

# **Ethnographic encounters: Towards a minor politics of field access**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the insight that can be brought by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature with regards to questions of field access within the context of organizational ethnography. This paper draws from an ethnographic account of scientists negotiating access during a field expedition to Fiji. While the scientists could secure access prior to their departure by abiding by the legal dimension of plant collecting in the field, they had to renegotiate access in the field by engaging with different epistemologies, codes and forms of relationality. Positioned as an ethnography of field access, this paper highlights the enmeshment of codes, practices and trajectories in the negotiation of field access and seeks to set the lines of a 'minor politics of access' within the context of organizational ethnography.

Key words: Field access, Ethnography, Minor literature, Organization Studies

## **1. Introduction**

A number of authors in organization and management studies have highlighted the intricacies associated with empirical research and more specifically with questions revolving around access to empirical sites (Brown et al. 1976; Barley 1990; Collinson 1992; Cunliffe and Alcadipani 2016). This has taken many different forms, including explorations of quagmires around the identity of researchers (Cassell 2005; Tapani 2009), ambiguities concerning the position of the researcher in the field (Cunliffe and Karunanayake 2013) or issues of trust (Collinson 1992), to name but a few. Obtaining and maintaining access might involve various actions and endeavours on the side of the researcher, such as adjusting oneself to evolving circumstances during interviews (Dundon and Ryan 2010) or accepting

banter and jokes from shop-floor workers in order to become ‘part of the group’ (Collinson 1988). Furthermore, gaining permission to enter an organization does not mean that one has successfully secured access (Cunliffe and Alcadipani 2016), thus highlighting the mediations and complexity underlying field access and organizational ethnography in general (Bruni 2006). Put differently, this amounts to the difference between physical and cognitive access to the field or between primary access (obtaining permission) and secondary access (gaining access to people and information) (Brannick and Coghlan 2007).

Some authors have suggested that, as compared to other disciplines in social sciences, organization and management research has manifested less of an interest in the study of the difficulties surrounding access within the context of ethnographic studies (Bruni 2006; Alcadipani and Hodgson 2009; Cunliffe and Alcadipani 2016). This paper sets out to contribute to research on organizational ethnography by extending our understanding of the politics and ethics of field access. In order to do so, the paper draws from the concept of minor literature as well as the relation between the vernacular and the vehicular (Deleuze and Guattari 1986) in order to develop a ‘minor politics of access’ with regards to organizational ethnography<sup>1</sup>. As noted by Katz (2017, 597), ‘thinking in a minor key opens many spaces of betweenness from which to imagine, act, and live things differently’. A minor politics of access strives to engage the deterritorialization of major forms of access in order to summon and actualize new territories, engagements, and relations. This entails a reshuffle of established power relations in the making of new forms of ethical engagement in ethnographic research. This paper contends that the mobilization of the concept of minor literature opens up the door for a different form of engagement with empirical access in the context of organizational field research.

To illustrate the implications of a minor politics of access, the paper draws from a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper also contributes to the growing scholarship in management and organization studies that draws from the work of Deleuze (and Guattari) (see for example Clegg et al. 2005; Linstead and Thanem 2007; Scott 2010; Aroles and McLean 2016; Munro and Thanem 2017; Pullen et al. 2017).

two-year ethnographic inquiry revolving around the study of scientific practices and more specifically from the difficulties encountered by scientists with regards to field access in the process of plant collection. This paper is positioned as an ethnography of field access that sets out to inform organizational ethnography. While the scientists could easily secure access with the government prior to their departure, they had to re-negotiate access once in the field through an engagement with different epistemologies and relationalities enacted by the local villagers. The entanglement of epistemologies, local practices, subjectivities, legislative spaces and differing forms of relationality highlights the complexity underlying field access. Ultimately, nuancing major forms of field access and research by engaging with the minor practices of relationality entails venturing onto uncharted ground as researchers strive to find ways of combining both forms of relationality in order to achieve a form of access that is faithful to both engagements. In that sense, it is not just about major codes of legislation on one side and minor codes of relationality on the other, but a matter of deterritorialization and reterritorialization whereby established codes are challenged and new codes, territories, and imaginaries continuously emerge.

The paper is structured as follows. Following on from the introduction, the second section examines the concept of minor literature (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) and the notions of vernacular and vehicular. An overview of the ethnographic research underlying this paper forms the basis of the third section. The fourth section narrates the events, actions and encounters connected to the process of securing and managing access to the field within the context of a scientific expedition to Fiji. The fifth section discusses this ethnographic account through the exploration of the complex and ephemeral entanglements between minor and major forms of field access. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the implication of these processes with respect to matters of access and outlines the characteristics of a ‘minor politics of access’ for ethnographic research in organization and management studies.

## 2. Minor Literature, vehicular and vernacular

Deleuze and Guattari (1986) developed the concept of minor literature in their book devoted to the literary work of Franz Kafka. Interestingly, the expression ‘minor literature’ is the result of a somehow over-interpretive translation (Weissmann 2013). It is in Kafka’s diary that the expression ‘*kleine Literaturen*’ first appeared<sup>2</sup>: while this expression has been translated as ‘*small literatures*’ in English, or as ‘*piccola letteratura*’ in Italian, it has been translated as ‘*littératures mineures*’ by Marthe Robert in the French version of the text that Deleuze and Guattari used for their analysis (see Kafka 1954).

### 2.1 Defining minor literature

A minor literature does not refer to a particular type of literature, but rather to particular ways of writing and to specific ways of using language. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze (1998, 5) defines the language of a minor literature as ‘a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language, nor a rediscovered patois’. For Deleuze and Guattari (1986), three main characteristics define a minor literature: a strong degree of deterritorialization, the omnipresence of the political and finally, the enunciation bearing a collective dimension.

Deterritorialization entails the dissolution of strongly established cultural codes and the setting aside of identity as a framework of reference. Rather than focusing on identity and binary relations, this involves conceptualising a state of intensive becoming that not only vanquishes the codes associated with a specific space or mode of being but also propels the subject towards the exploration of new lands, new positions, new possibilities, etc. The concept of becoming plays a pivotal role in Deleuzian philosophy – in many ways, it

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<sup>2</sup> Lecercle (2012), however, notes that Kafka experts have cast doubts on the origin of the concept of minor literature, highlighting that it was Max Bord who assembled Kafka’s diaries. In any case, the notion of minor is not explicitly present in Kafka’s writings (Corngold, 1994).

transcends the mere status of concept as it underlies the whole of Deleuze's philosophy (May 2003). Every becoming involves a process of deterritorialization, with the process of becoming establishing 'a zone of proximity' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 273) between two categories. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) argue that Kafka is faced with two possibilities when it comes to pushing this movement of deterritorialization in the German language. The first possibility is to artificially enrich the language through the addition of a symbolic and oneiric dimension to the German language. Authors such as Max Brod or Gustav Meyrink are seen to embrace this first possibility by embellishing the German of Prague. The second possibility is to keep the language in its original form, that is to say using the German from Prague (the actual spoken German of Prague) regardless of its limitations, grammar imprecisions and syntax peculiarities<sup>3</sup>. For Deleuze and Guattari (1986), the first possibility would ineluctably widen the split between the author and the people, resulting in a loss of any potential political resonance. By following the second path, Kafka achieves deterritorialization through sobriety (i.e. accepting the German of Prague as it is) and the language he uses undergoes a process of deterritorialization, as it distances itself from the established and rigid codes of the German language. Kafka achieves deterritorialization through his use of a vernacularized form of German.

The second characteristic mentioned by Deleuze and Guattari (1986) is the political dimension of a minor literature. This particular point sets aside a minor literature from any form of literature that would revolve around self-centred considerations: each and every single individual case echoes back to the political. In that sense, rather than simply depicting a personal story, the literary text in a minor literature is caught in a wider political dimension; concerns that might appear to be solely individual are traversed by something far greater, something that bears a strong political resonance (for instance, within the context of minor

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari (1986) see these two possibilities, respectively in James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.

literature, one's account of identity struggle surpasses the individual dimension). Bogue (1997, 104) notes that 'by treating Kafka as a minor writer, Deleuze and Guattari call attention to his status as a member of an ethnic minority and citizen of a minor region/proto-nation within a foreign-based empire, while insisting that his formal and thematic innovations in literature have direct social and political implications'. Furthermore, as highlighted by Beaulieu (2005), the apparition of a minor literature is conditioned by an external necessity and as such, cannot be concerned with personal and subjective conditions.

Finally, the third characteristic of a minor literature is the collective dimension of its enunciating mode. For Deleuze and Guattari (1986), Kafka does not produce a masters' literature, he is on the side of the people (this connects to Kafka's choice to achieve deterritorialization through sobriety rather than through oneirism and symbolism). In that sense, the mode of enunciation is not individual but collective (Lecerle 2002), it is about writing for a people or summoning a people; as Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 33) put it, 'there is no subject, there are only collective agencements of enunciation – and literature expresses these agencements'. The political dimension of a minor literature and its collective form of enunciation are inseparable; any individual writing effort from members of a marginalized group transcends the individual and aspires to wider political concerns<sup>4</sup>. In that sense, writing constitutes a collective action; while the national conscious might be inactive, literature bears a revolutionary dimension. Such a stance gives literature a certain responsibility and as such, writing can be seen as a form of solidarity with a people as yet to come.

Beyond its potential for literary inquiry (Sunderland 2011) or cultural studies (Behdad 2005; Bignall and Patton 2010), the concept of minor literature has been enrolled in various fields of inquiry. Some of its most visible manifestations are found in critical geography (Katz 1996; Bradshaw and Williams 1999; Gerlach 2014, 2015), education theory and

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<sup>4</sup> From that perspective, we can appreciate the strong resonances between the concept of minor literature and post-colonial, LGBT or feminist literatures.

pedagogy (Gregoriou 2004; Gale 2016), politics (Thoburn 2006; Van Wezemaal 2008) and the study of movement (Manning 2016), to name but a few.

## *2.2 Vehicular, vernacular and becoming*

The relation between the notions of major and minor does not amount to a dialectical impasse whereby the majority along with its codes and culture would be opposed to a ‘second-class’ minority; as Deleuze (1978, 155) notes, ‘this is why we have to distinguish between the majoritarian as a homogeneous and constant system, the minorities as sub-systems, and the minoritarian as potential, created and creative becoming’<sup>5</sup>. In turn, this implies that the majoritarian ceases to act as a referential, thus opening up possibilities for novelty and difference. As such, rather than having a dualistic opposition between what is minor and what is major, one finds a line of flight that relates to the process of becoming minor in/through a major language or mode of expression. A line of flight is defined as a deterritorialization that ‘produces multiple series and rhizomic connections’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 15). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 105) put it, ‘conquer the major language in order to delineate in it as yet unknown minor languages. Use the minor language to send the major language racing’. This leaves us with three functions for languages: major languages, minor languages, and the becoming minor of major languages.

It is in the light of this rejection of dialectical thinking that we can fully appreciate Deleuze and Guattari’s turn towards Henri Gobard’s Tetralinguistic model. Gobard (1976) distinguishes between four forms of language: the vernacular (maternal or territorial) language; the vehicular (urban, state, official) language; the referential language (the language of meaning and culture) and the mythical language. This model is particularly useful when it comes to understanding the position of Kafka with regards to languages and to

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<sup>5</sup> Author’s translation from French.



appreciating the intricacies of a minor literature. In relation to Kafka, the vernacular language is Czech, the vehicular language is the German of Prague, the referential language is High German, and the mythical language is Hebrew. However, as we are reminded by Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 24), these language functions ‘can have ambiguous edges, changing borders, that differ from this or that material (...) A blur of languages, and not at all a system of languages’.

This paper sets to explore how the concept of minor literature might enable us to engage differently with question of politics and ethics regarding field access. More precisely, the concept of minor literature is seen as a conceptual device that can be mobilized in order to make sense of the ways in which the researcher constantly (re)negotiates field access at different levels with the aim of crafting more ethical and political forms of engagement within the context of organizational ethnography. The following section briefly presents the methodological endeavour underlying this paper.

### **3. Methodology: Ethnographic encounters**

The empirical research underlying this paper comes from a two-year long ethnographic study into the making of scientific facts and knowledge. The recourse to ethnography enables the researcher to make use of a wide range of tools, techniques and approaches (Law, 2004) and allows for an in-depth exploration of empirical sites. Ethnography has recurrently been deployed in relation to the study of scientific practices and spaces (Traweek 1982; Lynch 1985; Latour and Woolgar 1986; Knorr-Cetina 1999; Latour 2000; Mol 2002; M’Charek 2005) and also has a long history in organization and management studies (Zickar and Carter 2010; Cunliffe and Kavunanayake 2013) dating back to the early 20th century (Hiller 1928; Mathewson 1931; Hersey 1932). Since then, the field

of organization and management studies has witnessed a continued interest in ethnography as a way of exploring the intricacies of organizational worlds (Van Maanen 1979, 2001; Czarniawska-Joerges 1992; Watson 1994, 2011; Bate 1997; Neyland 2007).

Throughout the course of the study, I have given much attention to moving away from a focus on *a priori* divides and positions in order to embrace the complexity, heterogeneity and vitality that transpire through various actions, events, and practices. This entails attempting to develop alternative empirical sensibilities in order to engage with ‘the intensive forces underlying the making of object/subject positions, dualism, divides’ (Aroles and McLean 2017, 179), rather than remaining at the level of extensive forms (that is these object/subject positions, dualism, divides) (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987). By engaging with the intensities connected to the buoyancy and ephemerality of events, this research sought to engage with different ways of accounting for events, actions and encounters (Coleman and Ringrose 2013; Duff 2014; Aroles and McLean 2017).

Over the course of the research, many different techniques and approaches have been mobilized, amongst which are both participant and non-participant observations; shadowing scientists in their daily practices; interviews and discussions with various scientists; attending miscellaneous meetings and scientific gatherings; as well as the study of many different documents. The research entailed exploring various spaces connected to the work of a group of evolutionary biologists, including a research institute focusing on evolutionary biology (where most of the empirical research took place) and a herbarium attached to this scientific institute, but also involved accompanying a team of evolutionary biologists on a field expedition to the South Pacific. Tracing practices outside the boundaries of the laboratory, as suggested by Latour (2000), allows the researcher to provide richer and more detailed empirical accounts.

One of the projects that emerged during the course of this two-year long ethnographic research concerned a group of Australasian plants. The paucity of information relating to these plants, coupled with the fact that they are difficult to find in collections (either in botanical gardens or in private collections) led the researchers to consider the possibility of a field expedition to Fiji. Within the context of this paper, I focus more particularly on the events surrounding this fieldtrip with a focus on how the scientists negotiated access to different parts of the forest on two Fijian islands. This field expedition involved visiting two different islands where these particular epiphytic plants could be found. During the course of the research, my role was very much that of an active research assistant<sup>6</sup>. This involved giving assistance to the scientists with the process of data collection: for instance helping the scientists in climbing up some trees, occasionally climbing up myself to develop a better understanding of their object of study, noting down measurements for the scientists while they were up in the trees, recording GPS coordinates, assisting with the use and set up of various devices etc. It also entailed helping them out with the more practical side of the expedition; travelling between the two islands was very difficult and required a lot of organisation. Information relating to the process of getting access to the research institute is not deemed to be relevant in this context, as this paper is positioned as an ethnography of field site access as opposed to being a reflective account of the author's own experience as a researcher setting out to access a particular field site (i.e. the research institute). This paper argues that, as management scholars, we can learn from the ways in which a group of scientists negotiated field access in Fiji.

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<sup>6</sup> I was then more actively involved in the work of the scientists as compared to the research conducted at the scientific research institute.

#### **4. Sevusevu, epistemologies and field access**

This section details the actions, encounters and events that surrounded the negotiation of field access, both from a distance (i.e. in the European research institute) and once in the field. Organizing the field expedition involved getting in touch with the main university in Fiji where the research would take place and more particularly with the herbarium of that university. Making contact with the herbarium was critical to the success of this expedition as no research can legally be conducted without liaising with that university. After some time, the scientists obtained an answer from Tunde, who works in this herbarium. The scientists then started engaging the procedures that would ‘allow’ them to undertake fieldwork. It firstly involved paying the fees relating to biosecurity processes, to the use of material at the herbarium (so-called ‘bench fees’), and to the subsequent sending of the material collected to the European research institute. Once the financial questions had been settled, it was agreed that Tunde would accompany the scientists during their expedition and that they would cover all the costs associated with his presence (e.g. plane tickets, accommodation, food etc.). At this stage, the terms and conditions surrounding fieldwork access had been articulated in clear and formal terms, in the same way that access can be formally granted to organizations through the commitment to follow certain rules and procedures. This aspect of field access could be successfully negotiated prior to the departure of the scientists. However, upon arriving in Fiji, the scientists rapidly appreciated that the authorization granted by the government was far from sufficient, as access needed to be negotiated at another level.

The access ‘granted’ through the university and the herbarium did not suffice to ensure the success of the expedition, as access also had to be negotiated many times ‘in the field’ so to speak. When field research was conducted in an area neighbouring a village, the

‘proper’ (or perhaps ethical) way of conducting research in that area was to obtain the consent of the village chief. Such an endeavour bore no ‘official’ relevance, as in most cases the areas surrounding villages do not belong to the villagers but to the government. Yet, Tunde insisted on the importance of such engagement; not only would the villagers get frustrated with strangers invading ‘their’ land but their help would also be very precious in order to locate plants. In that sense, seeking to obtain consent from the local community was enacted as the most engaging path in terms of ethics and logistics. Interestingly, this destabilized well-established power relations, as it unfolded different geopolitical realities.

When going to a particular village to ask for permission to explore the forests surrounding the village, it is customary to bring a *sevusevu*, which translates as a small gift. Whenever the scientists had to ask for permission from village chiefs, this *sevusevu* took the form of kava roots. *Piper methysticum* (known as kava or yaqona in Fijian) is a plant that possesses both sedative and anaesthetic properties and which is consumed on a daily basis in villages (Laverack and Brown 2003; Tomlinson 2007). The roots of this plant are dried and then pounded until turned into a powder; this powder is then stored in a dry area. When villagers consume kava, they put the powder into a knotted cloth that they infuse into cold water. This is prepared in a large bowl that is put in the middle of a group of men seated on a mat. The village chief then initiates the ceremony by drinking the kava from a cup made from a coconut shell. The cup is then given to the person seated on the left of the chief and so on. As explained by Tunde, kava drinking plays a key role in the social life of the village (see Tomlinson 2007), as it offers the opportunity to men to gather once they have finished their daily work. Kava-drinking sessions would typically occur in the early evening when men would return from the fields. The daily consumption of kava roots by villagers implies that they do not ‘need’ the kava roots brought by the scientists. In that sense, the action of bringing kava roots to the village is proof of respect, appreciation and understanding of their

culture. On most occasions, once the offering had been made to the village chief and the purpose of the research explained in Fijian by Tunde, one or two men from the village would come with the scientists in order to help them with their research and also to demonstrate their involvement.

On one specific occasion, the offering of kava roots to the village chief unfolded differently. When receiving the kava roots, the village chief, along with other village dignitaries, performed a ceremony during which they symbolically offered the kava roots to the spirits of the forest. In other words, they presented the kava roots as a gift made by the scientists to the spirits of the forest. In that sense, the chief and the dignitaries were just the intermediaries between the scientists and the spirits of the forest. The kava roots were enacted as a medium of access to the forest in a perhaps more striking way, as compared to other encounters with villagers, and the underlying logic seemed to be that of a trade-off: the ‘outsiders’ (the scientists) brought kava roots as a proof of respect to the spirits of the forest and, in exchange, were ‘allowed’ to take something out of the forest (i.e. plant specimens). The action of bringing kava roots as a gift to the spirits of the forest, with the village dignitaries acting as intermediaries between the scientists and the spirits, testified to the basic logic of the exchange. In other words, the scientists concluded some sort of barter with spiritual entities and the villagers were enacted as the gatekeepers of the forest, both in the spiritual and in the practical sense of the term; a material object (kava roots) against a material object (living plants) via immaterial forms of relationality. In that sense, the *sevusevu* was enacted as a way of ‘paying’ for one’s entrance to the forest.

Tunde explained the aims of the research after having carefully introduced all the members of the team and then actively took part in the ceremony. In certain ways, Tunde was found at the interface between the local engagement with the surrounding environment and the image of formal ‘scientificity’ attached to the expedition. This encounter highlighted a

practical intertwinement between contrasting epistemologies. It is key to avoid portraying such relations as an opposition between standardized modern scientific inquiry on one hand and localized traditional practices on the other (see Agrawal 1995). Such a dualism conceals more than it reveals as it relies on a process of categorisation grounded on cultural perspectivism (i.e. notions of research or tradition are simply socio-cultural constructs) and ultimately black-boxes much of the richness of these different epistemologies and forms of relationality. The scientists' engagement with the long-standing practices of relationality and with the epistemologies of the villagers represents a particular way of enacting and making the field, one that differs from dominant narratives.

Tunde exhibited the ability to engage with contrasting epistemologies and relationalities, or rather the ability to move from one form of engagement with the forest to another. This capacity prompted the emergence of particular ways of assembling during that ceremony – a be-coming together of different intentions, relations and forms of engagement. Once the ceremony was completed, Tunde, the scientists and two men from the village went to the forest. After trekking for about three intense hours, the whole team made their way back to the village where the chief greeted them. Tunde along with the two villagers showed the specimens that had been collected and provided some information as to where these plants had been collected from. Tunde later explained that it was important for the chief to know where the plants had been taken from so that he can address the appropriate spirits of the forest. The approval from the village chief was followed by an invitation to a kava-drinking session.

## **5. Discussion**

This section explores how the empirical account provided might inform our

understanding of field access in the context of ethnographic research. This entails considering the various entanglements between ‘minor’ and ‘major’ modes of field access in the making of new ethical and political forms of engagement with field research; interestingly, this resonates with the call for the development of indigenous methodologies (Louis 2007; Kovach 2010). The scientists engaged with the practices of the villagers by bringing a *sevusevu* (in the form of kava roots) to chiefs of villages that had neighbouring areas they wanted to explore. The villagers and the scientists enacted the forest in very distinctive ways: the villagers’ relation to the forest testifies to a long-lasting engagement<sup>7</sup> while the scientists’ engagement was initially framed around a clear set of expectations (e.g. in terms of research, results, impact, publications etc.). In other words, the difference between the villagers and the scientists is more appropriately expressed in terms of relational intensity rather than knowledge with regards to the forest. Viveiros de Castro (2007) made a very similar point when he explained that the difference between ‘regular’ people and shamans (in a South American context and in relation to the engagement with the forest) is a matter of relational intensity rather than a case of differing accumulations of knowledge. Understanding how one relates to one’s environment is pivotal to the success of a form of research that is highly dependent upon access. In that sense, appreciating how the villagers interact with the forest, its spirits, and the surrounding environment in general, allows one to decipher the codes associated with that field.

Two different images of field research were concomitantly enacted throughout the process: the ‘legal’ image of the field determined by the collection permits and biosecurity legislations (what one can legally do) and the ‘experienced’ image of the field embedded in ceremonies, ancestral practices and characterized by a deep engagement and a complex form of relationality with the surrounding environment. While these two images firstly appear to

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, all the villagers encountered knew the plants the scientists were looking for.



be confrontational, the success of the research lay in finding ways of ‘combining’ them through the enactment of a form of engagement that would be more than simply legal or experienced. Conducting research ‘properly’ involved a mixture of these two images, a coming-together of differing interests, logics and codes. Such endeavour was logistically sound, ethically attractive but challenging and demanding in practice (especially as access had to be constantly renegotiated through the fieldwork); conducting research in a way that would pay little attention to the villagers’ connection to the forest would materialize and echo problematic geopolitical relations.

Even though access had been secured formally at the level of the herbarium, which is officially in charge of such matters, in conjunction with the biosecurity legislation (corresponding to ‘primary access’ as defined by Brannick and Coghlan (2007)), access needed to be renegotiated at a different level that was not yet perceptible when the scientists were planning their trip from their European research institute. Within that context, the legal dimension of access may appear in the image of the major while an engagement with local practices enacts the minor (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). However, it is key to recall that the interest of this paper does not lie in dialectically opposing the minor to the major but rather in exploring the ways in which both become entangled through various processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the production of new ways of engaging with research.

The official dimension of field access (e.g. relating to the paperwork completed by the researchers) came to the forefront prior to the trip and towards the end of the trip when the specimens to be exported needed authorization and clearance. On these occasions, the engagement with the villagers did not mean anything – the authorities were not concerned with whether or not the scientists had engaged with the local practices and codes since these do not bear any official dimension. The complex associations and processes of assembling

around the engagement with the villagers' practices became lost within the space of official regulations and biosecurity. Likewise, when in the field, all the paperwork that the scientists had to fill became lost. In other words, this part of the process connected to securing access to the field was enacted as secondary, as intensities and forces connected to these practices failed to attract attention within that particular context (or to assemble convincingly). The villagers were not concerned with the official procedures underlying the field expedition – i.e. there was a deterritorialization of the codes of the legal space of field access. Other more prominent forces have assembled and sent to the background the official and legal dimension of the research during the engagement with local practices.

We can appreciate how through certain processes of assembling, one way of engaging with fieldwork might become minor while another prevails. The minoring of the 'field ceremonies' in the space of biosecurity and legislation highlights how the codes associated with ceremonies, *sevusevu* and forest spirits become lost within a different process of assembling. While this form of engagement is very different from the dominant scientific texts or scripts, it might appear as regular practice within the context of field research in Fiji. It is therefore pivotal to refrain from portraying major and minor as dialectical opposed forces (Bradshaw and Williams 1999) in order to appreciate the various ways in which both forces may be combined and coalesce in the assembling of new modes of being and acting. In other words, rather than simply having processes whereby one form of engagement with field access would become 'minor' and the other 'major' (and reciprocally), this paper documents moments of entanglement between these two images of access. They are not two discrete states (minor vs. major) but processes of deterritorialization whereby the codes associated with major and minor forms of access become unsettled and fused through other processes of territorialization, thus leading to the production of new forms of engagement. Within the frame of scientific research, the actions relating to an engagement with local practices

represent an ‘alternative’ way of conducting field research. Yet, this is an engagement that aligns itself with the need for ethical relations with the context of empirical research. As noted by Lancione (2017, 575), ‘how we perform the field and how we position ourselves within the latter, how we plug into it, are the most subtle moments in harnessing a contextually relevant minor ethics’.

The field expedition involved a be-coming together of these different ways of enacting the field; the field is not only a space of spiritual encounters or a space of scientific experiments. The field is neither the scientifically imagined (even fantasized) field, nor is it the realm of spirits but an assemblage of these different ways of enacting, engaging and representing the forest. In that sense, the field becomes a complex territory traversed by a wealth of processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Ultimately, nuancing major forms of field access and research by engaging with the minor practices of relationality and spirituality entails venturing onto uncharted grounds as researchers strive to find ways of combining both forms of relationality in order to achieve a form of access that is faithful to both engagements. In that sense, it is not just about major codes of legislation on one side and minor codes of relationality on the other, but a matter of deterritorialization and reterritorialization whereby established codes are challenged and new codes, territories and imaginaries emerge.

This development around a minor politics of access has practical implications regarding how, as researchers, we set to engage with negotiations around field access within the context of organizational ethnography. As highlighted through this section, researchers have very little control over the ways in which the research unfolds as well as over how the terms of access evolve over time. This emphasizes the serendipity of field access (Barley 1990) and calls for a greater focus on the micro-politics of negotiation that can only be fully understood once immersed in the field. This reinforces the idea that access is more

appropriately understood as a performance requiring an on-going engagement with many different intermediaries and mediators. Furthermore, a minor politics of access entails shifting away the focus from the researcher towards to a greater appreciation of the many forms of agency involved in the constant shaping of field access (Cunliffe and Alcadipani 2016). A final consideration might relate to how such an engagement with field research might be translated in our writing practices. The issue of how to write differently has recurrently been raised in the organization and management literature (Grey and Sinclair 2006; Fotaki et al. 2014; Phillips et al. 2014) and the concept of minor literature might offer new possibilities in the writing of organizational ethnographies.

## **6. Conclusion: Towards a minor politics of access**

While it may be argued that Deleuze and Guattari's work on Kafka solely focuses on the literary dimension of Kafka's work and that this conceptual device might only be deployed in the context of literary analysis, this paper agrees with Massumi (2002, 17) when he argues that 'the first rule of thumb if you want to invent or reinvent concepts is simple: don't apply them'. As such, this paper does not attempt to 'translate' the concept of minor literature but rather to explore the insight that can be gained through an engagement with this concept in the context of field access in organizational ethnography. Three main characteristics define a minor literature: a strong degree of deterritorialization, a political dimension, and a collective mode of enunciation (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). By examining closely these three characteristics with regards to the ethnographic case of field access, this paper attempts to sketch a minor politics of access.

With regards to the scientists, the 'major' codes associated with the legal dimension of the fieldwork (the various legal forms to fill, importation and exportation permits to

obtain, close collaboration with the national herbarium, etc.) became challenged once in the field as the scientists needed to engage with other practices, thus destabilizing archetypical images associated with the formalism of scientific practices and fieldwork. In a sense, the codes underlying the space of legislation (enacted as pivotal in scientific research) have become undone through various processes of deterritorialization. Concomitant to this process of deterritorialization are various forms of reterritorialization through which new codes, practices and images assemble and come to the fore. Within the context of the scientific expedition, this became manifested through the ways in which the scientists engaged with the practice of ‘sevusevu offering’ and in the spirituality associated with rituals underlying successful access to the field (e.g. bartering with the spirits of the forest) while also abiding by the legal procedures framing field research. Through the processes of reterritorialization, new combinations of relation, forms of connectivity and assemblages emerged (Patton 2010). In that sense, there is an undoing of what is depicted as the vehicular mode of action (in the image of the legal space or the formal authorisation to enter an organization) through which new possibilities emerge and new territories unfold.

This is not to bluntly oppose a major form of field access (e.g. access negotiated formally with ‘people in charge’) to a minor form of field access (e.g. localized practices), as upon considering the major and the minor as ‘a susceptible weave of lines working at different registers’ (Gerlach 2015, 275), the concern of a minor politics of access is to find ways of combining both dimensions through an unsettling of the established codes and the making of new forms of relationality. This positioning reveals the poignancy of the political dimension of such endeavour, as the core concern revolves around finding ways of conducting research ‘properly’ (or ethically) through an engagement with various logics, directions and commitments. This is about engaging with certain lines of empirical research that reflect wider political and ethical concerns; ‘ethical actions and blueprint to actions are

always contextual, because they are understood as material and immaterial practices arising from the performed field rather than deriving from a universalising norm' (Lancione 2017, 575).

These lines are visible when considering the fact that the engagement with the local practices and forms of relationality does not mean anything within the space of biosecurity. In that sense, a minor politics of access is concerned with the problematic repetition of certain geopolitical relations in the aforementioned case and with questions of power in more general terms and as such, strives to craft a form of field engagement that is immanent to the challenges at stake. Finally, within the context of a minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari (1986) argue that one needs to write for a people yet-to-come and this is where the collective dimension of the mode of enunciation comes into the picture. As highlighted through the empirical account, a becoming minor of major practices involves a different way of engaging with and representing access to the field, not just a 'personal way' of conducting research but rather an engagement with ethical questions that take prevalence over personal interests and potentially bear a wider resonance regarding our disposition as researchers conducting organizational ethnography. As noted by Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016, 538), 'gaining and maintaining access entails recognizing its complex, political, ethical, and relational nature'.

This way of positioning ourselves, as organization and management researchers, could form the basis of a 'minor politics of access' whereby we would seek to move away from dominant (dogmatic) images of the field in order to engage with an alternative range of imageries, practices and codes. A minor politics of access strives to deterritorialize major forms of access and to find these lines of flight through which new territories, relations, and engagements may be summoned in order to engage differently with the ethics and politics of field access. This corresponds to a process of becoming vernacular through a vehicular mode of expression, conduct or access. In that sense, by bypassing the opposition between major

tendencies (legislation) and minor tendencies (local practices), as researchers we seek to materialize ways in which both forces and tendencies can assemble in order to open up new lines of flight and put forward alternative ways of conceptualising and engaging with matters of access and field research. A minor politics of access does not revolve around linear and ordered systems but consists in the engagement with the ways in which different forms of access and field research become ‘mashed up’ together in the production of new realities, territories and encounters. Ultimately, the ethnographer is never fixed in any pigmentary state, ready to become deterritorialized and always on the lookout for new territories, codes, and imaginaries to be conjured up through various processes of reterritorialization.

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