combine it with his field experience in Argentina's Dirty War (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). He added that the comparison between the Iraq War and Argentina's Dirty War was not a random choice, because it was rooted in his findings that "the American military [recruited] former soldiers and officers from South America to work in Iraq" and implemented the same counterinsurgency and dirty war tactics (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). In addition to his selected case of Argentina, his book *Iraq at a Distance* includes a series of cases using ethnographic imagination to analyze the consequences of the war on Iraq, such as Cambodia, Northern Ireland, and Palestine. The increasing global interconnectedness also plays a role in drawing comparison. Andre Gingrich argues that globalization imposes a new emphasis on macro-anthropology because the increasing interconnectedness among human beings renews the scholarly interest in human commonalities and differences (2002: 228). Meanwhile,

there is universal production of global phenomena, such as mass hunger and migration (Gingrich 2022: 228). These two impacts of globalization arouse scholarly interest in the human condition and human interactions, which leads to an innovative approach of "macrocomparison of distant case studies" (Gingrich 2002: 229).

On the other hand, George Marcus (1998) deems ethnographic imagination a logical approach in multi-sited research. Distinguished from the most common construction of ethnographies focusing on "a knowable, fully probed" micro- or local world, Marcus imposed significance on an "encompassing macro-world" (1998: 33). This macro-world refers to a system, a topic, and a process instead of a place (Marcus 1998: 33; Kucera 2012: 40). Robben was not presenting a think description on Iraq's local context but concentrating on the topic of war to make arguments according to the connections between wars in Argentina and Iraq. Hence, counting on the comparisons between other conflict and the Iraq War plus the nature of global interconnectedness, Robben demonstrated in the consultation that ethnographic imagination in macrocomparison of distant case studies is not a creative fiction but based on solid knowledge (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). Since ethnographic imagination is a tool of macrocomparison of distant case studies, the key attention should be paid to the criteria of case selection, which indicates reference significance. If the investigators do not have an identified case with a similar topic or system which can generate a comparison, like the identical tactics that were used by US military in both Iraq and Argentina, then ethnographic imagination may not be a practical method choice.

By applying distant ethnographic method through contextualizing his imagination, Robben immersed himself with the sources on Iraq and took an indirect

approach to grab anything he could for serendipitous insights by looking at Iraqi folktales, literature, films, music, poetry, and clothing (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). Through counting on the multi-sited fieldwork and diverse sources of information, Robben made possible connections with the inaccessible field site without participant observation (2010: 9). Nevertheless, he marked in the consultation that ethnographic imagination is not an impeccable alternative (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). Extrapolation is subjected to the unpreventable risk of being completely discrepant from reality on the ground (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). More importantly, he lacked the capability to evaluate the discrepancy because he has neither been to Iraq, nor been able to read Arabic (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). As a result, the only remedy for misinformation is casting personal networks as wide as possible (personal interview with Robben, 2 October 2023). Thus, ethnographic imagination method deems cross-validation necessary. Nevertheless, language skills and an extensive field network are among the first steps. To adopt which methods and to collect what information remains unanswered because being equipped by these two elements can guarantee neither the reflection of realities on the ground nor a comprehensive overview of perceptions. Resorting to what sources for cross-validation depends on investigators' research objectives.

In addition, the ethnographic imagination approach utilized by Robben provides a specific top-down angle of everyday realities during the Iraq War induced by the tactics used by American military. Keeler criticizes his approach as it fails to address a local angle, such as the impacts of military strategies on Iraqi society and the complex realities on the ground (2011: 217). However, this critique was formulated based on

Robben's objectives rather than his ethnographic imagination approach given that this approach can collect both information and perceptions. For instance, Irene Kucera, who adopted the ethnographic imagination method, compared Western and Eastern positions of women's rights to study the Afghan war (2012: 47). In this study, she utilized discourse analysis, social media analysis, and distant interviews (with Afghan women lived in Austria, Germany, and Tajikistan by then) to collect perceptions (Kucera 2012: 42-44). Therefore, ethnographic imagination is not designated with a specific top-down or bottom-up angle. Like "glocal" collaboration, investigators can accordingly elaborate it with other means to support their imaginations. Regardless of the angle and objectives the investigators are aimed for, the key of applying ethnographic imagination is performing cross-validation and establishing a macro relation with comparative cases.

Before elucidating logistical challenges in Hawija in the following part, this chapter categorizes the selected scholars' distant methods into three groups: 'glocal' collaboration, remote methods, and ethnographic imagination. These categories are not mutually exclusive but formulated based on their associated methodological and ethical concerns. Investigators opting for distant methods must take these challenges into consideration and address them to guarantee the safety of participants plus intermediaries in conflict and post-conflict contexts. In addition to that, the analyses expose new aspects involved in method selection, such as the depth of partnership in 'glocal' collaboration, the modification of positionality, the extent of personal networks in the field, the effect of method combination, and the nature of required data. These scholars have taken various measures to ensure data quality, such as cross-validation for information gathering and target selection for perception accumulation. However, the extracted instructions from these methods remain insufficient to develop a methodology

specifically tailored to the examination of regulatory systems in Hawija. Any proposed methodology must accommodate the realities on the ground. Therefore, I devoted the next chapter to detailing the challenges that researchers have encountered in Hawija by analyzing their studies on the district.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH CONTEXT IN HAWIJA

As what has been mentioned in the first chapter, the Hawija district of Kirkuk governorate in Iraq has remained inaccessible to researchers, especially to those from the academia, because of the imposed institutional restrictions upon conflict and post-conflict context. Reports from the Center for Civilians in Conflict and the International Crisis Group both point out the potential security risk resulting from the escalating ISIS attacks since 2019 (2019: 13; 2020: 15). Other than the external evaluation, the Iraqi government had an impression that Hawija still has ISIS presence or hosts former ISIS people (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). These reputations of Hawija impeded my and other investigators' institutionally authorized access to the field. Hence, the number of (social sciences/ humanities-related) studies on Hawija is limited.

To propose a practical methodology for the investigation of the regulatory systems, in this chapter, I resorted to local NGO staff and researchers who had experience conducting qualitative work in the district to learn about its local research context. Among the limited studies solely and directly targeting Hawija, I counted on a joint project launched by Al-Ghad League for Woman & Child Care, Utrecht University's Intimacies of Remote Warfare (IRW) program, and the PAX Protection of Civilians Program, which aimed to examine impacts of the 2015 Dutch airstrike in anti-ISIS campaign. Hence, in this chapter, I elaborated on the local challenges and opportunities of Hawija's research context, which can enhance the practicality and

comprehensiveness of my methodological proposal on the investigation of regulatory systems in this district.

4.1. Example of "Glocal" Collaboration

The joint project aimed to investigate the 2015 Dutch airstrike that "neither the Coalition against ISIS, nor the Dutch government" admitted the responsibility until 2019 (Azeem et al.: 2022: 9). This project applied the following techniques:

> "… (1) in-depth interviews with affected civilians, (2) focus group discussions (FGDs) with affected civilians, (3) key informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders and subject matter experts, (4) visual investigation of satellite imagery (before and after the airstrike), and (5) primary and secondary source reviews of a range of policy briefings, political, and NGO reports, as well as media reports and academic literature." (Azeem et al. 2022: 30).

To examine and evaluate the impact of airstrike plus hears civilians' accounts of the incident and its subsequent harm, this two-year project adopted a "glocal" collaboration approach where PAX and IRW from the Netherlands partnered with Al-Ghad, a local NGO from Iraq (Azeem et al. 2022: 9).

Mohammed Abdulkareem Khthar, the project coordinator from Al-Ghad, stated in the consultation that this investigation was initially launched by Al-Ghad (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Nevertheless, Al-Ghad found the district-level investigation not useful as they intended to highlight this incident at an international level (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Therefore, Al-Ghad partnered with PAX, an international NGO that focuses on civilian protection through references by journalists from Iraq and abroad (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). On the other hand, Saba Azeem, the project leader from PAX, told me that Al-Ghad's topic concentration on post-conflict development distinguishes it from other NGOs working in Hawija, which inspired

PAX's formation of partnership with it (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). This partnership provided the external parties with a vital advantage. Al-Ghad's existing network in Hawija, which extends from local authorities to the bombardment victims to data collectors, met the project requirements (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Hence, Al-Ghad took the lead in collecting data on the ground, such as formulating a database of civilian victims and recruiting interviewees. Like what have been reflected upon Collombier's and Beaujouan's applications of 'glocal' collaboration, one of the factors motivating IRW and PAX to partner with Al-Ghad was due to local NGO's extended networks in the field. Depending on Al-Ghad who is a gatekeeper in the field can equip IRW and PAX with a reliable network to identify research targets. Otherwise, it would have been challenging for the investigators from abroad to either spot airstrike victims and witnesses or conduct a large number of interviews.

Through hiring and training four research assistants possessing "necessary proficiency in the Iraqi Arabic dialect spoken in Hawija, cultural fluency, and knowledge of local practices and physical infrastructure in Hawija," Al-Ghad was able to carry out interviews with 119 affected civilians, launched four focus group discussions, and conducted key informant interviews with Hawijian authorities, journalists, and NGO staff (Azeem et al.: 2022: 30-31). Whereas IRW brought professors and students possessing methodological skills to set up the research, code the interviews, and write the report, PAX provided financial support, trained the local research team, and sent research personnel for field coordination (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). In addition to that, the research team resorted to secondary sources on "area-and city-based assessments of Hawija" and "various media

items about the airstrike on the industrial neighborhood in Hawija itself" to triangulate the data collected from interviews (Azeem et al.: 2022: 31-32). After data transcription and translation, PAX and IRW performed data coding and analysis (Azeem et al. 2022: 32). To ensure all parties were in accord with the research flow, partners met on a weekly basis for six months to discuss codes, new themes, and data patterns (Azeem et al. 2022: 32). To ensure the compliance with ethical standards, the research team not only obtained informed consent from all interviewees, but also managed the collected data through a cloud-based system for security and confidentiality where all data were encrypted and all participants were anonymized (Azeem et al. 2022: 31-32).

While this project was successfully processed through collaboration, it also disclosed some limitations and contextual obstacles that need to be inspected before conducting research on Hawija. Firstly, while recruiting research assistants who could speak regional colloquial from the Hawija district was helpful, the research team inevitably encountered the potential bias that were brought by the local assistants (Azeem et al. 2022: 33). Additionally, the English translation of data provided to analysts could neglect the "cultural and linguistic nuances" that existed in different languages (Azeem et al. 2022: 33). According to the procedure where the nuances emerged, 'glocal' collaboration's recruitment of researchers speaking colloquial can reduce the risk of misunderstanding during interview process while postponing it to the translation phase. Since the translation process is not as dynamic as the one of interview that needs constant interaction, frequent discussions between local researchers and principal investigators can ameliorate the negative effect of these nuances. In addition to that, when selecting affected civilians for interviews, the research team selected those "who were currently living in Hawija" without reaching out to those who had left

Hawija after the strike (Azeem et al. 2022: 33). Hence, 'glocal' collaboration relying on face-to-face interview shows an absence of field diversity, which can only deal with the inhabitants from the chosen field sites while neglecting other targets. If research includes a target selection process that is affected by relocation factor, investigators can opt for a combination of physical and online interview methods. Furthermore, the research team pointed out the challenge of memory duration because the civilians could not accurately recall details of the strike that happened six years ago (Azeem et al. 2022: 33). In this case, cross-validation of the collected data was essential. Other than the methodological obstacles, the research team indicates the risk of retraumatizing affected civilians during interviews (Azeem et al.: 2022: 34). Therefore, when examining sensitive topics that could evoke participants' grief, investigators should always have an accessible psychiatrist ready to provide assistance. While the obstacles that could have an impact on the result were mentioned in the project report, other logistical challenges also emerged through consulting relevant stakeholders involved in the project. These obstacles should also be taken into consideration when resorting to "glocal" collaboration or conducting research in Hawija.

Frictions did appear between two of the tripartite partners, IRW and PAX, during the project based on their different values and goals (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). The advantage of this collaboration was that the researchers from PAX were previously trained by IRW's senior academics who were also their fellows in the project from Utrecht University (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). Laren Gould, the project leader from IRW, stated in the consultation that this academic background strongly supported the collaboration since the personnel from both sides had the same concept of research question formulation,

the same research training in conflict-affected areas, the same understanding of appropriate and ethical methodologies, etc. (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). However, different interests of the institutions emerged towards the end of the project. An NGO lays great emphasis on lobbying and disseminating production as soon as possible, whereas a university underscores academic rigor, data reliability, and structured output, which is a lengthy process demanding coding, pattern finding, and reiteration. (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). Hence, their understandings of research progress were different, which had required lots of communication (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). Meanwhile, Khthar did not find any challenges cooperating with PAX and IRW due to their close communication (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Azeem and Gould also resonated with the flow of effective communication with Al-Ghad which mediated communications between external institutes and the field. All three parties recognized the sensitivity of this topic and the cultural difference between the Dutch and Iraqi context (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Thus, before PAX and IRW proceeded with data collection in the field, they always reached Al-Ghad for recommendations (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). For instance, Al-Ghad offered help in formulating contextually sensitive interview questions and doing the negotiation of different cultural backdrops based on its familiarity with the local culture and language (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023).

Effective communication not only maintained the tripartite partnership, but also supported project development. The four data collectors encountered trust issues when interviewing the victims and their families at the beginning (personal interview with

Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Although these four data collectors were from Hawija, the locals suspected that they had a relationship with the Dutch government which recruited them to collect secret information from local inhabitants (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). The locals reacted by rejecting interviews and angrily confronted them about their research intention (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Al-Ghad handled the challenge by halting the interview process, launching an advocacy campaign, putting up posters and brochures around Hawija, and meeting with community leaders to clarify project objectives and gain trust plus support from the locals (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). In the retrospect, Khthar emphasized to me in the consultation that this incident of trust issues was no accident in Hawija because the locals remained skeptical about the exposure of their personal information which could affect their life in the midst of a corrupt and fraudulent society (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). This obtainment of research authorization from community leaders was not only a trust building process, but also a modification of researchers' positionality. Community leaders' permission reflects a sense of community's acceptance of their research intentions and identities. Thus, foreign investigators aiming to conduct interviews with the locals must obtain not only a recommendation letter from their home institutions detailing research ethics, but also an authorization from community leaders (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023).

Three other challenges were revealed by Azeem in consultation when she was conducting research in the field. Despite informing the victims and their families that the project team could not promise any compensation, the victims and their families'

expectations did rise (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). They were hoping that the project team could address their immediate needs which have existed since 2015, such as services and goods delivery (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Nevertheless, with respect to research ethics, the project team could not respond to their immediate needs (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). If the team started providing things to people for research, it might cause concern for discriminating against those who did not participate or taking advantage of people's circumstances to enforce involvement (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Besides this context-based ethical challenge, Azeem raised two logistical challenges in the field. Except for those big cities, such as Baghdad, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah, foreigners must apply for access papers from the government to work. Although the requirement of work authorization is common in some countries, foreigners are further restricted by working hours in Hawija where non-Iraqis can only stay from 9am to 2pm (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Azeem assumed that it was due to a negative perception of Hawija that the district has a persistent presence of ISIS or former ISIS people (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Hence, she had to stay in Kirkuk and drove back and forth for 40-45 minutes daily during her stay in the field (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). In addition, Azeem informed me about the habitude of officials and authorities in Hawija, who prefer face-to-face interview rather than phoning (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). From their perspectives, meeting online is not considered a meeting that pays enough respect. (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). These two obstacles were solved by the adoption of 'glocal' collaboration. While Azeem's movement in field was restricted by the curfew, the data collection process

was accommodated by relying on local Iraqi researchers who could move freely in Hawija. On the other hand, their physical presence in the field allowed interviews with officials and authorities to proceed. Although 'glocal' collaboration was able to tackle with the two logistical challenges in Hawija, its application could be criticized as the perpetuation of inequality between international investigators and local researchers that was mentioned in the previous chapter. The published report did not address this drawback but merely recognized the four local researchers in acknowledgements. Whereas this airstrike project successfully brought the Dutch state to the International Court of Justice (Bijl and Zeijden 2024), the court rulings on and the compensations to the victims and their families were not applicable to local researchers'. They cannot overtake international investigators' responsibility for addressing the ethical critiques of the partnership. As the ethical consideration on the perpetuation of inequality between external and local researchers is principal in collaboration, I should address it in my proposed methodology.

According to both Azeem and Gould, partnering with Al-Ghad, a local NGO, addressed lots of challenges in the field, which had provided invaluable assistance to the project (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023; personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). Other than assisting PAX and IRW with navigating the network of its existing contacts, Al-Ghad helped the project team with obtaining work authorizations from the government and transporting between Hawija and Kirkuk (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). In addition to logistical assistance, Gould indicated that collaborating with Al-Ghad equipped the project team with rapport amongst the local community when discussing the harm caused by the Dutch government and its enduring grievances (personal interview with Gould, 15

November 2023). This project shows both the logistical challenges in the field and another empirical application of 'glocal' collaboration to me. It exposes layers of daily interaction and project collaboration among the three actors. While the project mentioned some limitations and failed to deal with certain concerns, it possesses reference significance as being one of the few studies on Hawija.

4.2. Example of Remote Method

In addition to the field research, a distant study was included in the Hawija airstrike project, which can provide me with insights on the remote approach to the field. Four interdisciplinary conflict studies students from Utrecht University conducted a social media analysis on the Dutch airstrike as a complement to PAX and IRW's field research in Hawija (Bloemen et al. 2021: 6). Their study intended to explore "how social media users that closely identify with Iraq and Hawija interpreted the Dutch F16 bombing on an Islamic State ammunition factory in Hawija on June 3, 2015" (Bloemen et al. 2021: 3). They investigated 392 social media posts via Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Instagram to analyze people's different ideas about "the identity of the perpetrator, the victims, and the reason for the bombing on social media" after the occurrence of the 2015 attack and after Dutch government's acknowledgement of responsibility over it in 2019 (Bloemen et al. 2021: 3 and 6). After identifying a list of descriptive keywords in both Arabic plus English and collecting the bombardment-related textual stories, images, and videos published between June 2015 to December 2020, these investigators developed a coding framework and categorized them accordingly (Bloemen et al. 2021: 7).

The report of this social media analysis reflects on some limitations in their research which can be constructive to the formulation of my methodological proposal on regulatory systems in Hawija. Bloemen et al. state that “except for one or two posts, most online users posting about the bombing did not experience the bombing themselves” (2021: 7). Thus, they point out the exclusion of “voices (physically) nearest to the actual event” in their research (Bloemen et al. 2021: 7). Moreover, they identify another obstacle which was the removal of social media posts by platforms in the attempt to block terrorist content (Bloemen et al. 2021: 7). Hence, the exploration of the bombardment interpretation can be biased because “all data possibly shared by [ISIS] and their sympathizers is no longer available on the platforms” (Bloemen et al. 2021: 7). More importantly, the report shows that this study was a collection of perceptions. In the previous chapter, I have shown multiple researchers, such as Alhaffar, applying target selection measures to reduce bias involved in data collection. However, the social media analysis method adopted in this study could not reveal account owners’ identity, except for identifying their potential locations and whether they have experienced the attack or not. This resulted in researchers’ inability to select targets as what can be done through online interviews. Therefore, due to the negative effects of voice exclusion and post removal, this study might not reflect a relatively comprehensive picture of public opinions on the Dutch airstrike. In this case, the sole use of social media analysis to collect perceptions in Hawija may not be an ideal choice. Last, but not least, these four students resonated with the challenges encountered by IRW and PAX’s research team because their non-Arabic background could have made them neglect linguistic and cultural nuances (Bloemen et al. 2021: 8). Thus, engaging with those who know the local language (or colloquial) is important when collecting opinions as it can mitigate

the effect of epistemological premises. While the report includes the methodological obstacles, it fails to address ethical concerns related to the obtainment of informed consent, the fluid dichotomy between privacy and publicness associated with the posts, as well as data storage and protection.

By elucidating the Dutch airstrike project conducting on Hawija, this chapter presents the local research context through analyzing the limitations mentioned in the reports and consultations. Such challenges are important since they can directly affect my choice of methods to investigate regulatory systems in the district, such as authorities' preference of face-to-face interviews, the daily curfew targeting foreigners, the removal of social media posts amid anti-ISIS campaign, etc. On the other hand, the studies mentioned in this chapter also reveal several favorable circumstances to me, such as the reliable intermediary Al-Ghad and its possession of an extensive local network that can be helpful to my research. Plus, community authorities' research permission can grant me an acceptable positionality in the field. Taking this local situation into account can endow the proposed methodology in the next chapter with thorough examination and practical value.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL ON REGULATORY SYSTEMS IN HAWIJA

I dedicated this chapter to developing distant research methodology for regulatory systems in Hawija. However, before proceeding with method selection and challenge resolution, I described my originally planned study on "Who Complied with What (&Whom) in Hawija from 2014 to 2017: Regulatory Systems in Areas of Limited Statehood" by elucidating its topic background and research aims. These two elements clarify not only my theoretical approach, but also the needed data for research. The chapter then delineates the chosen methods and their reasons. Meanwhile, I would also address the methodological and ethical concerns associated with the adopted methods plus logistical challenges in Hawija. Last, but not least, the chapter ends with a discussion on the limitations of my proposed methodology.

5.1. Theoretical Framework of the Proposed Study

While Max Weber refers to statehood solely as a monopoly over legitimate violence over a fixed territory, Toby Dodge and Becca Wasser add two other pillars of state survival—state's service delivery and infrastructure development abilities and ideological binding capabilities (2014: 14). This distributional capability not only allows the state to penetrate civil society and enforce rule of law, but also accrues legitimacy among its population within the territory (Dodge and Wasser 2014: 15). Otherwise, if the state fails to control and distribute resources during times of

insecurity, the population will resort to informal channels for goods procurement and strengthen their communal alignments, such as ethnic, religious, and political groupings (Dodge and Wasser 2014: 16). Dodge and Wasser indicate that “states with weak institutional power, in terms of both security and service delivery, create space for sub-state violence to flourish” (2014:16). They conceptualize the 2014 collapse of the Iraqi army based on the aforementioned three pillars and attributes this collapse to the “low institutional presence within Iraqi society” which was filled by “inadequate infrastructural power” and “pervasive corruption” (Dodge and Wasser 2014: 25). This institutional vacuum triggered individuals’ alignment with their secondary identities and enabled the intervention of religious and ethnic groups (Dodge and Wasser 2014: 26).

Similar to what Dodge concludes on the institutional vacuum that triggers the intervention of non-state actors, Charles Tripp designates the Iraqi state as an always-unfinished performance paving the way for a ‘shadow state’ as a result of its failure to employ coercive and administrative power. From his perspective, the Iraqi state articulated its national identity to gear to internal and external audience since the anti-colonial period (Tripp 2018: 338). In the meantime, those who felt to be neglected by this national identity developed alternative ideas of state (Tripp 2018: 338). As the ruler reached the apex of power and created his networks of patronage, the division was further entrenched within the body politics (Tripp 2018: 338). This inequality created out of privileging certain communities, regions, classes fostered ‘shadow states’ established by both the patronage networks and those who rejected the state (Tripp 2018: 339). By 2014, Tripp states that “[although] the state was being performed…it was no longer a unitary state” (2018b: 172) Multiple state and non-state actors intervened in the state, including Kurdish peshmerga forces, Sunni Arab tribal forces,

Shi'i militia forces, as well as units of the regular army and specialized anti-terror units" (Tripp 2018b: 172). Therefore, when the Iraqi government withdrew its army from the Kirkuk governorate amid heavy attacks by ISIS, the Iraqi state lost its legitimate monopoly over the means of violence in the province. Meanwhile, the Kurdish forces tried filling the vacuum left by the government and captured the province to fight against ISIS.

The 2014 withdrawal of the Iraqi army was one of the turning points that deepened the administrative and institutional vacuum proposed by Dodge and Tripp. This vacuum made Hawija an ALS where central authorities' incapability to implement legitimate monopoly of violence resulted in multiple non-state actor's intervention (Santini et al. 2020: 15; 54). Although Huber and Woertz argue that Iraq has remained an ALS since 1990 when its breakdown of governance led to insurgency and civil war, its violent conflicts reached a tipping point in 2014 when ISIS occupied one-third of Iraqi territories (2021: 1265). More importantly, the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from Kirkuk governorate marks a proactive concession of the Iraqi government by yielding sovereign control over its territories to non-state actors.

Even though the academics have recently stopped viewing ALS as an exotic exception but as part of the daily life, little outcome has been shown on the programmatic level. The conception of "strong/consolidated state V.S. weak/fragile state" still occupies Western narratives, which affects policy-making processes at both state and international levels. For instance, at the international level, the United Nations, continues regarding building sustainable state institutions as the core of its peace-building mission because states are seen as the necessity of peace and good governance (Call 2008: 1498). However, this monolithic state-building process as a cure to "failed

state" indeed jeopardizes peace and contributes to insecurity and tensions (Call 2008: 1498-1499). Pinar Bilgin and Adam Morton dismiss this one-size-fits-all state-building process as an application of Eurocentric generalizations and propose the prerequisite of "[inserting] oneself within alternative historical and contemporary contexts in order to adopt and adapt concepts to changing circumstances and new conditions" (2002: 70). Governance in the Middle East has frequently been conducted through involving de facto powerholders, such as tribal leaders, religious figures, etc. (Ahram and Lust 2016: 24-25). Due to the existence of shadow state, navigating ways to accommodate the co-existence between de jure and de facto powerholders and understanding the dynamics where the role of de jure actors is compromised can be helpful to realize peacebuilding mission.

5.2. Research Objectives of the Proposed Study

Under this background, Matthew Cancian and Diana Greenwald (2022) conducted a survey to examine provisions of justice in disputed territories, which include Hawija, during the 2014-2017 period. The respondents, composed of Kurdish soldiers and elites, identified that around half of the provisions of justice in Hawija were provided by Iraqi government (Cancian and Greenwald 2022: 460). Whereas the rest were divided between Kurdish actors (more) or no services (less; including two respondents identified Arab sheikhs as justice provider) (Cancian and Greenwald 2022: 460). In addition, ISIS implemented its own administration of justice in occupied territories. Provost states that ISIS demonstrates its capability to bring order by establishing a working administration of justice before fully controlling a territory (2021: 107). Thus, this period was marked by legal pluralism, when multiple actors

possessing regulatory systems were present in Hawija. These regulatory systems are the social frameworks and networks that enable dispute settlement, which includes both formal and informal laws and institutions.

Although Cancian and Greenwald's research on justice provisions in Hawija identified a small portion of "no service" responses, in addition to the Iraqi government and Kurdish actors, when asked about "who did civilians go to if they had a criminal complaint about someone else," this "no service" responses by Kurdish soldiers may fail to represent the context in Hawija (2022: 454). Hawija has remained beyond Kurdish reach until 2014. Since its predominant population is Sunni Arabs, Kurdish soldiers might not be fully aware of all regulatory systems existed in Hawija. In addition to that, the campaign against ISIS was ongoing at the time of survey which might prevent Kurdish forces from being aware of residents' provisions of justice. More importantly, Sandra Brunnegger argues that "justice may lie outside the law or legal edicts" (2019: 1). Dima Smaira and Jeroen Gunning support this view with their works on everyday peace in contested cities where disputes can be settled through bottom-up and localized mechanisms deployed by main actors in the field, such as families, clans, political parties, mukhtars, police and other security services (2023: 342). Roger Mac Ginty depicted these mechanisms as "reciprocity, or an unspoken pact whereby actors agree to abide by the same ground rules and operate within broadly shared parameters (2014: 554). Hence, the response of "no service" can be misleading. Meanwhile, since the Iraqi government only withdrew its army from the Kirkuk governorate without dismantling its public institutions in 2014, public sectors remained operating. As a result, many of the interviewees identified that the Iraqi state provided justice provisions during the 2014-2017 period.

Following Iraqi government's recapture of Kirkuk and the withdrawal of Kurdish forces in 2017, legal pluralism sustained in the province. What distinguished the legal pluralism in post-2017 period (till 2019) from pre-2014 period was the realization of the decentralization that was proposed to post-2003 Iraq to deter dictatorship (Al-Rikabi 2022: 344-345). The state, provincial authorities, community leaders, tribal leaders, and armed groups all claimed different regulatory frameworks (Parry 2018: 1). In addition to devolution, the communal tension and ethnic competition following the independence referendum and the return of the federal government further politicalized the situation in the province with multiple forces simultaneously operating in the governorate under various mandates (International Crisis Group 2020: 11). On the other hand, the active withdrawal of state actors that changed the former power and social relations between state and non-state actors made the 2014-2017 period an exception. Due to limited information available on governance context in Hawija, having a glimpse of the fluid dynamics from 2014 to 2017 in order to apprehend its local judicial matrix is also a research objective.

Therefore, through examining the regulatory systems in Hawija from 2014 to 2017, this research aims to explore the judicial landscape, which refers to a depiction of operated regulatory systems and an illustration of their associated categories of cases. Plus, it intends to investigate the motives of local residents' acceptance of and compliance with regulatory systems because their choices contain reflections on "who within their environment might have the right amount and type of capital, what beliefs and dispositions others might have" (Smaira and Gunning 2023: 346). More importantly, the research intends to display the dynamics of regulatory systems in ALS because the line of various regulatory systems between state and non-state actors as

well as among non-state actors is blurred. Previous literature shows that tribesmen sometimes staff judicial government bodies (Bobseine 2019: 8); many civilian employees remained working in public sectors amid ISIS take-over of public institutions and payroll (Revkin 2018: 7). In terms of judicial frameworks, Moore believes that actors cannot completely flip the previous laws enacted by former entities because "new laws are thrust upon going social arrangements in which there are complexes of binding obligations already in existence" (1973: 723). In addition, Melisande Genat mentions that "…the relationship between tribes and state judicial institutions in Iraq is in fact best understood as deeply embedded cooperation (2021: 507). She proposes a landscape of legal pluralism in Iraq conciliating central government and tribal laws (Genat 2021: 507). Hence, though the pluralistic and partially precedent traits of administration of justice have been observed, an investigation of regulatory systems and fluid dynamics in Hawija can present local judicial practices in detail.

According to the objectives of the investigation, there are two data sets that need to be collected for the research. The first one is a factual investigation of the variety of judicial systems that were running in Hawija during the 2014-2017 period. The second one is the reasons behind local inhabitants' acceptance of and compliance with a specific regulatory system.

Multiple scholars mentioned in the previous chapter differentiated the methods used for information accumulation and perception collection. Khaddour, for example, emphasized the various depths of partnership formulation when utilizing "glocal" collaboration with local assistants in Syria and Iraq. The collection of information, according to him, depends on a shallow degree of partnership that solely looks for

factual information from the field without the need to train local assistants on observing or comprehending the context. However, Collombier and Beaujouan developed their partnerships with local researchers to another level, including plenty of training, long-term engagement, and reciprocity, since the data they collected from the field comprises mainly opinions. Hence, while 'glocal' collaboration can be adopted to collect both information and perceptions, their associated measures applied by the scholars are different. Distinguished from what Khaddour did by unidirectionally informing local assistants what to collect, Collombier and Beaujouan offered them standardized methodological training and formulated tight relationships with them by giving weight to their thoughts and accordingly framed the studies. More importantly, since Collombier and Beaujouan were gathering opinions from the field, both of their methodologies involved a process of target selection on local researchers (the interviewers) or/and participants (the interviewees), which is unseen in Khaddour's borderlands studies.

In addition to the scholars utilizing "glocal" collaboration method, scholars resorting to remote methods laid emphasis on the differentiation between information and perception collections. Leenders, for example, did not use the data collected from social media to corroborate factual claims as social media is subjected to the drawback of fabrication. He indicated this downside in the research on mass mobilization and protests in Syria, social media illustrated "what protestors and regime incumbents had, how they presented themselves, and how they responded" as discursive dimensions of the conflict rather than "as a source to figure out what exactly happened in terms of who opened fire or who was killed" (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). According to Leenders, social media cannot be featured as the only source of

information in academic research (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). He then produced factual claims through cross-checking the data gained from social media with other sources, such as online interviews with Syrian refugees. Resonated with what Leenders highlighted on the nature of social media analysis, the remote method utilized in the airstrike project also emphasizes this by solely gathering opinions via social media analysis without making factual claims. Therefore, when utilizing social media analysis, studies examining information require a combination with other methods for cross-validation.

Gould also found the necessity to differentiate factual information from views when running the airstrike project in Hawija. While the project allowed variations on local inhabitants' perceptions of the airstrike, the claims of the damage and harm caused by the airstrike, which have been brought to litigation investigations at the international level, were cross validated. Gould emphasized in the consultation that "interviews were a source of information, but not the only source of information" (personal interview with Gould, 15 November 2023). The research team also resorted to satellite imagery, pictures, and literature review on area-and city-based assessments of Hawija to validate the claims of harm gained from interviews (Azeem et al. 2022: 31-32). Therefore, before proceeding with proposing methods and addressing their associated challenges for investigation of regulatory systems in Hawija, I divided my research objectives into two parts because factual investigation and opinion collection adopt different sets of research methods and involve different measures.

5.3. Methodology

5.3.1. The Chosen Methods

To pursue the research objective of judicial landscape in Hawija, the study requires interviews with judicial personnel who resided in the district during the 2014-2017 period, including judges, lawyers, and local authorities referring to sheikhs and mukhtars. By utilizing semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, these judicial personnel will be invited to answer the following questions: 1) Throughout your interaction with clients/civilians/tribesmen, the regulatory systems issued by which authority did you resort to during the 2014-2017 period; 2) What judicial systems existed in Hawija during this period have you seen; 3) Where were the courts/judicial decision-making agencies for these regulatory systems; 4) For the petitions/court records/verdicts related to these regulatory systems, where were they stored; 5) Did those regulatory systems handle all case types or did they differentiate between categories; 6) Who served as judicial decision-making agents during this period; 7) Have you noticed other agents taking the role of dispute resolution or judicial decision-making process during the period?

To cross validate the data that will be gained from the interviews, the study will also resort to archival sources for petitions, court records, and verdicts plus to local residents' narratives through interviews. Khthar informed me in the consultation that there is an archive for relevant information on regulatory systems in the Hawija municipality building and Kirkuk governorate building (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). The mayor and municipalities of Hawija scanned and sent all documents to be stored in Kirkuk's governorate building every year (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). He added that

while hard copies may not be available during the 2014-2017 period, the governorate building still possesses scanned copies (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). For the information on ISIS judicial system, while ISIS had its own archiving services since the 2014 occupation of Hawija, it never occupied Kirkuk city (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). While the director of the Hawija municipality who came to power during ISIS occupation was working in Kirkuk city, some of his employees were still in Hawija, who kept communicating with the director (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). Therefore, Khthar believes that the governorate building of Kirkuk city had a small amount of archival data from ISIS stored (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023). To access the archives, the study aims to explore the Hawija municipality building, Kirkuk governorate building, Kurdish court in Kirkuk, and tribal diwans. Hence, the factual investigation will be composed of interviews and archival research.

The second research objective examines the empirical legitimacy of the regulatory systems that were operated in Hawija during this period. This objective aims to explore the regulatory mechanisms that residents complied with or resisted against, their reasons of choice, and motives of social acceptance. The study intends to utilize semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions as research methods. The interview comprises four main questions with potential follow-ups depending on interviewees' answers: 1) which set/sets of regulatory mechanism did you comply with when encountering problems in personal and communal affairs (including a request for examples); 2) who developed and imposed these sets of regulatory mechanism; 3) what the reasons behind your choice of regulatory systems were; 4) what factors motivated

your compliance with this/these choice(s). The formulated answers reflect local inhabitants' perceptions on regulatory systems' empirical legitimacy.

According to the research aims and needed data, the study plans to adopt a combination of "glocal" collaboration and remote methods to achieve the objectives through interviews and archival research. The reason why I do not opt for ethnographic imagination to formulate a macrocomparison is because it demands a large amount of available data on Hawija and research experience with other field sites on relevant topics. However, resources on power and social relations in Hawija are limited as this field site is under-researched. Apart from that, I do not possess experience with regulatory systems in other sites. Hence, practical drawbacks hinder the adoption of ethnographic imagination.

The examination of the judicial landscape in Hawija through interviews with judicial personnel needs local researchers in the field because officials and authorities accept only face-to-face interaction and consider phoning and online interviews as disrespectful. Moreover, seeking information from government buildings in Hawija and Kirkuk city will need the assistance of local researchers because the stored information was neither published online nor accessible to the public. Thus, this planned study relies on local researchers' access to these places and data. Otherwise, its objectives cannot be pursued. More importantly, as what has been reflected upon 'glocal' collaboration, the size of personal networks in the field plays a decisive role in method selection. Collombier and Beaujouan, who aimed to collect public perceptions from the field, possessed a limited number of contacts which can negatively affect the quality of data. Rather than gathering opinions from the few existing contacts in the field, they relied on them as intermediaries to recruit researchers and participants. In this case, they had a

wide and diversified population of research participants, which allowed them to perform target selection and reduce bias. Since I have never been to the field and have a limited number of contacts, ‘glocal’ collaboration can present me a choice to navigate field networks for interviews. This study will also resort to conducting online interviews with local inhabitants to examine regulatory systems’ empirical legitimacy based on the prevalence of communication applications and the availability of the internet. In addition, the engagement with local researchers presents an advantage to the research, which is their familiarity with the field, referring to both their colloquial capability and knowledge with local contexts. This advantage can lower the inference of my epistemological premises and language nuances in interviews. Furthermore, having local researchers present can modify my positionality in the field because they possess pre-existing relationships with local communities. Meanwhile, their identity as an Iraqi citizen is not bound by the curfew on foreigners, which can provide flexibility to interview schedules.

On the other hand, I plan to combine online interviews from the remote methods with ‘glocal’ collaboration when gathering data on regulatory system’s empirical legitimacy. When local researchers can physically be present at the interview, my participation through hybrid mode may bring new follow-ups into the picture and let interviewees expand on their responses. Furthermore, providing an option for online interview can potentially involve local inhabitants who lived in Hawija during the 2014-2017 period but have relocated to other regions. Their contribution to the research can make the perception accumulation more thorough than merely focusing on current residents. This section clarifies my chosen methods by detailing the needed data plus its collection means and elucidates my reasons of choice. Whereas the next section

elaborates on the associated challenges of the methods that have been mentioned in chapter three. By addressing these considerations, I can rigorously polish my proposed methodology and identify its limitations.

5.3.2. Methodological Challenges

To compile a research proposal, I dedicated this section to addressing methodological challenges associated with the chosen distant methods that were mentioned in the previous chapter. This first methodological challenge is how to navigate networks in the field. This is a realistic concern of the study because possessing personal networks in Hawija can endow me with the capability to recruit local researchers, communicate with officials and authorities, connect with local inhabitants, and obtain research authorizations. Multiple scholars adopting distant methods have imposed importance on prior networks in the field and resorted to their existing contacts amid field inaccessibility. Brandt, for example, did not consider field inaccessibility as a rupture because she could still access the area based on her formerly built networks with the locals (Brandt 2017: 508). Collombier resonated with Brandt and said that having prior contacts on the ground allowed her to identify interlocutors and put them in touch (personal interview with Collombier, 18 September 2023). What distinguishes my situation from these scholars was that they established the networks during their previous residency in the field, whereas I have never been to Hawija. This distinction makes my navigation of personal networks in the field more demanding than them. However, among the scholars who had successfully navigated their field networks mentioned in the previous chapter, Beaujouan has never been to Syria where her field site is. She addressed the obstacle by resorting to her personal networks and

assigning her friend who has field contacts as a "gatekeeper" through whom she was able to navigate local connections and collect quality data (personal interview with Beaujouan, 20 September 2023). Hence, I plan to rely on the local NGO, Al-Ghad, that has experience researching conflict contexts in Hawija for contact development in the field. Al Ghad will thus be responsible for recruiting local assistants who can speak Hawijan dialect with data collection capability, obtaining research authorizations from local authorities, and connecting me with local inhabitants. In addition to the contacts referred to by Al-Ghad, to reduce the bias of target selection, a snowball sampling will be utilized to identify interviewees through the provided contacts. By counting on remote interaction and snowball sampling, this study will be able to access former residents who have relocated to other regions.

This dependence on an intermediary which will refer local inhabitants to me for interviews on empirical legitimacy, however, can lead to selection bias. To reduce potential bias and balance representation, I will adopt Collombier's approach which monitors interviewees' communal affiliations. While local assistants' interviews with authorities are information investigation which includes little bias inference, the collaborative online interviews with local inhabitants which involved opinion collection can be affected by local researchers' perspectives. Therefore, other than ensuring gender balance which will be helpful in interviewing both male and female residents, I need to monitor the communal background of local researchers during the selection process. In addition to that, providing methodological training to local researchers on how to conduct interviews, formulate questions, and organize data can be useful. If the field is not equipped with digital facilities, performance of pilot test and instant provision of feedback can be another remedy to reduce bias inference. Meanwhile, local researchers'

engagement can bring an advantage to the study: the collaborative online interview can address the existing linguistic and cultural nuances between English and Arabic colloquial in Hawija that were mentioned in the airstrike project. By framing questions, conducting interviews, and reviewing results together, I will be able to both avoid the epistemological premises in interviews and reduce bias. Furthermore, as someone who has never been to the district, the incapability to accurately comprehend the local dialect poses a challenge to the research. Hence, collaborating with local researchers can also alleviate the language barrier to communication in the local dialect.

5.3.3. Ethical Challenges

To achieve the objectives through interviews and archival research in a conflict and post-conflict context, addressing ethical issues in the field, preserving the safety of interviewees, and maintaining the confidentiality of information are essential. Distinguished from the airstrike project which the investigators specifically targeted the victims of bombardments, the reaction to my study on regulatory systems in Hawija is less predictable because residents might have different experiences of service provisions from 2014 to 2017 which could arouse other memories during the war. Thus, there will be risk of retraumatizing the interviewees. Having an Arabic-speaking psychotherapist to provide trauma counselling and train all interviewers to act accordingly when interviewees show emotional response is necessary. On the other hand, as Azeem mentioned in the consultation, Hawija is perceived as having persistent ISIS presence and former ISIS people (personal interview with Azeem, 21 November 2023). Since some civil servants remained in the municipality of Hawija continued working during ISIS occupation (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023), they

might work according to ISIS guidelines and law. Testimonies from the interviewees could put those who provided service provisions in danger. Thus, maintaining privacy and confidentiality of information is imperative to residents in Hawija to avoid retribution. In addition to following the ethical guidelines required by academic institutions, I will also provide ethical training to local researchers because I will not be the only investigator involved in the examination process. Hence, I need to ensure that all researchers follow the required ethical guidance as well.

Regarding the interviews with local authorities and inhabitants, I will address the ethical segments of informed consent obtainment and data protection. I plan to obtain the consent by explaining the study to interviewees, presenting research authorizations granted by local authorities, and collecting informed consent via phone calls, which can make them feel comfortable with sharing accurate and detailed information. Once the interviewee has given consent, the investigator and local researchers will schedule interview time with the interviewees. During the interview, the informed consent will be recorded at the beginning and the end of the interview. After the interview, interviewees have the right to withdraw the information that they provided. Meanwhile, to avoid the risk of exposure, the interview will be conducted via encrypted applications, such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Although the interview will be recorded, their records and transcriptions will be anonymized with codes and stored in a restricted access file.

Other than addressing the ethical challenges associated with interviewees in the field, another concern that needs to be laid emphasis upon is the ethic of “glocal” collaboration between me as the principal investigator and local researchers. I plan not only to compensate local researchers’ time, but also to involve them in research

development and decision-making process before launching the research in the field. More importantly, I intend to endow my research with flexibility which can accommodate their research objectives and take their perspectives into account through intensive and frequent communications. Since these researchers will make substantive contributions to the study, I would like to share the intellectual ownership of the work with them through which to reveal their familiarity with Hawija in the production to a global audience.

5.3.4. Limitations

While the chosen method can address many obstacles proposed by scholars adopted distant research, it still possesses limitations that I am not able to promptly accommodate. Firstly, the adoption of the collaborative hybrid interview can address obstacles, such as inference of bias as I can be present online with local researchers to monitor the interview process and body languages as they can observe non-verbal cues through their physical presence. However, local inhabitants' reaction to this mode of interview remains unknown. If its implementation poses any technical difficulties or discomfort to local inhabitants, then I will resort to a face-to-face interview conducted solely by local researchers with my occasional participation if the situation allows. Thus, the alternative hybrid mode will be implemented based on ground realities. Moreover, the study which will investigate the 2014-2017 period may encounter a similar obstacle as the 2022 airstrike project which investigated the bombardment that happened in 2015. The interview result can be affected by residents' limited memory duration, whose impact cannot be instantly presumed. In addition, another unpredictable factor is my positionality in the field. Compared with the Dutch, whose government

caused harm to the local population, my ethnic background may be more acceptable to the residents. However, I am not sure which institution I will be associated with at the time of research. Any Western affiliations can arouse suspicions among the population in Hawija. While the receipt of recommendation letters or research authorizations from local organizations and authorities can affect my positionality in the field, it remains unclear to what extent it will smooth the rapport building process with the locals and what additional measures that should be taken to build mutual trust. Last, but not least, all the scholars opted for "glocal" collaboration involving the personnel recruitment, received fundings from various organizations. The implementation of my methodology requires fundings as well. Therefore, to what extent can the study be launched and how many local researchers I can recruit will depend on the amount of fundings I can receive. This variable can add unpredictability to my research performance. More importantly, the funding process will expose me to another ethical concern in the collaboration, which is my possession of power to determine payment because the budget must be planned in advance without negotiating with local researchers (Mwambari 2019: 5). This absence of negotiation for payment and working hours can exacerbate the inequality between external investigators and local researchers.

The 2014 withdrawal of Iraqi army from the Kirkuk governorate amid ISIS attacks entrenched the institutional vacuum which encouraged the continuous intervention of informal actors in the region. Hawija, a district located in this governorate, has remained an ALS where de-jure and de-facto powerholders have co-existed for a long time. However, this district has been left under-researched in academia while possessing a predominant Sunni Arab tribal population in the contested territories between the Iraqi federal government and Kurdistan regional government. On

the other hand, while academia has stopped viewing ALS as an exotic exception, little outcome has been shown at the programmatic level when dealing with these regions. Therefore, under this background, the proposed research builds upon previous studies on justice provisions in the region and investigates regulatory systems in Hawija. Instead of relying on rebel governance literature which focuses on rebel groups to the state, such as ISIS to the Iraqi state in Mosul (Revkin 2021: 46), I adopted everyday peace and justice literature (Smaira and Gunning 2023; Kyed and Thawnghmung 2019) for a multi-dimensional approach to examine localized mechanisms deployed by both formal and informal actors on the ground. Based on the theoretical framework, the proposed research aims to analyze the judicial landscape in Hawija and the empirical legitimacy of the operated regulatory systems from 2014 to 2017. These objectives demand two different sets of data: information gathering for the judicial landscape and perception accumulation for the empirical legitimacy. Taking methodological and ethical considerations plus local research context in Hawija into consideration, I decided to adopt a combination of 'glocal' collaboration and remote methods to conduct archival research and interviews. Concerns like field network navigation, bias inference, emotional risks, data protection, and the perpetuation of inequality in the partnership have been addressed at the methodological development stage. Whereas participants' reactions to hybrid interviews, technical challenges, and funding availability are not foreseeable. Other unexpected circumstances may emerge throughout the data collection process. Hence, I need to endow the distant research plan with flexibility that can accommodate these obstacles and accordingly modify the structure of my research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

While more and more scholars impose importance on fieldwork in political science after the local, ethnographic, and interpretivist turns, many of them face the obstacle of field inaccessibility due to conflict and post-conflict contexts, COVID-19 travel restrictions, environmental hazards, and host country's access rejection. Since I encountered the empirical difficulty as well when planning to study regulatory systems in Hawija due to security concerns, I dedicated this study to explore how to research inaccessible and under-studied areas in conflict and post-conflict contexts as a means to propose an alternative to field research in Hawija. I randomly selected eight scholars working on political science, social science, and anthropology-related topics in the Middle East and North Africa to examine their distant methods when facing field access restrictions. Through reviewing their methodologies mentioned in secondary sources, including publications, published interviews, plus book reviews, and supplementing them with primary sources, such as consultations, I was able to group their methods into three categories: 'glocal' collaboration, remote research, and ethnographic imagination. In addition to analyzing the methodological and ethical challenges associated with each method, I consulted researchers and local NGO staff who had previously conducted research on Hawija to learn about its local research context.

By taking the challenges and the research objectives of regulatory systems in Hawija into consideration, I plan to adopt a combination of "glocal" collaboration and remote research as methods to analyze the judicial landscape and the empirical legitimacy of the operated regulatory systems during the 2014-2017 period. This

method can address many methodological, ethical, and logistical obstacles, including epistemological premises, language barrier, exploitation of local researchers, data leakage, bias inference, Hawija's access constraints, etc. However, it still suffers from limitations, such as fundings, technical uncertainties, post-authorization positionality, and interviewees' memory duration, which can only be tackled during the research process.

6.1. Limitation

While the proposed methodology tailored to the study on regulatory systems in Hawija sounds convincing, it may not be applied to other areas. This discrepancy is not simply due to the different research dynamics of the field sites, but also because of the definition of "conflict and post-conflict contexts." In this research, the "conflict and post-conflict contexts" refers to the hostile environments that disrupt investigators' control over the research process in the field in general without illustrating the detail on the level of risk. Hence, this factor exposes a limitation on accommodating different scenarios. Hawija, for instance, can be considered as the "post-conflict context" as it is located in the contested territories between the Iraqi federal government and Kurdistan regional government. While it is perceived as a district with persistent ISIS presence, it is no longer an active combat zone. One the other hand, Leenders mentioned in the consultation about the difficulty associated with Syria, that is summed in the towering authoritarian regime not appreciating people talking to foreign researchers (personal interview with Leenders, 20 November 2023). He believes that his case should be distinguished from Hawija, where researchers can still conduct interviews without putting themselves and their interviewees in danger (personal interview with Leenders,

20 November 2023). Although both sites were ruled as conflict and post-conflict contexts by IRB, the risks associated with them are different. Moreover, the situation in Hawija is different from what Brandt encountered in Yemen where her field site slid into an active battleground. As a result, the conflict and post-conflict contexts comprise a variety of scenarios that researchers should take into consideration and accordingly modify their distant approaches.

In addition to the definition of conflict and post-conflict contexts, this research faces another limitation which is the epistemological pitfall of security. Although I stated in the introduction that the field of Hawija bore security risk, I reserve my judgement on its safety conditions since the local NGO staff and journalists whom I reached out to for risk assessment remained optimistic about its contextual dynamics. What drove me to drop the originally planned field study was indeed IRB's unpredictability. IRB's decision is based on an epistemological premise of field security without considering its local context. Its approval of Elizabeth Tsurkov's research in Iraq also demonstrates the fallacy. What's more, the externally produced evaluation/ information without ground securitization on under-researched inaccessible areas can leave these fields perpetually under-studied. This circuit is problematic as it will have programmatic impacts on these inaccessible areas. Therefore, the reflected idea of adopting alternative methods to research the "inaccessible" field in this research falls into the trap of epistemology. Seeking new ways to bypass the enduring framework is crucial for area studies.

6.2. Contribution

Nevertheless, the discussion on IRB's institutional restriction in this thesis can bring another reflection on its decision-making process. De-securitizing the field is not a pitfall. Rather, it is a breach of the established framework deeming what is safe and what is unsafe. It can provide an opportunity for area studies to re-evaluate and exert an ontological understanding of safety, and subsequently, accessibility for IRB.

On the other hand, since little research has discussed alternatives when encountering field inaccessibility, this research fills the methodological research gap. Through reflecting on distant methods and consulting scholars on their experience with alternative approaches, the study makes distant methods a realistic choice for future research by being cognizant of methodological and ethical challenges associated with them. Meanwhile, I would also like to clarify that fieldwork still possesses advantages that cannot be replaced by distant methods, such as the principal investigator's field observation and experience. Beaujouan and Robben, who have never been to their respective field in Syria and Iraq, for example, indicated the importance of going to the field in the consultations. Hence, in this research, I only argued for the necessity of resorting to alternative methods when facing field inaccessibility instead of calling for a complete replacement of field research. More importantly, IRB's assessment of field accessibility or inaccessibility may not reflect the reality on the ground. Its conclusion may be different from an investigator's personal judgement. Therefore, researchers may be able to act responsibly and visit some low-risk field sites aside from academic or research commitments. Volunteering at or affiliating with local NGOs while relieving these duties, for example, can serve as a way for field navigation and observation.

In addition, this research presents a methodological proposal tailored to the future investigation of regulatory systems in Hawija. It contributes to the development of the legal pluralism field in ALS because it proposes methodology on how to investigate de facto powerholders' governance mechanisms from afar. Ahram and Lust state that governance in the Middle East has frequently been conducted through actors, like tribal leaders, religious figures, etc. (2016: 24-25). More research on ALS is important to both examine its nature plus non-sovereign entities and enhance the understanding of multidimensional governance. An increasing comprehension of formal and informal powerholders plus their localized mechanisms may introduce programmatic outcomes to policy making and peace-building missions of the international community. Furthermore, the methodology utilized in this research and the developed methodological proposal can help future researchers who face challenges alike and share similar scenarios to develop their distant research plans. For some under-studied areas, possessing conservative vibes and requiring access authorizations from local authorities may be common. Therefore, researchers opting for a distant approach should learn about local research context and their positionality in the field beforehand. Failing to compromise with ground realities may diminish the practicality of the proposed methodologies. More importantly, exploring local research context through communicating with anyone who identifies familiarity with the field site can be a way to capture useful information. For instance, during the consultation with Khthar, the project coordinator from Al-Ghad, and after explaining my proposed research plan on Hawija, Khthar advised me to look at the archive at the municipal building (personal interview with Abdulkareem Khthar, December 4, 2023). Hence, for me as someone who has never been to Hawija, learning about local research context is not only about

addressing logistical challenges in methodology, but also a chance to navigate the field site and its networks. While field sites can be inaccessible in its epistemological sense, devoting efforts to initiating connections with the fields from afar, such as establishing personal networks and exploring ground realities through secondary sources, is a precondition for adopting distant approaches.

APPENDIX

Chronological List of my interviews:

1. Interview with Virginia Collombier, 18 September 2023
2. Interview with Juline Beaujouan, 20 September 2023
3. Interview with Kheder Khaddour, 28 September 2023
4. Interview with Antonius Robben, 2 October 2023
5. Interview with Mervat Alhaffar, 3 October 2023
6. Interview with Lauren Gould, 15 November 2023
7. Interview with Reinoud Leenders, 20 November 2023
8. Interview with Saba Azeem, 21 November 2023
9. Interview with Mohammed Abdulkareem Khthar, 4 December 2023

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