Power Negotiations in the Field:
Ethical and Practical Challenges of Field Research on Party Politics in Hybrid Regime Settings

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Abstract

This article reflects upon the author's long fieldwork experience on party politics in the hybrid political regime of Turkey. It illustrates the ethical and practical challenges that the political context poses for research and elaborates on two interrelated issues. Firstly, the observations and findings that researchers may obtain and present in such a polarised and semi-authoritarian setting can be remarkably different from the expectations of the research participants. This poses a challenge to the principles of not doing harm and of informed consent, and requires researchers to negotiate these principles in order to convey meaningful research outcomes while being uncompromising with respect to the principle of anonymity/confidentiality. The other dilemma is that, in settings where politics imposes itself on bureaucratic and legal institutions as well as on the economy, researchers may find themselves in extremely vulnerable positions before powerful research participants. To what extent should the researcher tolerate being treated badly and how should the researcher deal with such contexts? In this article, the author proposes that Max Weber's recommendation in his article "Science as Vocation" – to avoid extremely politicised positions – still remains relevant in ethical and practical respects.

Keywords: Research ethics, field research, hybrid regimes, authoritarianism, party politics, clientelism, Turkey

During my research on party organisations in Turkey in different peripheral districts of Istanbul I saw piles of CVs and job applications on the desks of chairs and functionaries of different parties. While I was not completely unprepared to witness such a phenomenon, since there is extensive literature on the prevalence of clientelistic exchange in Turkish politics, I was still surprised to witness such open practices of clientelism in party offices.[1] This was certainly not compatible with the ruling AKP's (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, "Justice and Development Party") discourse of "advanced democracy" and the opposition

parties' claim that they represent a different kind of politics and ethics. Such scenes raised a number of ethical challenges: How was I going to convey, in the research outcomes, such observations regarding clientelistic practices that are located in a grey zone between legitimate party activity and corruption?

Witnessing this type of party–voter relations in an established democracy with more programmatic parties and autonomous judicial institutions might be surprising for a researcher. But in a political setting like Turkey, characterised by strong non-democratic inclinations accompanied by "competitive clientelism" (Lust 2009), this is a regular occurrence for those looking at the patterns of intra- and interparty competition that define the party system. Nevertheless, even in this type of party system, parties and interviewees would not wish for such evidence of the prevalence of clientelistic exchanges between parties and their supporters to be made public. Authoritarian incumbents in such hybrid settings seek to present a flawless democratic picture of the political regime even while actually enjoying certain advantages that opposition parties clearly lack. How should the researcher treat such contradictory and often problematic observations and information gathered in hybrid systems – given that the presentation of such observations in the research outcomes has the potential to undermine some of the ethical principles of research, such as not doing harm and of respecting informed consent? In this article, I explore the ethical challenges that accompany political science research in a politically volatile setting such as Turkey.

To conduct interviews with party workers and politicians, I had to travel extensively throughout Turkey. During these fieldwork experiences I also encountered, to put it lightly, some deeply discomforting attitudes and behaviours from powerful participants of my research – ranging from interviewees failing to appear to disrespectful tirades. In an interview with a particularly powerful politician, for example, I found myself in the odd situation of being berated for a standard question. In another interview with a former minister, one of the visitors of this powerful politician began interrogating me, in a markedly patronising manner, on the literature on political parties in Turkey. These were certainly uncomfortable encounters for me because I did not feel able to express my discomfort or to defend myself, as I needed information from those particular actors. Moreover, as I elaborate below, such encounters were not uncommon and could hardly be ignored and classified as unpleasant or unlucky coincidences. Such attitudes were, in fact, part and parcel of the field. Another question I thus pose is: How can researchers deal with such attitudes in the field that negatively affect their wellbeing?

Without doubt, conducting in-depth interviews for social science research is not always easy in any context, even in wealthy liberal democracies with en-

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1   Cf. Akarlı / Ben-Dor 1975; Ark-Yıldırım 2017, 2018; Arıkan-Akdağ 2014; Arslantaş / Arslantaş 2020; Ayata 2010; Çınar 2016, 2019; Kemahlıoğlu 2012; Kılıçdaroğlu 2019; Sayarı 2014; Schüler 1999; Sunar 1985; Unbehaun 2005; Yıldırım 2020.

trenched check and balance mechanisms. Particularly at the elite level, researchers are often in an inferior position vis-à-vis powerful participants, "requesting time and information" while offering nothing in return (Busby 2011: 11, Pierce 1995) except their attention. Especially the literature on "studying up" demonstrates these difficulties (cf. Nader 1972, Gusterson 1997, Aguiar / Schneider 2016). As Laura Nader emphasises, the study of elites usually conflicts with the "populist values" of anthropologists and many social science researchers and there are many problems in such settings with regards to "access, attitudes, ethics and methodology" (1972: 10, 17). In addition, the subject matter may be dangerous, repellent or highly distressing and may pose severe threats for researchers' physical and psychological safety, such as in research on crime, racism, race or poverty (Tomic / Trumper 2016), as is the case with "dark ethnographies" in general, which problematise severe power asymmetries in society (Ortner 2016).[2]

But to be subject to being treated badly by interlocutors from the political elite should be a surprising and exceptional experience for researchers working on political elites in democratic polities with strong vertical and horizontal mechanisms of accountability. This is why there is often little (psychological) preparation on the part of researchers for such situations. However, in hybrid and volatile political settings characterised by strong non-democratic inclinations and weak judicial institutions, being treated badly should be considered a possibility that researchers need to prepare for. Hybrid/semi-authoritarian settings can be quite volatile in the sense that powerful political and economic elites may have extensive resources – largely stemming from informal and influential interpersonal relations – at their disposal, which help them to easily circumvent the – already weak – institutional legal frameworks that protect ordinary individuals from arbitrary interventions, which also include the safety and security of researchers. When accountability mechanisms are weak or marked by volatility, this may easily lead elites or powerful "patrons" to exhibit markedly careless and reckless attitudes and demeanour in encounters with addressees who lack noticeable standing or backing.[3] The practical – and ethical – challenges in these volatile and semi-authoritarian/hybrid contexts are to negotiate the extent to which such treatment should be tolerated by the researcher and to determine the best mitigation strategies.

I address these challenges by reflecting on my fieldwork experience on party politics in Turkey that stretches over seven years and includes more than 250 in-depth interviews with representatives of political parties and actors of local and national politics, including subject experts and journalists. For this

2   Also see the special section "Dark Ethnographies", edited by Lene Faust and Simone Pfeifer (2016) in the *Journal of Social and Cultural Anthropology* 145(2), pp. 81–201.

3   In Turkish "having a backing" (*arkası olmak*) is a common expression that refers to relations of patronage and solidarity that can empower people in social relations in just and unjust ways.

purpose, I have spent long periods of time in party offices and headquarters observing daily routines. During the period of my field research, the Turkish political system has undergone profound transformations in its formal/legal structure and in the practical/informal organisation of its regime. Turkey has not only made a transition from parliamentarianism to presidentialism, but its already fragile electoral democracy has moved in a more authoritarian direction and many scholars of comparative politics have started to identify it as a type of hybrid regime (competitive authoritarianism or new authoritarianism), combining features of authoritarianism and democracy (Esen / Gümüşçü 2016, Somer 2016, Sözen 2020). This volatility has impacted my research in manifold ways.

Hybrid regimes and social research

Each political setting and each type of government poses unique challenges to researchers. The following brief section tentatively maps the "grey zone" between full-scale authoritarianism and institutionalised liberal democracy. In the last few decades there has been a growing consensus that we are witnessing a process of "democratic backsliding" (Bermeo 2016, Haggard / Kaufman 2021) or "autocratisation" (Lührmann / Lindberg 2019) worldwide. This process, as well as the preceding "third wave of democratisation", have created regimes that show features of democracy and authoritarianism at the same time. Since the turn of the 21st century, therefore, there has been a vivid discussion on "democracy with adjectives" (Collier / Levitsky 1997), followed by a discussion on "authoritarianism with adjectives" (Bogaards 2009). While these regimes usually have competitive party politics, they include either powerful non-party political players with extensive veto powers (such as armies, judiciary and bureaucracy), which effectively impede the full reflection of citizens' preferences in the government, or profoundly majoritarian civilian governments that undermine the rule of law and freedom of expression and organisation for the opposition. There are various attempts to classify this grey zone.[4] All of these categorisation attempts, however, struggle with issues regarding the boundaries that separate distinct sub-categories of hybrid regimes and the fluidity of these polities across analytical frontiers over time. For example, some scholars argue that it is better to label such indeterminate polities, which frequently move back and forth within the grey zone between democracy and authoritarianism, not as regimes but as fragile "situations" (Skaaning 2006, Somer 2021).

Other scholars, however, highlight the problems of proper separation of powers in hybrid regimes and the consequences that this situation creates for

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4   Cf. Collier / Levitsky 1997, Diamond 2002, Levitsky / Way 2002, Sartori 2005, Magaloni 2006, Greene 2007, Lührman / Lindberg 2019, Özbudun 2011.

the rule of law and for individual rights and liberties. Especially in cases of contemporary competitive authoritarianism with populist incumbents at the helm, these widespread problems are coupled with a high degree of polarisation (McCoy / Somer 2019, Roberts 2021), a kind of excessive or hyper politicisation of social relations and the spread of clientelistic logics across the political spectrum, rendering political elites extremely powerful in the absence of proper "horizontal accountability" or in the absence of autonomous institutions of checks and balances (Haggard / Kaufman 2021: 2).

For qualitative researchers who are in direct contact with actors of hybrid regimes and who work in settings that are marked by constant democratic backsliding or autocratisation processes, this means that they face conditions that place them in profoundly fragile positions and that elicit particular ethical challenges in research. Turkey's current situation could be classified as a case of an indeterminate "situation" (Somer 2021), yet its indeterminacy has been ultimately contained in an autocratisation trend in the last decade, moving back and forth between a hegemonic party regime and competitive authoritarianism. It is an extremely fluid polity that, in certain periods and localities, reveals an either more democratic or more authoritarian face (Arslanalp / Erkmen 2020), and it is fast producing new formal and informal rules regulating political, social and economic interactions.

Throughout its long and turbulent multiparty experience, Turkey has never been a liberal democracy, and its experience of competitive politics came to a few abrupt ends with military interventions, albeit for short periods of time. Even in periods of relative democratisation, there has always been an undercurrent of authoritarianism in Turkey, especially when it came to the role of powerful veto players and hierarchical patron-client relations as the basis of party politics (Baykan 2021). Therefore, it is hard to define Turkey's exact location along the spectrum stretching from electoral democracy to electoral authoritarianism. Despite the overall volatility, many basic features of Turkish party politics have not dramatically changed: the prevalence of informal personal relations, problems with the rule of law and widespread clientelistic practices have all remained intact, albeit in varying degrees. But it is certainly a hybrid regime, lacking those features that render either liberal democracies or full-scale authoritarianism usually quite predictable.

In such volatile political contexts, qualitative research on politics that deploys methods that put researchers into direct contact with the actors involved in these transformations presents extraordinary opportunities while raising unexpected constraints and difficulties. Unlike full-scale authoritarian contexts, however, hybrid regimes still present opportunities for researchers to conduct meaningful field research on party politics, since these regimes claim to be democratic (and, to a certain extent, they are, when the presence of competing

political parties is taken into account). But the constraints these regimes impose on freedom of expression and autonomy of legal institutions, as well as their polarising impact on public opinion, place researchers in a very fragile position that requires utmost care in the research process and in the dissemination and expression of findings from the field. Unlike totalitarian and full-scale authoritarian contexts, however, it is possible to have critical evaluations of politics in research outcomes in these semi-authoritarian settings.

I draw attention to two interrelated ethical challenges in this reflection on my fieldwork experience in the hybrid regime of Turkey. The first regards the overall analysis of the empirical material collected in the field and its representation: What if the research participants do not like what they read? What if the researcher's interpretations and findings are not in line with participants' expectations? No doubt every research setting poses a discrepancy between the participants' views and the narrative constructed by the researcher. Yet, this discrepancy appears more consequential in hybrid regime settings due to the fundamental ambiguity regarding the "rules of the political game". This raises the question of whether differing perceptions between researchers and research participants pose a challenge to the principles of not doing harm to the participants (for instance, certain interpretations could dramatically contradict the expectations of interviewees and potentially cause harm to respondents if they reveal problematic practices) and of informed consent (such as when observations that go beyond the verbal data supplied by the interviewees are included in the write-up).

Another challenge for the researcher stems from the particularly powerful position of some of the interview participants. In hybrid regime settings, participants who enjoy powerful positions in local and national offices and ruling parties may, albeit not frequently, abuse their power in general and toward the researcher in particular. To what extent should researchers tolerate being treated badly for the sake of information? For example, should the researcher intervene when powerful interviewees mistreat subordinates? Or, more importantly, to what extent should the researcher tolerate such behaviour under circumstances of hostility that render the researcher a target?

Ethical challenges of field research in the hybrid regime setting of Turkey

I have been conducting field research on political parties in Turkey since beginning fieldwork on my PhD degree in 2013. At the time, I was trying to find answers to the puzzle of the rapid rise and the electoral success of a new party, the AKP, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. After my PhD research,

I started a new, broader research project, again on political parties, as part of a research team.[5] The new project required me to frequently conduct interviews with party members and other politically relevant participants such as representatives of civil society organisations, journalists working at the local and national level, experts and professionals such as academics, public opinion consultants, etc. I thus spent a great deal of time travelling and working in the field. The research project was designed inductively and enquired into the role of organisational strategies and party-voter linkages of the ruling as well as opposition parties and how these co-created a party system dominated by an authoritarian incumbent party.

Over the past nine years, I have conducted more than 250 in-depth interviews for the two projects and had the opportunity for face-to-face contact with more than 300 people. The group of participants that I conducted interviews with throughout these years included ordinary party members, provincial and sub-provincial party executives, journalists, representatives of politicised civil society associations and political professionals, as well as relatively powerful politicians such as deputies, ministers and members of the top national leadership of major parties. For both research projects, I visited numerous cities of varying size and influence in the country's national politics, including İstanbul and Ankara. Only a very small portion of the interviews that I conducted for these research projects were shorter than one hour and some even took almost four hours. I also frequently spent long periods of time in (primarily) party offices while waiting for participants.

Since I am a political scientist who focuses on comparative politics, my methodological approach to these research projects has been, both theoretically and methodologically, largely inspired by political scientists who use qualitative methods, but who are not anthropologists with expertise in ethnographic research. Much qualitative research in this particular field of party politics is done by "comparativists". Those research projects that are similar to the projects that I have conducted over the years usually rely on interview content to achieve a holistic understanding of the organisational mechanisms behind various national political outcomes such as political success, moderation, radicalisation or electoral success and failure.[6] Hence, as compared to ethnographic research,

5   Prof. Murat Somer, his PhD student İlker Kocael and I designed the research project. I have been conducting fieldwork since December 2018. We were still conducting this research at the time of writing this article. Throughout the fieldwork process, I was usually accompanied by our research assistant Seval Gülen. This is why, from time to time, I use the word "we" in this paper. But the incidents that I relate in this paper mostly stemmed from my individual experiences in the field. I also draw on experiences from my PhD research.

6   In this respect a particularly methodologically inspiring study for me is Steven Levitsky (2003), who conducted a country-wide study in Argentina to demonstrate the evolution of the Peronist Justicialist Party. See also works on political Islamist movements and parties that rely on field research (mainly in-depth interviews) conducted in a very broad setting: Hadiz 2016, Hamid 2014, Schwedler 2006. There are also previous accounts on Turkish politics that involved interviews either only with top party elites (Eligür 2010, Kumbaracıbaşı 2009) or only in particular localities (Tuğal 2009, Doğan 2016, Ocaklı 2012). Such an approach would not be helpful with regards to the holistic approach, like that of Levitsky (2003), that I embraced for

the "field" I am referring to would be usually more bounded and "less immersive" (such as focusing only on brief visits to certain localities, rather than longer periods of residence), focusing on visits to certain localities.

As my field research experience continued, however, I more clearly noticed the importance of the "ethnographic" dimension. Although it is not possible to argue that the research that I have conducted for the above-mentioned projects has been full-scale ethnographic research, it has, nevertheless, been carried out with a certain "ethnographic sensibility", as Edward Schatz (2009) terms it. In fact, the importance of interpersonal relations in Turkey in political and social life (Meeker 2001, Baykan 2018: 27) has the potential to draw researchers' attention to the ethnographic dimensions of the overall research experience, regardless of the particular research topic. Immersion and ethnographic sensibility were important because from time to time I had to rely on personal connections to find interviewees for these research projects. I personally built familiarity with the context by visiting party offices in person several times, spending long hours there waiting for someone authorised to speak to me and by repeatedly contacting party executives and members for interviews.[7]

It is also crucial to briefly reflect upon my own positionality within the research field, which no doubt rendered access to participants easier or more problematic depending on the context and which also affected my interpretations of findings in particular ways. First of all, I am a male researcher from a middle class provincial family with secular orientations, and belonging to a majority ethnic and sectarian background. Due to my positionality, I enjoyed a number of privileges in the context of such research projects that involve local as well as national political elites in Turkey. I also grew up and lived until my graduate studies in an Eastern Black Sea town, one that exerts a remarkable influence on Turkish party politics despite the town's relative economic backwardness (an economy lacking sizeable industrial and service-oriented sectors and mostly relying on agriculture and petty commerce). Although it is not common to ask someone their ethnic or sectarian background in formal encounters in Turkey, the hometown usually provides a very precise marker of ethnic and sectarian identity. Therefore, it is common to hear the simple question: "Where are you from"? in a first meeting in Turkey, as a means to acquire some quick information about a conversation partner.

Moreover, for the first project, I was a PhD student at a university in the UK and, during the second project, I was in an academic position at a Turkish public university. While my position as a researcher abroad, in the UK, was appealing to some of my well-educated interviewees during my PhD research,

these research projects. Thus, I adopted a broader approach to the research by including participants from many local contexts as well as the national leadership of parties I was examining.

7   Also see Baykan 2018: 21–32, and Baykan / Somer 2021 for the practical and logistical details of my field research for my PhD research and for the subsequent research that I conducted with Prof. Murat Somer.

others had become more sceptical about my ties with a foreign country. When I was back in Turkey after my PhD research and conducting interviews for the second project, financially supported by a state institution as an employee of a public university, the scepticism I encountered during my PhD research was no longer a hindrance. But, this time, the fact that my position was in a recently founded, less prestigious university probably made my requests for interviews less appealing, particularly for potential participants of a certain background.

Revealing such personal information, however, usually helped me to establish bonds of trust with the participants. Also, the fact that I was male certainly rendered interviews more comfortable for male participants, particularly in local contexts, where some felt comfortable enough with me to openly relate certain aspects of local politics using slang and swear words. With a female researcher they would have probably been more reserved, since social conventions in Turkey usually dictate a certain proper and restrained behaviour in formal contacts with women.

I also think that, despite my academic position and education, my provincial middle class background usually helped me to better understand the linkages between broad underprivileged constituencies and local and national political elites in Turkey, who usually also have provincial middle class backgrounds (Uysal / Topak 2010). It is my belief that all these processes (access, establishing personal connections, adapting to the research context and interpreting findings in a measured way) would have been much more difficult for someone from an upper class background with an upbringing in a major urban centre (like İstanbul or Ankara). These urban settings are often detached from – and thereby fail to provide insight regarding – the sort of hierarchical networks of interpersonal dependence that are widespread in provincial Turkey and form the basis of Turkish party politics. Similarly, having an underprivileged background would also undermine a researcher's standing vis-à-vis powerful patrons. Furthermore, I conducted these studies mainly during my thirties, which usually put me at a socially inferior position relative to most of my respondents, who were at least 10 years older. In Turkey, seniority, in terms of age, is another marker of respect and social status, due to the legacy of traditional and patriarchal social conventions. It was only in the 1980s that the majority of Turkey's population started to live in urban settings; up until then most of the population lived in rural households consisting of large families that were headed by elders, usually the grandfather (Özkul / Kalaycı 2015). Thus, old age in Turkey is traditionally associated with higher social status, although these conventions have been changing in recent decades. Due to the age differential between my respondents and me, the overwhelming majority of respondents engaged in interviews with the pleasure and sense of superiority of teaching someone younger than themselves. In the case of younger respondents, our similar ages generated spontaneous trust and usually made interviews easier and less formal.

While I shared many markers of identity with respondents from the AKP, İYİ Parti and CHP, it should be noted that my background and positionality was often quite different from interviewees from the party of the Kurdish movement, namely the HDP. What helped me in interactions with respondents from the HDP, however, was that I am a graduate of Ankara University, Faculty of Political Sciences (*Mülkiye*), which is known for its firm left-wing proclivity, which was highly favourable towards the Kurdish issue. This socialisation, I think, prepared me to a certain extent for interviews with participants from minority ethnic and sectarian backgrounds and created some rapport. Yet my political socialisation process, along with my family's secular orientation and lack of active involvement in politics, placed me at a certain disadvantage when it came to accessing mainstream political parties, particularly the AKP. Nonetheless, as I mentioned above, I tried to solve these problems of access and building rapport by relying on certain connections, such as politically involved friends and distant relatives or by improvising in the field, such as by sending numerous emails to the participants or visiting party offices repeatedly.[8]

Here, a particular broader aspect of the ethical challenges regarding positionality in volatile hybrid regime settings should also be noted. I conducted these research projects as someone who was a citizen of this political setting and as someone who wanted to remain and work in his own country in the foreseeable future. There is a profound difference between doing research within a non-democratic regime as an insider, whose centre of life is in this setting, and as an outsider who can leave the country. Certainly, the stakes are much higher for the former and this creates many other difficulties that cannot be acknowledged from a "safe distance". Foreign researchers in hybrid regime settings may come across their own difficulties, such as obtaining access to participants, building trust with informants and interviewees and even facing accusations of "spying", which may entail police harassment and even detention, as well as visa issues. Yet the harm that the "insider" may face as a result of incautious research activities in such settings is generally greater, because it is more consequential, including criminalisation, loss of a job, judicial and police harassment and even imprisonment, as well as social repercussions, for both the researcher and their family.

Finally, it should be noted that, throughout AKP rule, since 2002, the politicisation of academia in Turkey has increased. There is increasing government pressure on academics, including the expulsion of many supporters of the "Academics for Peace" from the universities due to the petition regarding the conflict in Southeastern Turkey between the Turkish Armed Forces and the

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8   As stated above, this may be in the form of a "politics of presence", in other words going and spending long times in party offices and establishing acquaintances there. Another method, for example, was speaking to local journalists first and using their connections to access local party elites in cases when I was not able to gain access to local party elites directly.

PKK during the summer of 2015. Such transformations – which are certainly reflections of an increasingly authoritarian context – should be taken into account when considering the researcher's positionality and the conditions of the research setting, particularly for researchers with critical views at public universities, whose situation is particularly fragile and demands greater caution on their part. Moreover, these increasingly difficult conditions, coupled with witnessing unfair treatment of colleagues, have politicised the views of even the most depoliticised segments in Turkish academia. This has certainly exacerbated the ethical challenges in the field elaborated below. There are undoubtedly even further limitations of which I remain unaware, precisely because of my very particular positionality.

Various scholars have identified and reflected on the ethical dilemmas that arise from conducting research in difficult circumstances and in non-democratic regimes.[9] They mention that researchers often observe many questionable practices (such as clientelistic exchanges and crony relationships in the conduct of public affairs, etc.) and ideas (extremely majoritarian views, patriarchal and exclusionary inclinations or non-democratic ideological tendencies) in the field. At the same time researchers are also held back from commenting on these observations vocally and immediately due to the unpredictable nature of these regimes (and the actors comprising it) in legal and practical terms. Hence, these research contexts allow researchers to see, to listen to and, to a certain extent, to write freely (given that their studies only circulate within a particular restricted audience) but, for the sake of their research, the context prevents them from effectively and publicly promoting their research and ideas on politics. Otherwise, they risk an abrupt end to the fieldwork process or even more unpleasant consequences, such as political pressure or even losing a job. At the same time, however, it should be noted that a social media presence is increasingly necessary for early career researchers in the extremely competitive academic job market of today. Therefore, another, more professional – and perhaps less visible – dilemma is that these contexts may prevent social science researchers from enjoying a strong public profile on social media and in public debates, at least during ongoing fieldwork.

Under these conditions, researchers may also encounter certain disturbing practices during interviews that may transcend the frontier of what is tolerable to them. While some practices are easy to spot as exceeding the border of the acceptable, others are in more of a grey zone. In hybrid regime settings, which are usually characterised by highly hierarchical, polarised and hostile power relations, many interactions are extremely unequal and they may seem unfair to the researcher. For instance, a deputy might scold his assistant in front of

9   Cf. Art 2016, Gallaher 2009, Jabeen 2013, Lunn 2014, Malthaner 2014, Perera-Mubarak 2014, Wackenhut 2018.

the interviewer or a powerful local politician might order his employees around in a way that is, to say the least, incompatible with standard notions of propriety. Interviewees may talk in ways that contain the most patriarchal and putrid forms of slang or interviewees might carry pistols illegally to protect themselves from their enemies in local politics. Other examples include more widespread practices, such as clientelistic exchanges, that are publicly deemed wrong but practically embraced by almost every actor. These practices are usually part of the research setting and they pose multi-faceted ethical challenges to the researcher. The question is whether the researcher should intervene in such practices, comment on them or – by not reacting – become complicit.

In this context, I found an invaluable guide for researchers under volatile conditions in Max Weber's recommendations in his seminal article "Science as Vocation", which cautions social scientists against the temptations and ethical problems of extremely politicised roles (2005: 200–236). Unless researchers encounter extremely questionable practices and views that directly harm individuals and put them in danger, the best way to engage with such contexts, ethically and strategically, is a healthy distance from the actors, skilful versatility and a certain degree of "impression management" (Malthaner 2014) in such interactions. In addition, it is wiser for researchers to maintain a low public profile that enables them to carry on their fieldwork and produce coherent and compelling research outcomes that may potentially be of help to future attempts to reform political institutions.

Encountering views that sound normatively questionable

Although our research has focused mostly on the practical operations of parties in the field and on intra- and interparty interactions, our interviews, most of the time, touched upon hotly debated topics in Turkey, such as gender inequality, freedom of expression and ethnic and sectarian differences. In these circumstances, sometimes we encountered normatively highly questionable statements, especially when viewed from a liberal-rational academic perspective. From an interpretivist point of view, norms are certainly subject to change and contestation among various different political and cultural outlooks in any given society. What I indicate here as "normatively questionable" relates to the norms prevailing in the left liberal and rational academic circles in Turkey.

For example, we were frequently exposed to anti-immigrant statements, with racist implications, from the members of the opposition parties in localities, and we came across some conservative local elites who were extremely suspicious of gender equality. Some of the interlocutors from the main opposition CHP, on various occasions, did not hesitate to explicitly state their contempt for

conservative majorities comprised of poor citizens. At the same time, participants from the İYİ Parti did not shy away from expressing their xenophobic views on immigrants. Very similarly, some of our participants from the HDP, in a rather anti-democratic way, did not refrain from personally arguing that Kurds who voted for the populist AKP are traitors. Such views are certainly unacceptable for us – the research team – normatively but do we need to avoid reporting such content simply because these parties are in a vulnerable position in the hybrid regime setting that we are observing? The ethical dilemma here would be whether reporting such statements could constitute a form of harm to the respondents, even though such information was revealed during an interview to which they gave their consent.

It is not my opinion that such important political orientations should be obstructed in our writing in order to avoid doing harm, since participants of the research had no reservations regarding the use of any part of the content produced in these interviews and since we properly informed them regarding the uses of this content. For example, some of the local party elites were sceptical regarding the immediate use of this information in local or national media. In such cases we made sure to inform our interviewees in detail about the purposes of the research, its funding, potential ways of dissemination of the research outcomes in the form of reports, articles and books, and the confidential and anonymous use of the data they provided and how the data would feed into our research outcomes.

Even in the case of having properly informed the participants, however, some of the principles of qualitative research might need to be negotiated in order to convey the main dynamics of the field observed in the empirical research. Here, the particularly problematic issue pertains to the principle of informed consent: participants of qualitative political science research that deploys in-depth interviews and on-site visits can never be fully informed regarding the precise nature of the data collected in the fieldwork in the research outcomes. This is because outcomes of such research may well include many unexpected, non-linguistic elements observed in the field as well as interpretations of the researcher combined with other evidence deriving from reviews of relevant literature and first-hand sources. Hence, researchers should not stick to very idealistic conceptions of informed consent, particularly in hybrid regime settings.

Here, Max Weber's views (2005) provided guidance to me: the best way to deal with challenges posed by such contexts is to avoid a highly politicised role. A healthy distance not only towards the ruling party but also towards the opposition parties, refraining from vibrant and politicised public profiles and avoiding the pragmatic use of research findings (such as for seeking publicity on the social media) may help researchers to carry on their fieldwork and minimise the potential harm that could be done to the participants and the researcher. Similarly, patience is key in the field in such settings and researchers

should refrain from taking any bad treatment personally. In fact, as studies on "affective scholarship" recommend, researchers should reflect on the affects and emotions that arise in order to gain further insights into the phenomenon they are examining (Stodulka et al. 2018).

As long as researchers can avoid an extremely politicised position that affiliates them with a party that they observe, and embrace a strategy of research and reporting that pays attention to both the positive and negative traits, strengths and weaknesses of political parties under examination, it is possible to convey this empirical insight from the field. This, I think, has not only guided me ethically but is also strategically very compatible with the realities of hybrid regime settings that I described earlier: in such settings, it is acceptable to listen to, observe and write on the realities of politics as they are. But to claim a highly politicised role is detrimental to the rights of the participants, to the reliability of the research and to the practical opportunities for carrying out research in the long run.

Nevertheless, one should also problematise the Weberian conception of a "depoliticized, neutral stance", which has increasingly become a myth since the waves of criticism towards such "scientism" at least since the 1970s, largely as a result of the "linguistic turn" in social theory in general, and the "reflexive turn" in anthropology in particular (Eriksen / Nielsen 2010).[10] It is no doubt the case that field work, including in-depth interviews and on-site visits in particular and social and political research in general, can only provide "partial truths" (Clifford 1986) regarding social and political phenomena. There is no way to describe the "whole story" without any bias stemming, first, from researchers' own positionality in political, cultural, economic and identity-based respects and, second, from endlessly shifting frontiers and countless dimensions of social and political interactions and reality. Nevertheless, under the circumstances of hybrid regimes, a Weberian approach to field research on political and social phenomena still has practical, operational value. It has at least the potential to psychologically and logistically equip researchers to endure semi-authoritarian contexts by providing them with the necessary tools of "impression management" in a repressive and politicised environment.[11]

For example, in the context I was working in, I felt that it would not be a good idea to have an active, public social media account and comment on hotly debated political topics or to give interviews to newspapers and TV channels that might be construed as indicators of partisan bias by the participants of the research (from the ruling party as well as the opposition parties). In polarised hybrid regime settings, the active use of social media has other negative implications as well, particularly for the interpretation of the data collected in the

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10 See Fine 1993 for these dilemmas with a special reference to ethnographic research.

11 Here it is important to emphasise that Weber himself had to conduct research under the circumstances of a rather restrictive political regime. See Art 2016 and Berman 2019 for the authoritarian dimensions of the German political regime of Weber's age.

field from the perspective of polarised "echo chambers" generated in social media. In this mitigation strategy, the cost is a low profile for the researcher, which, in the current academic environment, has some negative implications including less visibility, fewer citations and the loss of some invitations to collaborate in influential academic networks. In my view, however, the long-term collective and professional benefits of a reserved public profile in such settings outweigh the short-term costs.

Witnessing normatively questionable practices

From a liberal-rational academic normative perspective, indirectly witnessing problematic practices was another ethical dilemma that fieldwork posed for me. One common practice we usually encountered in party office was the prevalence of clientelistic relations in political activities. In every major Turkish party, we either listened to cases of clientelistic relationships from our interviewees or we witnessed people coming to party offices or calling party members and asking for various favours (such as aid in kind and cash and jobs) for themselves or for their relatives. These activities were certainly aspects that our participants were not keen to reveal. But they were so prevalent and dominant in the daily practices of Turkish parties that they were hard to hide, and clientelistic exchanges between parties and their supporters have become a major theme in our research. The particular dilemma of research in hybrid regime settings based on a kind of "competitive clientelism" (Lust 2009), even if clientelistic relations have become normalised to a certain extent, as in Turkey, is that this particular and prevalent party–voter linkage is not how these parties want to be seen. Hence, our observations and the way we want to represent our observations in research outcomes have the potential to harm the participants of our research from every major party, since some of the clientelistic practices they were engaged in may be subject to legal investigations.[12] The question therefore is about the extent to which reporting such practices may also be seen as violating the principle of informed consent.[13]

Another issue here is that our research does not involve only the "brokers and patrons" from political parties who are consciously being interviewed. In fact, "clients" who visit parties for jobs and aid in the middle of an interview became unwitting participants in the research. Apart from their subordinated

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12 Perhaps the distribution of food packages to impoverished neighbourhoods could be seen as a benign form of clientelistic practice that approximates charitable work. But, for example, the collection of CVs in a party office for job applications to a municipality is a clear violation of rules regulating recruitment in public bodies.

13 For standardised ethical principles of ethnographic research see American Anthropological Association 2012. See also Spradley 1979 (pp. 34–39). For a very important critical account of the practicalities of ethnographic research that critiques most of these principles see Fine 1993.

position vis-à-vis the party brokers and functionaries, their lack of knowledge regarding our presence in party offices for research places them in an even more subjugated position. Thus, the position of clients as uninformed participants in our research compounds the ethical dilemmas in this research process regarding informed consent because we were not able to inform all bystanders about our study.[14]

Under these circumstances, for reporting purposes, we decided to include the practices we witnessed in our work but under strict adherence to the ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity. We made this decision because these encounters illustrate very important dynamics in party politics in Turkey that shape party organisations and party–voter linkages. Moreover, as such relationships become increasingly normalised, we also think that the risk of harm to participants in this case is minimal, since every major actor in the field was engaging in such clientelistic relations in one way or another, albeit to varying degrees.

Thus, a more immediate concern is how a researcher should or could react when he or she encounters questionable practices during interactions with respondents. In such settings, I found it unwise either to engage in disagreements with the participants or to disclose my views on political issues. Instead, it was logistically and methodologically effective for me to embrace the mode of self-presentation in the field as a neutral, serious but highly interested listener/ researcher, despite the temptations to intervene when hot political topics arose during interviews. The concept of the completely "unobtrusive ethnographer" may well be a myth, but it is particularly important in hybrid regime settings to avoid "too great an involvement in a social scene" as an active participant (Fine 1993: 281). The cost here may be frustration in the field, which I experienced frequently in the face of some of the attitudes and views of my participants.

These ethical and strategic issues, however, could also be interpreted from the perspective of the critical function of academics in society. Can researchers who refrain from loudly expressing the uncomfortable truths and knowledge they possess regarding these regimes, in order to remain able to access information and carry on their fieldwork, be considered "clients of autocracies"? In fact, many researchers who have found themselves in similarly difficult research circumstances have spontaneously embraced self-restraint as a mitigation strategy. Carolyn Gallaher, who worked on militia movements in the United States, for example, also adopted such a technique and she remarks that "while my strategy ensured successful data collection, I also worried it signalled a tacit approval on my part. I felt like I was being dishonest to my informants, and as a result, to myself" (Gallaher 2009: 128).

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14 The bottom line regarding the principle of informed consent here appears to be refraining from evidently deceptive practices, as addressed by Allen 1997. Our interviewees always knew that we were conducting a research for future academic publications, although "clients" visiting these settings did not.

From a broader pragmatic point of view, however, I do think that, in hybrid regime contexts, the long-term benefits of in-depth analysis of these semi-authoritarian systems through field research (including interviews, on-site observations, etc.) outweigh the benefits that may derive from exposing these systems' inadequacies and incremental deterioration publicly in a highly politicised way. Understanding the essential internal operations of these systems require in-depth examination of the reality in the field. Researchers with highly politicised public profiles – especially when they exclusively embrace qualitative methods – would only have access to evidence usually contaminated by the polarisation that hybrid systems produce in the public arena.

Moreover, in such settings, if a researcher is positioned with a highly politicised public profile, this can create a distance between the researcher and the research participants, which effectively hinders an interpretive engagement with the socio-political reality. This proximity to ground realities, though, helps researchers to understand a dimension critical to the endurance of these regimes: How is consent of the members of the predominant party and other actors in the system produced via material and non-material means? What are the bases of consensus and interaction among various actors in these systems alongside material interests? These important questions can only be answered if the social and political interactions in the field are observed in person and only if a degree of trust exists between the interviewer and the interviewee. If the researcher has a politicised public profile, trust building might thus be more difficult.

I have found that, as long as researchers avoid favours from the dominant parties of these systems and as long as they refrain from contributing to the latter's propaganda, carrying out research and achieving comprehensive, reliable, in-depth and interpretive knowledge of these systems and the parties comprising them via a "low public profile" should be seen as an ethically acceptable practice. However, what counts as participation in the system and as propaganda needs to be individually negotiated. The production of relatively significant knowledge of this kind may be beneficial for potential reforms of these systems. If researchers assume more politicised roles, the results would certainly be quite different. Hence, mitigation strategies such as avoiding expressing political views, reporting positive and negative traits of all actors observed in the field, being transparent as to the funding of the research and reflecting on their own positionality may help researchers protect themselves, their research and its participants.

Practical challenges:
examples of "being treated badly" in the field

In qualitative political science research that makes use of in-depth interviews and on-site visits in hybrid regime settings, there is a real possibility of bad treatment for researchers. By the term "being treated badly" I mean clearly and visibly dominant and unresponsive attitudes that take advantage of the superior knowledge or powerful position of one party in an interview interaction. This can intimidate the other party and has the potential to derail the interaction by effectively placing the other party in a weaker position and hence undermining her/his potential agency. In the following, I focus on perceived bad treatment of the researcher by interview partners. Bad treatment in these examples ranges from relatively minor incidents – such as keeping the researcher waiting for long periods of time or not paying attention – to much more serious discomforting behaviour, such as asking condescending questions, refusing to answer or even berating the researcher.

Apart from the more obvious cases, including addressing the researcher in an explicitly condescending manner, "being treated badly" usually becomes visible in the bodily behaviour of the interviewees – in their gazes, the attention they give to the researcher, the tone of voice, length of answers, facial expressions, the way they address the researcher and the environment that they receive the researcher in. These are signs and signals that indicate the relative dominance of the interviewee and the importance, or lack thereof, ascribed to the researcher's presence. These signs and signals are rather easily discernible, and their difference from much more modest, egalitarian attitudes is usually evident to trained researchers.

I should also emphasise that there is an irreducibly subjective element to what I call "being treated badly" in the field. In interactions, some interviewees might be of the opinion that, by simply agreeing to be interviewed and taking time to help the researcher, they are being kind enough. The lack of appropriate attention to the researcher may simply reflect the perceived self-importance and power felt by the interviewee. As can be seen from the examples that follow, some of these instances were probably typical for the daily interactions of the interviewees, because they enjoyed considerable resource and influence. In such interviews, the issue of "being treated badly" was not usually about the researcher in particular but reflected the overall asymmetric relationship the interviewee naturally established with supporters, clientele, personnel and other subordinates – of which the researcher was now one.

Treating the researcher badly is by no means a phenomenon unique to hybrid regimes. But the lack of meaningful checks and balances related to the rule of law and the deeply volatile relative balance of power among political actors,

based only on their organisational and economic resources, renders these hybrid settings highly unpredictable. Discomforting forms of bad treatment thus become more likely and potentially more consequential, especially if the researcher decides to speak up rather than acquiesce. In hybrid regimes, encounters that include such behaviour may emerge not only in interactions with participants from the ruling party but also during interviews with powerful opposition figures. Particularly if researchers are working on topics that involve elite interviews, it is highly probable that such practices will be encountered.

In other political settings (e.g. full-scale authoritarian regimes or liberal democracies), researchers may be in a better position to predict behaviour that they may encounter: in liberal democratic settings the expectation of being treated badly would be minimal, since even top politicians are usually bound by strict institutional-legal frameworks and there is much less room to reveal unchecked, arbitrary, personal authority. In full-scale authoritarianism, in contrast, the expectation of such behaviour may be high, but researchers are much more aware of these possibilities and therefore adopt extremely cautious modes of operation from the beginning. In this respect, hybrid regimes are different. The problem in the field in such contexts is that it is more difficult to predict bad treatments because such regimes provide influential national and local actors with much larger leeway for exercising their power while retaining some features of a functioning democracy. In other words, the dos and don'ts are not as clear as they are in functioning liberal democracies or under consolidated authoritarianism. In hybrid regimes, it is usually very difficult to distinguish the extent to which bad treatment is due to the outcome of the general volatile context or due to the unique personality of the respondent. How should researchers react to and reflect upon such behaviour?

In the overwhelming majority of the more than 250 interviews I have conducted so far, my interviewees were very generous with their time and were usually very kind to me. Nevertheless, the attitudes of a small cluster of interviewees were, to say the least, rather unpleasant and I encountered what I call "bad treatments" in the field.[15] In these interviews my participants were remarkably powerful individuals in local or national contexts. They were from not only the ruling AKP but also from the main opposition CHP as well as from some highly politicised non-governmental organisations and commercial institutions. They also included both men and women. There were not more

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15 For an account of another researcher who encountered very similar discomforting behaviour in her interviews for her research on sex trafficking in Turkey with powerful top bureaucrats, see Coşkun 2016. Here, I completely agree with the critical take of Tahira Jabeen (2013) – who conducted research involving Pakistani bureaucratic and political elites – about some of the presumptions in the literature regarding the power of researchers vis-à-vis participants and their privilege of representation regarding the subjects involved in the research in ethnographic practice. In non-liberal societies with markedly non-democratic tendencies, research involving political elites usually places the researcher in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis the respondent/participant. The power of representation and of being in the position of asking questions should not be exaggerated in such contexts of deeply asymmetric relations of political power.

than ten such instances among the more than 250 separate interviews and they could well be ignored statistically. Yet, I also think that these are experiences worth reflecting on since they are illustrative of power relations in Turkish society as a whole, and the hybrid regime it has produced thus far. These experiences also pose some important ethical dilemmas for the research and the researcher.

Keeping the researcher waiting or not showing up for a meeting

Keeping researchers waiting for a very long time despite a prior appointment is a common and a very light form of bad treatment that I frequently encountered in the field. In several cases, I had to wait for my interviewees for about an hour, but most of the time respondents had concrete excuses for not arriving on time and the rest of the interview process was smooth and normal. In one example, I had to wait for my interviewee for almost four hours. But again, the rest of the interview went smoothly, and the participant seriously engaged with my questions. In another case, the interviewee did not show up, although he had given me an appointment at the local party office. It should also be mentioned that, in these cases, the interviewees were busy local party representatives with erratic daily schedules that included intra-party meetings, visits to weddings, funerals, the ill, condolence visits (*taziye ziyareti*) and dealing with other problems of voters and supporters. If interviewees with executive responsibilities for a political party find themselves overscheduled in such situations, an interview request from a researcher is usually the one most easily ignored. This is certainly understandable since the relationship between voters and party representatives is the core of political activity in localities. What qualifies some of these incidents as bad treatment is the fact that they occurred without any notice regarding the lateness – or in some cases no-show.

Refusing questions

Some interviews I conducted started in a tense atmosphere from the very beginning and the relationship quickly became adversarial. In a couple of such interviews, I found it extremely hard to continue since my interviewees were unwilling to cooperate at all. Questions that I had asked in dozens of other interviews without offense were received with a kind of unexpected hostility. Instead of shaking off questions, my interviewees' reaction was to aggressively refuse to answer my questions and to contest some of my comments on local politics – which I used to contextualise the questions – with a visibly angry expression. In these incidents, I backed off from the offensive material and was able to finish the interview despite a tense atmosphere throughout.

Not paying attention and refusing interview requests

What I would like to call bad treatment can also start before the formal interview process. In a certain sub-province in a metropolitan context I had a hard time getting an interview from the local chair of one of the opposition parties. In this sub-province, the mayor was also from this particular party, which testifies the fact that the sub-province was a stronghold of this particular chair's party. In this particular interaction, our would-be interviewee was quite a powerful figure in this local setting. When we finally had a chance for an introductory meeting he did not look at us at all, but remained focused on his computer and the documents in front of him. He listened to our introduction of the research project and then lectured us on the uselessness of our entire project, using aggressive and very frank expressions. The research assistant in our team and I did not take a confrontational stance at the time, but later, on another occasion, we managed to obtain an interview with this particular local politician on another visit to the party office in this local setting, because, after this first failed attempt, we had found new gatekeepers, conducted several interviews and meanwhile built a degree of trust in that particular locality.

Pointing out the researcher's lack of knowledge

An interview in one of these settings with a locally powerful and a politically engaged businessperson quickly turned difficult and uncomfortable. This interview came about accidentally during a visit to a local newspaper, where I wanted to speak to a local journalist regarding the city's politics. I coincidentally came across the owner of the local newspaper, who also owned other enterprises and businesses in town. The interviewee was in his sixties and knew many interesting details regarding the city's politics. He kept me waiting for a long time in the busy reception area of the local newspaper office, which was understandable since I did not have a previously arranged appointment. The participant, in fact, had a centrally located desk in this reception area from which he managed the business and after a while he started to talk to me in a patronising manner. This style and way of talking and addressing others is common in contexts like Turkey, where seniority and old age go hand in hand with higher social status and hierarchical superiority.

In most of the other interviews with senior and powerful participants, however, my interviewees were so confident of their own position that they did not feel any need to adopt a patronising attitude in this relationship with a younger academic. But this case was different from most of the interviews I had had with older and powerful participants (including ministers and deputies). The interview turned into a kind of show of force (most probably on purpose) in which my interviewee not only spoke to me but also constantly ordered his

employees around like they were his servants. He also halted the interview on several occasions to help several people who visited him by making phone calls or giving them money or ordering meals.

Later, again in a very patronising manner, he explained to me that he wanted to talk to me in this particular space because he also wanted me to see the traffic in his office: "I could have you in that room and shake you off in half an hour, but I wanted you to see all this traffic." Although this performance was probably also put on to confirm his superior social position, he ironically had a point. Judging by the content of the interview and my observations in the busy reception area, he was a quite powerful local figure with influence in the city's politics. During the interview, when he realised that I had not known who he was beforehand, he aggressively told me that "you do not know who you are talking to". His expectation that I (someone not originally from that small city) should know him beforehand was not at all realistic. When I avoided from taking a confrontational or defensive attitude, refraining from explaining to him that his expectations were unrealistic and keeping my patience, it paid off: I obtained a good interview regarding local politics and the interviewee provided me with additional contacts.

Reception in an inconvenient setting and shaking off the researcher

In many interviews, I was received by my interviewees under inconvenient and unexpected circumstances, usually due to compelling circumstances and pressing needs on the part of the participants. For example, it was very common for there to be other party members around when interviewing a party chair and these were instances that completely changed the dynamic of the interview process from a one-on-one, in-depth interview to a group interview. On the one hand, this provided me with opportunities to observe intra-party relationships among party members in the various hierarchies of the party. On the other hand, the circumstances in which I encountered the participants were not compatible with my expectations and my interview preparations, which had been shaped by notions of "sterile" one-on-one interviews in private offices. Most of the time this inconvenient setting was an opportunity more than a liability, as long as the main interviewee was willing to take time to talk to me and cooperate. But in two particular cases, the setting of the interview, combined with a strong attitude on the part of the interviewee, created a context that facilitated bad treatment.

The interviewee in the first case, whom I interviewed for my PhD research, was a member of the executive board of the ruling AKP in a metropolitan city. She accepted me in her office in the party building in the presence of two other visiting high-ranking party members. Not only did she exhibit an extremely patronising attitude that kept her answers extremely brief, but other party

members in this small office kept chatting to each other as if I was not there at all. My interviewee shook me off after 10 minutes of a series of short and extremely bland and uncontroversial answers. It was clear that, in this case, my interviewee did not take my visit seriously at all and preferred to evade me as soon as possible.

The second such encounter during my fieldwork took place when I already had a position at a university in Turkey. This time, my interviewee was the mayor of a small provincial city, who was also a member of an opposition party. She was quite an autonomous figure with direct personal influence in the city's politics. She was actually a powerful local patron who was skilful in mobilising a broad clientele with material incentives. After extensive fieldwork in this city, I requested an appointment for an interview with this mayor from her personal assistant. When I arrived for the interview, I was led to a waiting room with other visitors. To my great surprise, I was invited to the rather sumptuous office of the mayor with three other visitors. During the ensuing interactions, I became aware that two of these visitors were quite close to the mayor and they were perhaps part of her clientele. The other visitor was a PhD researcher who was there for an interview as well, and who ultimately got no more information than I did.

Although the mayor was not at all rude towards her visitors, the way she preferred to arrange these meetings was completely inappropriate for a research study. Her excuse for postponing the one-on-one meeting I had requested was that she had some important business to talk about with the other two visitors, who were evidently her acquaintances. It was all too understandable given the clientelistic nature of this local patron's linkages with her supporters, which I had already found about prior to our meeting.

This group reception of people with different demands and issues became even more difficult to navigate when the mayor's acquaintances intervened in the mayor's dialogue with me. At some point during this encounter, I found myself in the bizarre position of having my home town (an Eastern Black Sea town notorious for its disproportional influence on national politics in Turkey) become the subject of a condescending discussion among the acquaintances of this local patron. They referred to me and those of my background as *bunlar* [these (people)], and of protecting each other like a criminal organisation. In the developed Western part of Turkey where this incident took place, there is a stereotype that associates the Eastern Black Sea region with backwardness and uncivilised attitudes. Neither the mayor nor her acquaintances treated me as someone with standing and/or backing; rather, the other participants felt free to disparage my origins and disrupt my dialogue with the mayor. Again, at that moment, the best option seemed to me to stay silent and not to engage. Although I did not have another meeting with the mayor later, I had a chance to visit the municipality a few times after this meeting. If I had taken a defiant

position during this encounter, later visits probably would not have been possible. This also provided me with very valuable opportunities for first-hand observation of the personal patronage networks built by this local patron in the city's politics.

Berating

In another instance, when I had the opportunity to speak to an AKP deputy from the central executive committee of the party at the party headquarters, things became even more tense and unpleasant. This encounter happened during my PhD research. In the middle of a long and a very productive interview, my interviewee unexpectedly became angry at a standard question that I had asked in many other interviews regarding the success of the AKP despite its long tenure. The question aimed at comparing the party with its centre-right predecessors in Turkish politics. Things quickly turned personal and my interviewee[16] accused me aggressively, and in a very clear populist tone (consisting of a series of agitated rhetorical questions emphasising the AKP's understanding of ordinary people and the elite's lack of grasp of this reality), of being unaware of ordinary people's circumstances and of how the AKP improved their lives. The way he addressed me in this moment, the content of his sentences, his tone of voice and his facial expressions were certainly not those of someone expressing anger in a horizontal, egalitarian relationship. Under these tense circumstances and in the sumptuous office of the angry AKP representative, this diatribe was nothing less than a long session of berating someone in an inferior position. In this instance, too, I by no means took a defiant position but behaved as if everything was normal, allowing me to complete the interview. Despite its extremely unpleasant transformation, this interview, along with other interviews that I conducted in AKP headquarters, provided invaluable insight into the power and influence held by this most prominent collective actor in Turkey.

Researchers and researched in hybrid regimes: a "powerful" relationship

It is clear that the relationship between researchers and the researched is not egalitarian at all (see also Clifford 1986, Gupta / Ferguson 2001, Stocking 1983). Yet, there has always been a discernible process of "euphemisation" – generated either by myself or by powerful participants – that has concealed very evident power differentials in encounters I have had throughout my field research ex-

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16 This interviewee stopped addressing me with the second person plural (*siz*), which is the proper and polite way to address someone that you do not know well in a formal interaction, and began addressing me with the second person singular (*sen*) which is generally used either for a person one knows well or for persons with an inferior status.

perience. In my experience, depending on the form of the power asymmetry, either the interviewee or the interviewer usually finds ways to relieve his/her addressees by giving the impression throughout the interview (through gestures, small talk, smiling, body language, etc.) that a conversation is taking place between two people with equal footing, as if there was no power asymmetry. Yet, as I have related with regard to certain encounters like the above-mentioned ones, in specific moments, the "euphemisation" can quickly evaporate and render the power discrepancy undeniably visible.

In the immediate aftermath of such encounters, researchers might experience a feeling of weakness. But this feeling should not prevent the researcher from placing the experience into a wider context of power relations and social stratification. In all the examples of bad treatment, it would be misleading to think that I, as the researcher, was personally targeted or humiliated because I posed a threat or provoked the interviewee. On the contrary, in these interviews, it was my perceived inferior status as a professional researcher, rather than me as a person, that elicited the performance of power on the part of the interviewee. In these circumstances I was not just another of the usual clients surrounding the powerful participant who might be useful in the future by casting votes or providing the patron with other services. Instead, the powerful interviewee perceived me, the researcher, as someone of an inferior position who could offer no potential benefit in the near future. In other words, what I witnessed in these interviews and incidents of bad treatment in the field was the remarkably naked face of political power in Turkey – without the cautious "public transcript" (Scott 1995) that would be performed in front of someone perceived as holding some degree of leverage.

In most of these cases, I preferred not to engage, and in some of these cases there was simply no possible way to firmly and explicitly express my discomfort. From a broader pragmatic point of view, I think I benefitted from restraining myself in the long run, despite the immediate emotional impact of the bad treatment. It is difficult to give a generic answer regarding the extent to which researchers need to tolerate such behaviour. The answer should take the subjective and contextual elements into account. As a man with a majority ethnic and sectarian background I cannot see myself in a particularly disadvantaged position. Thus, even in the most unpleasant encounters, I did not feel personally and/or physically threatened, despite certainly experiencing a great deal of frustration. I am sure that I have colleagues who have had much harsher experiences and have had to endure much more disturbing attitudes in the field due to bias and prejudices towards their ethnic, sectarian or gender identities.[17] But judging by my own experience, I am of the opinion that, even in such instances, it is important to understand that these interactions are not entirely "personal" and the unpleasant experience or bad treatment may certainly have a wider

17 See Ünlü 2019 for a very important analysis of ethnic hierarchies in Turkey.

political and social context; in short, there are always structural aspects at play. The best mitigation strategy in such circumstances seems to be a principled distance and broad contemplation that takes into account the context of broader power relations.

Finally, I also feel that the relative frequency of such hostile attitudes calls for a broader discussion of the dynamics of domination and social stratification in Turkey in particular, and in hybrid regimes, in general. At first glance, Turkish society seems to be a status-driven society. For instance, research on occupational prestige usually reveals the fact that academics, after judges, are considered the most respected occupational category in Turkish society (Sunar 2020). But as an academic carrying out research on party politics, my experience has drawn my attention to a kind of hypocritical moral economy in this respect. Within the context of this moral economy, everyone knows where the real power and influence reside, despite the discursive veneration of some professions (including academics) and the condemnation of politicians. In Turkey (and probably in many other hybrid regimes as well), it is not the social or occupational status or socio-economic class position but rather the holding of political power (e.g. an office in local and national legislature or government, or serving as the chair of a powerful political organisation, or occupying a top position in a highly politicised bureaucratic institution) that is essential and definitive in social stratification.[18] This should be taken into account when planning interviews.

This is of course not to claim that other markers of social distinction have no impact on social hierarchies and research interactions in Turkey. Older age, coupled with a respected occupation/institutional position, middle class behaviour and demeanour, and a considerable amount of social capital, are usually aspects that work in favour of researchers in interactions with party activists and elites. During my research I also occasionally found myself benefitting from my position at a public university in Turkey as well as my middle-class background. Yet, in the context of competitive clientelism with remarkably low levels of social trust (Livny 2020), where powerful politicians have the ability to distribute concrete material benefits, such non-political markers of social distinction – which might indicate a respected position in the eyes of many – provide researchers only a fragile standing that is highly dependent on their respondents' consideration, manners and politeness. In addition, as the institutional autonomy and prestige of academia diminishes in Turkey due to the impact of an increasingly authoritarian regime, as well as the mushrooming of new higher education institutions in the last couple of decades, these vulnerabilities of researchers vis-à-vis powerful patrons or brokers have become increasingly apparent.

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18 When distinguishing these different milieus of hierarchy, I have in mind Weber's threefold separation of forms of social stratification: class, status and the party (2005: 268–290).

Concluding remarks

A hybrid regime setting, and the particular form it has gained in Turkey, poses specific ethical and practical challenges for researchers when it comes to negotiating standard ethical principles of conducting social research, such as not doing harm to the participants (and to the researcher her/himself) and informed consent. I argue that some of these principles require re-negotiation. Such settings call into question whether and how researchers can conduct critical research, when and how they can or should remain silent and when to speak up. In a polarised hybrid regime under the predominance of a populist ruling party, competitive clientelism and the privileged access of the ruling party to state institutions and resources creates an environment in which every major party engages in clientelistic practices and develops certain normatively questionable views and practices on democratic participation, gender, ethnicity, immigration, etc. Under such circumstances the overall picture that the researcher might draw when relying on interviews with the representatives of all major parties is very likely to contradict the way these parties want to be seen.

Under these circumstances, I argue that Weber's recommendations for principled distance may still serve as a guide for researchers who are navigating these practical and ethical challenges. Although it is in sharp contradiction with the current academic environment that pushes researchers to publish quickly and to establish a high profile on social media and in traditional media (mostly through the construction of very politicised personas), researchers of party politics in such settings might need to stick to a low profile and carefully disseminate their research outcomes in the hope that in the long run their research might effectively contribute to potential political institutional reforms. This means that researchers need to think about research dissemination in detail. On a more personal level, researchers might also encounter and endure some practical difficulties that may stem from bad treatment by some of the powerful participants of their research and that certainly have roots in the overly politicised nature of hybrid regimes. In such contexts, the researchers' academic status and skills cannot counterbalance the dominance of politically powerful participants and creates a deeply asymmetric relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, to the detriment of the former. In such cases I have found it important to avoid taking bad treatment personally and to reflect on the broader meaning of such behaviour in the overall framework of power relations and social stratification in hybrid regime settings. Thus, patience and a willingness to play the "cautious long game" in research activity and the dissemination of the research outputs are key in such settings.

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