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### Article

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# SPORT AND SHORT-TERM ETHNOGRAPHY

Exploring sport and intergroup relations in Fiji:  
Guidance for researchers undertaking short-term ethnography

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### Abstract

There is a key tension associated with ethnographic explorations into the lives of people in the Global South – ‘outsider’ researchers from the Global North who lack experience of the environments they are seeking to understand. A considered response, therefore, is for scholars to seek physical immersion in a field – to live among those they are trying to understand. Such ethnographic inquiries are optimal when researchers have the capacity to engage over long periods of time. However, in some circumstances, this may not be feasible. Thus, questions arise about the veracity of field work investigations that are not only temporally brief but undertaken by scholars who lack local experience. This paper reflects on the experiences of a researcher who was faced with those challenges. It provides guidance as to how scholars might prepare for short-term ethnography (STE) in field work, along with the limitations and constraints of such an approach. The research centered on a sport for development and peace study into intergroup relations and ethnic separatism in Fijian sport.

*Keywords:* ethnography, sport for development and peace, postcolonialism, qualitative research, field work.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper wrangles with the often-neglected question of the time-sensitive nature of qualitative field work, along with questions about the nature and depth of immersion relative to the purpose and objectives of a research project. That is especially important in a context where the field researcher is unfamiliar with local terrain and culture. The paper will assert, therefore, that investigators ought to be more explicit (and indeed honest) about the temporal and positional boundaries, constraints and limitations around which they undertake qualitative field work (Lubert, 2018).

The study presented here evaluates challenges associated with planning for, and engaging in, ethnographic research – observational, participatory and conversational – in a socio-cultural environment (Fiji) that I (the principal author) had yet to experience first-hand. Adding currency to those reflections was the time-limited nature of that exploratory field work – a total of just under 12 weeks on the ground.

By way of background, I have extensive field experience as a volunteer in different sport for development and peace (SDP) contexts that necessarily require cross-cultural sensibilities. However, in the case of Fiji I had entered unfamiliar territory by exploring what was for me a new socio-cultural milieu. There was, none the less, a very specific research aim – to explore intergroup relations between Indigenous (iTaukei) and Indo-Fijian men, as developed and expressed in the sports of rugby and soccer. In that respect, this was a very targeted (and thus deliberately limited) SDP research project: the purpose was to investigate why men in those ethnocultural groups have gravitated towards rugby and soccer respectively, and what that divergence reveals about Fijian intergroup relations and sports culture.

My journey was intended to be a departure from conventional approaches to SDP scholarship. Typically, researchers address what they perceive to be a local deficit (i.e. lack of playing fields, no opportunities for women) or the violent breakdown of social relations

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(i.e. military conflict) (Schnitzer, Stephenson, Zanotti & Stivachtis, 2013; Sanders, 2016; Welty Peachey, Musser, Shin & Cohen, 2018). I wanted to investigate a subtler SDP scenario *sans* major deprivation or overt expressions of militarism: I was driven to explore how and why intergroup relations play out in a context where sport and society challenges do not stem from impoverishment or aggressive conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary Fiji proved to be an ideal site for such an inquiry: by 2014, democratic elections had conferred legitimacy on the government (a departure from earlier coups). Indeed, according to [globaleconomy.com](http://globaleconomy.com), as late as 2017 Fiji was ranked 49 of 195 nations in the Political Stability Index.<sup>2</sup> I was also drawn to Fiji because of its intriguing ethnocultural dynamic: the two main ethnic groups were embedded very differently in two major sports, rugby and soccer, while in wider society there were also bilateral contrasts, with indigenous Fijians holding power in government and the military, while Indo-Fijians assert some dominance in business (Chand, 2015; Teaiwa & Nicole, 2017). From a postcolonial perspective this seemed fascinating, for contemporary Fiji is controlled (in different ways) by two groups of color who, historically, were subjugated by white rulers, yet their inter-relationships (which I sought to explore in two sports) suggested distance and rivalry more so than commonality and solidarity (Larson, 2013; Ramesh, 2017).

In pursuing this line of inquiry, I obviously needed to come to terms with the norms, attitudes and beliefs that typify the iTaukei and Indo-Fijian communities, though especially their sport customs and attitudes related to leisure time, cultural practice and masculinity. This meant learning about what is socio-culturally ‘valuable’ in Fiji, both within and across the two ethnic groups at the heart of the study (Vaiolleti, 2006; Prasad, 2009, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the forthcoming tome by Whitley, Massey, Darnell and Smith, tellingly entitled *Sport in Under-resourced, Underdeveloped, and Conflict Regions* (2019). While this book is undoubtedly welcome, the ongoing emphasis on deprivation and divided societies unwittingly frames SDP research contexts as deficient or dysfunctional.

<sup>2</sup> As a comparative illustration, near neighbour Australia came in at number 44. [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/wb\\_political\\_stability/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/wb_political_stability/).

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An ethnographic methodology was core to the study, this involving a combination of dialogue (conversations and interviews), witness (observing local customs and behaviours) and participating, as appropriate, in cultural practices. The venture would be, as Hammersley (2016, p.2) has put it, an exploration in “sense making” about surroundings. While I had read widely about Fiji’s history, politics, sport and cultural scene, and discussed these complexities with academics based in Fiji and other field researchers with experience of the region, I had yet to immerse myself physically in the country. Consistent with Hammersley’s guidance about ethnographic field work (2016, p. 2), my study aimed to deal with people in “everyday contexts”; information would be gathered from “a range of sources” (observation and conversation); the data would be in “raw form” (consistent with exploratory research); the focus would be on a “single setting or group of people” (Fiji and its two main communities); and “locally provided actions and meanings” (as embodied in leisure activities and group identities). With these considerations in mind I needed to ask two fundamental questions: could I do justice to my goal of authentic, locally-centred research in a place I had never actually been? And could I do so effectively in the limited time I would be able to spend in Fiji?

In probing those questions, this paper has been structured the following way. Section Two discusses qualitative field research, about which I position myself as an advocate and exponent of a postcolonial framework. Section Three describes my desire to learn by doing, despite my status as a novice about Fijian sport and society and my position as an outsider. The next three sections evaluate the research journey. Section Four consider the project’s significant temporal constraints and my adoption, in response, of an incipient method known as Short-Term Ethnography (STE), the application of which is the *raison d’être* for this paper. Sections Five and Six contemplate the ethnographic process, namely protocols for cross-cultural dialogue and bearing witness. Section Seven addresses the research context:

even though this paper is about method and process rather than study findings, the reader needs to hear about the socio-cultural field in which I was located. What follows in Sections Eight through to Eleven is the most extensive part of the paper: it reflects on how I planned for field work in Fiji, the culturally nuanced nature of time, and my quest for research authenticity. Finally, a summary of the paper's contribution and recommendations as they pertain to STE and SDP research are presented.

### **2. Postcolonial field work**

There is a long tradition of anthropological, ethnographic, demographic and similar kinds of human-centred research in which Western scholars from the Global North seek to investigate the lives of people in the Global South with the aim of socially positive, transformational change. A self-absorbed, idealistic, and benevolent paternalism has typified many such inquiries. Well-meaning researchers, motivated by a concern to improve the human condition among those less privileged than themselves, have explored issues of disadvantage or conflict in developing regions (Baulch, 2011; Sandbrook, 1982; Scheyvens, 2014).

What is at serious risk, though, is a mismatch between the assumptions of field researchers and the expectations of those they seek to engage with. Ethnography, for example, has long been branded as an accomplice to colonialism (Clifford, 1983). By contrast, postcolonial ethnography seeks to reposition the researcher as a receptacle rather than as an inquisitor (Faier & Rofel, 2014). It is vital, therefore, that field researchers come to terms with the power and politics of their position as investigators, as well as the privilege of building relationships with locals. As Wolfram (2013, p. 209) has asserted, "the ethnographer, through engagement in fieldwork, is implicated and interwoven into a matrix from which they cannot be extracted."

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Given that enmeshing, Shome and Hegde (2002, p. 258) remind us that reflexivity is core, which in both conceptual and operational senses ought to mean the researcher's immersion in a postcolonial framework. As they put it, "postcolonial scholarship is not driven by any particular method" but rather shaped by its appropriateness to purpose and context, as well as its appreciation of history and its consequences. This means that "diverse methodological perspectives from ethnography to textual criticism can fall under its rubric" Shome and Hegde (2002, p.258).

Pointing to a germinal example of postcolonial feminist ethnography, Shome and Hedge (2002) observe that the feminist field researcher, Visweswaran (1994), began by conducting 'interviews' with South Indian laboring women but ended up learning to listen rather than just asking questions. One emergent benefit for Visweswaran was that she became a trusted confidante, as some of the women ventured to share their secrets with her in private. Visweswaran had thus been transformed into a very privileged outsider – something that was much less likely should she have inflexibly stuck with conventional interviews and top-down dialogue.

In the field of SDP research there have been clarion calls for researchers to embrace a postcolonial sensibility. Leading the way, Darnell (2012) and Hayhurst (2015) have warned that unless scholars commit to understanding their own power and position in the field, as well as the historical and political nuances of the research context upon which they are focused, they risk – even if unwittingly – the promulgation of a neocolonial mindset, both in terms of investigation and interpretation. By contrast, a postcolonial lens requires a process of knowledge co-creation between participant and researcher. According to Darnell et al (2018, p. 144), a reflexive postcolonial ethos is now seen as "the next logical step within the SDP research paradigm".

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In the present study, a postcolonial lens demanded the primacy of local agency, with myself as field work researcher a receptacle for stories, ideas, and perspectives. I also observed (as appropriate to questions of privacy and decorum) local behaviours and inter-relationships as they related to rugby, soccer and two key ethnic groups. Such postcolonial field work is, therefore, fundamentally a dialogue *by* and *with* locals: people are not mere research ‘subjects’, but rather agents that drive an outsider’s learning process. Rather than objects of the Western gaze (Mwaanga & Adeosun, 2015), locals must be integral to knowledge production – should they in fact wish to engage in dialogue.

Smith’s (1999) dictum about the researcher-as-decolonizer is an important reaction to what she has described as “research through imperial eyes” (p. 44). This is a longstanding and important message for contemporary field researchers. Smith’s prime interest relates to questions of power, positionality and purpose in research involving Indigenous peoples. A postcolonial praxis ought to mean that scholars are aware of sensitivities about how Indigenous groups value their culture and sense of being, despite the historical affliction of colonialism (McSweeney, 2017). In practice, though, there is likely to be significant variations and challenges when undertaking research involving Indigenous communities. It is therefore worth contemplating contrasting contexts. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia are suffering extreme impoverishment and subjugation (Elder, 2003); by contrast, the iTaukei dominate the Fijian military and lead the country’s government (Ratuva & Lawson, 2016). In other words, research with one Indigenous group involves coming to terms with culture *and* profound subjugation and distress, while research with another Indigenous group involves coming to terms with culture and an *absence* of profound subjugation and distress. In both cases the position of the researcher-as-outsider is critical, but the contexts are poles apart.

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McSweeney has provided a detailed and thoughtful articulation of the field work process: in reflecting on his ethnographic research (over four months) in Swaziland, McSweeney explained that his postcolonial praxis did not remove his Western gaze (owing to the reality of his identity), but he reflexively sought to “question and make explicit” the dynamics of position and interaction while in the field (McSweeney, 2018, p. 29). McSweeney’s research is characterised by a profound sensitivity to the nuances of outsider-insider positions in a community he did not belong in, but was nonetheless made a guest. Just as significantly, his journey would have been impossible without a deep exploration and appreciation, as a non-expert, of the social, cultural, political, and historical context of Swaziland (McSweeney, 2018).

People typically have voice in their own communities. However, some voices are either unheard or rarely heard beyond that context. A purpose of my Fijian intergroup relations study, therefore, was to invite people, should they be interested, to offer their voices to an outsider. From a postcolonial perspective, scholars seek to learn *from* locals. After all, the ‘research environment’ has already been lived by those within it, so the role of scholars is to mediate local perceptions, thereby enabling stories to be facilitated and, should locals approve, that knowledge disseminated (Burnett, 2015; England, 1994; Spaaij, 2012). In these respects, Ashby’s (2011, p. 2) advice is apt: “voice is the right and the ability to make oneself heard and to have one’s experiences and perspectives available to others; to participate in the construction of the self and to decide how to represent that self to others”.

I undertook the research with the hope that Fijians had some interest in telling their stories, even if it was to an outsider. This meant, of course, establishing trust to enable conversations to flow. Underpinning all this, therefore, is the question of local appetite: if people have no interest in telling their stories, especially to an outsider, then the quest to

undertake such research falls at the first hurdle (Bishop, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999).

### **3. Learning by doing**

I am an early-thirties, white-skinned male of European ancestry. I grew up in the UK, completed my doctoral studies in Australia, and now reside again in the UK. I therefore come from a Western cultural paradigm and have enjoyed the privilege and benefits of tertiary-level educational opportunities in two high-income countries. Beyond that, I have first-hand experience as a volunteer in numerous SDP projects in countries as diverse as Israel, Palestine, South Africa, Northern Ireland and The Gambia, so have affinity – in a practical sense – with SDP initiatives in the Global South and with environments featuring inter-ethnic differences. The basis for and effectiveness of all the programs I was involved with stemmed from mutually respectful relationships with locals. It would be presumptuous, fatuous, and indeed counter-productive for such SDP initiatives to adopt a neo-colonial position as the ‘arbiter’ of what locals ‘should’ be doing (see the critiques by Coalter, 2010 and Darnell, 2012).

When moving from an SDP program environment into academia I wanted to undertake research that was independent of – even removed from – institutionalised for-development initiatives. Rather than simply critiquing an existing SDP project, I was interested in conceiving something novel. By chance I became aware of SDP initiatives in the Pacific Island regions of Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia – about which I developed a keen interest. But there was an uncomfortable truth: I had no prior knowledge of direct exposure to Pacific communities. When contemplating field work in that region I therefore faced significant challenges: could I prepare myself to become sufficiently knowledgeable of the research context, and how might I immerse myself credibly – as an outsider of European ancestry – into what was an intriguing but unfamiliar socio-cultural environment?

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My quest for authenticity and legitimacy was all the more important given the history of some SDP initiatives. In recent years, critics have rightly sounded claxons against ‘top-down’, neo-colonial paradigms of sport-as-aid (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Darnell, 2014; Reis, Vieira, & de Sousa-Mast, 2015), with development agents helicoptering in to wave the flag of Western progress and, by assuming a deficit perspective among locals, ‘make a difference’ to the ‘plight’ of those less fortunate.

This is not to say that the Global South is free of social justice and under-development challenges: rather, the point here is that Western researchers have sometimes tended to (a) gloss over problems caused by the legacy of colonialism, and/or (b) proffer ‘solutions’ underpinned by neo-colonial attitudes (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013). As Collison & Marchesseault (2016, p. 2) have deftly put it, much SDP research is too often “mute to deeper understandings of participants”, with a tendency to “disregard or temper the voices of those truly worth listening to: the participants themselves”.

What is clear from the paper thus far is that significant contemplation is required before an outsider even begins to prepare for field work. Indeed, if the goal is to create trust between locals and an outsider-researcher, thoughtful planning is needed (Frank, 2005; Uddin, 2011). Later in the paper, I return to an explanation about how I navigated that journey. Before doing so, though, I need to discuss the physical immersion of field work scholars in a qualitative research environment, as well as the related issue of the time that investigators are positioned locally.

### **4. Immersion and temporality**

To explore, by way of direct experience, a diversity of meanings and relationships in human societies, the physical immersion of scholars in research environments is key. This typically involves field work using ethnographic methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Geertz, 1994). A classical approach posits the need for researchers to be immersed in a

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society and culture for many months or even years, residing among locals for the duration (Crabtree, 2006; Lassiter, 2005). Such longevity in a field is undoubtedly optimal. Kemper (2002) has compiled a collection of studies from scholars interested in what they specifically label long-term ethnography. However, it may not be logistically feasible for scholars to spend substantial amounts of time in a host society. Researchers, whether representing universities or grant providers, may be constrained by factors such as funding for travel and sustenance during field work, as well as logistical limits in terms of the time that an investigator is approved to be in a field environment (i.e. ethics submission to a university). In short, in some cases it is simply not feasible for ethnographic researchers to be immersed for many months or even years, in the idyllic tradition of Malinowski (1978). The question then becomes how ethnographic scholars optimise the quality of their field study, notwithstanding temporal limits they may have little or no control over.

Marcus (2007) has pondered the issue of time committed to ethnographic field work. He argues that the appearance of a study – if reduced merely to length of immersion – is not necessarily a guide to its acuity. For Marcus, what is most important is the depth of inquiry and findings gleaned, with temporal constraints delimiting scope of focus but not intensity. On the question of temporality in ethnographic fieldwork Wolcott (2005, p.141) wrote: “The best answers are not in response to “how long” measured in time, but to questions of purpose.” Roper and Shapira (2000, pp.13-14) make a similar point: they assert that the ‘right’ amount of time in the field is a question related to purpose, goals and practicalities, and the achievement of a research aim is always fundamental to that sense of balance. They acknowledge “reports of fieldwork that lasted years” but also “fieldwork that lasted only a few months or weeks”. The over-riding concern, they insist, is what has been learned: when an ethnographer recognizes that their “research question has been answered” and they are “getting no new information”, that data sufficiency enables the investigator to leave the field.

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In this same tradition, Pink and Morgan (2013, p. 2), who coined the term short-term ethnography (STE), argue that:

Ethnography is not always characterized through long-term engagement with other people's lives. Rather it involves ... observational methods to ... delve into questions that will reveal what matters to those people in the context of what the researcher is seeking to find out.

From that perspective, STE fieldwork is not merely temporally pragmatic, it can – and indeed must be – sufficient in detail in order to be fit for purpose.

Pink and Morgan (2013, p. 1) acknowledge that “short-term ethnography itself is not a new phenomenon”, for there have been previous advocates of this type of inquiry. Most notably, Knoblauch (2005, p. 1) has used the label “focused ethnography” to describe “time intensity” in immersive research, with the researcher both positioned and engaged in observations that are either ephemeral or finite. In that tradition, Wall (2014, p. 4), in reviewing the nomenclature around focused ethnography, notes that it may also be referred to as “mini-ethnographies, micro-ethnographies, [and] rapid ethnographic appraisals”.

Ranabahu (2017, p. 254) concedes that “The main criticism against [such] rapid data collection procedures in ethnography is that not enough time is spent in the field to collect quality in-depth data”. However, like Wall, he practices a form of STE, which he calls rapid ethnography, which at its heart seeks “effectively to collect rich data in a short period of time without compromising ethnographic principles”. One of Ranabahu's key recommendations, which I adopted prior to his paper being published, is the importance of prior immersion and pre-communication before the field work began. I return later to an explanation about how I navigated these issues. Before that, there is a need to discuss the field work methods relied upon: dialogue (conversation and listening), followed by witness (observation and participation).

### 5. Dialogue

I was aware that under an SDP framework many researchers have sought to understand local perspectives solely through the medium of semi-structured interviews (Dyck, 2011; Njelesani, 2011; Šafaříková, 2012). There can, no doubt, be benefits to interviews as a form of dynamic dialogue, with participants encouraged to voice robust opinions (under the protection of anonymity and confidentiality). For example, Lindsey and Banda (2011) interviewed stakeholders in local sports NGOs in Zambia: their aim was to explore the form and nature of partnerships that respondent groups had with international organisations. This de-identified testimony approach was, according to those with whom they spoke, an acceptable way to convey how they felt about such relationships. There are, indeed, numerous SDP studies where researchers, acting on behalf of respondents, have made recommendations about stakeholder relations and program delivery in sport (see: Nabobo-Baba, 2006; Otsuka, 2005). In cases like these, the researchers used loosely-structured interview-like conversations, this enabled them to learn about respondents' desire for transformational change. The investigators were therefore able to provide locals with a stage upon which to voice their very own views and recommendations.

Briggs (1986), meanwhile, rightly cautions that 'traditional' modes of interviewing via question and answer format are not designed to pinpoint and make sense of metacommunicative routines (such as speech nuances, meaning-making conventions and body language). However, while there is understandable reticence about interviews among many field researchers, some assert that, where culturally appropriate and relevant to purpose, this form of dialogue can be useful. Skinner's (2012) volume, *The Interview: An Ethnographic Approach*, is perhaps the best example of that position. As one of the contributors, Rapport (2012) avers, the *conversational* nature of that exchange remains critical. He insists that any so-called "interview" must be a dynamic and fluid "talking-

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partnership” (p. 53). The ethnographer Forsey (2010), meanwhile, is less interested in whether a conversation is labelled as interview or otherwise: for him the overarching requirement is “ethnography as participant listening” (p. 558). Conversational dialogue, with an emphasis on the researcher listening rather than interrupting by routinely asking probing questions, is therefore fundamental to the flow of ethnographic narratives.

Concurrently, it is vital for researchers to understand what is culturally appropriate by way of meeting, greeting and thanking those they engage with. There is also the question of communication style and the nuances of rhythm: who gets to speak and when. Some environments are formalised while others are more casual and fluid. Ethnographic researchers must, therefore, learn how to enter different types of spaces within a field and to conduct themselves appropriately (i.e. according to local expectations) given varied elements of culture, religion, gender, language and so on (Forsey, 2010; Yagi & Kleinberg, 2011; Wolfframm, 2013).

In pursuing field work, language and communication nonetheless bring numerous challenges – some of which might be anticipated while others are emergent. When Ponting and O’Brien (2015) chatted with locals about the development of surfing in Papua New Guinea, they struggled with oral communication given language differences. There can also be misunderstandings in respect of cultural expectations. Schulenkorf (2010), when conducting SDP research in Sri Lanka, soon realised that locals nodded their head or verbally agreed with almost anything he said: they were being polite in assuming that this is what the researcher wanted to hear. There was also the constraint that, in a war-torn country like Sri Lanka, opinions were laced with the potential for recrimination (De Mel, 2007). In a more recent study, Bruening et al. (2015, p. 83) admitted that they were unsure, from conversations alone, whether respondents were saying what they believed the researchers “wanted to hear”. As discussed later in the paper, a strategy I employed to verify what locals intended when

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they spoke to me was to check with them on return to Australia, where they could converse privately via email or use online chat apps.

### **6. Witness**

In terms of SDP research, ethnographic observation has certainly been a feature of field work. For example, Okada and Young (2011), in their study of Cambodian football, were able to garner conversational testimony that outlined welcome social developments with the advent of a new league. Beyond that, though, these researchers positioned themselves as witnesses of stakeholder conduct and organisational behaviour; this revealed systemic patriarchy that was not mentioned during interviews. In that regard, the researchers were able to explore lived experience beyond that revealed in documents or testimony, and thus to explore tensions and contradictions that were previously concealed (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010).

Spaaij (2013) produced a multi-site study of Somalian refugees in Australia. This project aimed to “capture the voices, experiences and meaning-making processes of the[se] people” (p. 4), and so a combination of methods – oral and visual – was deployed. Spaaij sought to engage with Somalis in order to understand their experiences as refugees and to produce findings with the aim of improving their involvement in sport (where that is sought). With anti-Somali discourses so prominent in Victorian society, Spaaij built a relationship of trust with elements of that community and, by doing so, endeavoured to advocate on their behalf by listening to them and observing challenges and opportunities they face. Spaaij had become an ethnographer-advocate, even though – in this case – he did not live with the Somali community in a traditional field work sense.

Hayhurst (2015) undertook a multi-sited ethnographic study in Uganda and Western Europe, thereby combining both the Global South and the Global North in a common project. In doing so, Hayhurst admitted to grappling with the “perils of cross cultural research” (2015,

p. 8); this was made even more complex by a need to immerse herself in the field as an observer. In keeping with ethnographic sensibilities, she not only spoke with locals, but, where feasible and appropriate, witnessed their inter-relationships. Hayhurst adopted a postcolonial global feminist lens, which she describes as “beginning from the standpoint of the participant (the local) when investigating the ‘social lifework’ of people who are entangled in its discursive practices” (2015, p.428). Meanwhile, Marchesseault (2016) has discussed the quest for authentic immersion in a field: for him, participant observation was key. In order to learn about Rwandan cycling communities, he employed a “diagnostic ethnography” (p. 16) seeking “thick exploration” (p. 18). In joining the cyclists on his own bike, Marchesseault was able to partake of the participants’ everyday lifeworld, this helping him develop “a physical and literal understanding of doing research ‘with’ them, instead of ‘on’ them” (p. 46).

There are, of course, risks and anomalies when undertaking ethnographic observation, whether as an external witness or co-participant. This is particularly so for researchers entering cultural, political and natural environments about which they lack experience. As Scheyvens (2014) has noted, novices are prone to misunderstand context-rich socio-cultural norms and behaviours to which they are unaccustomed. However, assuming that ethnographers are appropriately acculturated – especially by engaging with a variety of groups relevant to or in the research environment – observation can be insightful. As will be explained later in the paper, I made field observations that, while sometimes unexpected, proved very valuable.

### **7. Context**

Although I had volunteered for several years in SDP contexts in the Middle East and Africa, I was keen to learn more about other environments in which that type of initiative either has or might be pursued. A new stimulus came from my participation in the 2012

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*Sport, Race and Ethnicity Conference* at the University of Ulster, Belfast. The chance viewing of a presentation by Kanemasu & Molnar (2013a) – researchers on sport, identity and identity in Fiji – provided me with the impetus to explore sport and ethno-cultural divides in that island nation (see also: Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013b; Molnar & Kanemasu 2014). I then read widely to learn about a complex Fijian history shaped by British colonisation and ethnic divisions, the most significant of which involve Indigenous Fijians and Fijians of Indian ancestry (Fraenkel, 2015; Lal, 2012; Robertson, 2012). I also noted the pivotal role of sport in both Fiji's colonial and postcolonial eras. I learned that ethno-cultural separatism is portrayed in business and government, as well as in the cultural domain, where an obvious example is the sports field, exemplified in the Indo-Fijian-controlled world of soccer and the iTaukei-dominated rugby union. These spheres were said to provide differing – even competing – versions of Fijian identity, with the cultural and political power of the iTaukei establishing ascendancy over the less numerous, albeit economically more prosperous, Indo-Fijian population (Kanemasu & Molnar, 2013b; Prasad, 2013).

I read germinal works like that of Teaiwa (2005), Fraenkel, Firth and Lal (2009) and Lal (2012), each of which highlighted the politics of identity around Indigenous and Indian Fijians, as well as their diverse places in various parts of society – business, government and culture. Among all this, sport has been a part of government policy and a key form of cultural expression. I wondered about the roles of rugby and soccer in terms of affirming ethnic separatism, and whether there was any evidence of inclusive participation outside the framing of rugby = Indigenous and soccer = Indian. I therefore contacted key sport and society researchers in Fiji, notably Kanemasu and Prasad at the University of the South Pacific. Kanemasu, of Japanese ancestry and a resident of Fiji +10 years, has particular expertise in rugby and society in Fiji, while Prasad, of Indo-Fijian ancestry, has particular expertise in soccer and society in Fiji. Taken together, they provided me with insights from both

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perspectives: they also agreed that my research, which took account of both Indigenous and Indian perspectives, would be original and valuable. The broader research project, then, sought to explore iTaukei and Indo-Fijian identities and intergroup relations as expressed in the country's two biggest sports.

### **8. Research strategy**

Research for this project was conducted over three and a half years, with a substantial commitment in the first half of that period to deep engagement with relevant scholarly literature and exploration of appropriate theories and methods. I adopted what Charmaz (2005, p. 508) has described as a “processual relationship”: from that perspective, theory develops as a consequence of the researcher's experience, and thus by their immersion in a field of inquiry (be that archival, testimonial or observational). Ethnographic method, combining two forms of experience, would be key: those underpinned by conversations with locals and those derived by bearing witness (either as observer or participant).

I began my quest for knowledge about Fiji by reading relevant scholarship and by engaging with Kanemasu and Prasad: this provided me with a foundational platform. There was so much to learn, yet as Fijian-based researchers and experts on sport and society, these academics were well placed to guide me. I also consulted regularly with the collaborators on this paper: taken together, they offered me field work guidance and experience of SDP projects in South Asia and the Pacific Islands; sport engagement research with Indigenous peoples and Pasifika communities; and knowledge of the integrative potential (and limits) of sport in divided societies\* (\*references to be added in the event of publication).

I now sought the permission of my university to travel to Fiji and conduct field work there. My initial expectation was a single journey to Fiji for up to six months, for which I would receive modest institutional funding and agreed absence from workplace requirements. However, I had long determined that a self-funded exploratory field trip prior to that would

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be methodologically crucial. This drew upon Wolcott's notion of "ethnographic reconnaissance" (2008, pp. 186-195), a journey that allows for exposure to an environment in advance of field work immersion. In the case of someone unfamiliar with a research context, such as myself, this presented a very important way of gaining a 'feel' for a new environment, and to think about what might make the subsequent ethnographic study effective.

As it transpired, this preliminary survey of the Fijian research context would be doubly significant. This is because it had become apparent that funding to support my research in Fiji would not last beyond three months. That rather dramatic realisation compelled me to question whether it was actually feasible for me to undertake meaningful field work in Fiji in half the time I had expected. This led me to contemplate more deeply the question of temporality in field work and its relationship to authentic and reflective research. I became aware that some scholars had adopted what has been described as short-term ethnography – which, as explained in Section 4, is characterised by time-limited research.

The ten-day reconnaissance journey in mid-2014 was therefore something of a litmus test for my plan to engage with STE. In that very brief period I exposed myself to Fijian culture, though with very specific targets – the clubs and organisations responsible for the playing of rugby and soccer. With the assistance of Kanemasu and Prasad, I was introduced to sport administration, coaching and player contacts I hoped to speak extensively with over the longer field trip to Fiji in early 2015. During the first period of exposure, I ate, talked, exercised and socialised with community groups involved in the organisation of rugby and soccer. These embryonic experiences (some as a participant, others as an observer) were routinely recorded in daily field notes. This reconnaissance of the field allowed me to establish initial rapport with key contacts, many of whom I was then able to connect with via email or social media upon return to Australia. This allowed me to build relationships with

locals via a different field – the Internet – and to plan to meet with them when I returned just over six months later. Thus, my dalliance with STE was turning into a working relationship.

### **9. Preparing for and experiencing cultures**

The reconnaissance journey provided an initial opportunity to meet with relevant sport administrators and journalists in Fiji, and to seek their advice about connecting with related parties, whether at elite or community levels of sport. That early learning process allowed for the development of rapport with key individuals, paving the way for scheduled conversations with sport leaders and policy makers across the two key ethnic groups I was focused on. I was therefore able to have preliminary, very informal discussions with officials, coaches and ex-players.

While the sampling of prospective contacts was an important strategy to generate focus and optimise time for the subsequent field trip, the most vital element of the reconnaissance journey was undoubtedly initial cultural exposure. In terms of indigenous Fijians, my principle interest was its rugby community, though that can hardly be explored independently of a broader awareness of iTaukei culture and communication norms. With that in mind, I had read of and been advised about Talanoa prior to landing in Fiji: my Australian-based Pasifika colleague, David Lakisa, provided welcome counsel – especially with respect to the nuances of symbolism, gesture, protocol and norms of hierarchy and respect.

I understood that Talanoa involves “personal encounter[s] where [Pasifika] people ‘story’ their issues, their realities and aspirations” (Vaiotei, 2006, p.21). I learned that Talanoa has distinctive characteristics: oral traditions and very open, emotional dialogue; it is also complex, varying across Pasifika cultures (Farrelly & Nabobo-Baba, 2014). As Halapua (2000, p. 1) has put it, the Talanoa approach is widely recognised as “engaging in dialogue with, or telling stories to each other absent [of] concealment of the inner feelings and

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experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds” ... [with] “*tala* meaning talking or telling stories and *noa* meaning ‘zero or without concealment’”.

In Fiji, I learned first-hand the ‘Talanoa way’ of meeting, greeting and sharing talk and time with iTaukei locals. A fluid, conversational dialogue – varying considerably in terms of scope and duration – was certainly the norm. I soon realised that discussions within a group were often preferred by those with whom I spoke – especially in advance of any subsequent one-on-one conversations. These groups were as fluid and open as the participants I spoke with wanted them to be: people were invited in on an impromptu basis or they left according to their own needs and whims.

For me, a particularly important entrée into Talanoa was through Kava circles. Fijian Kava circles vary, from the highly ceremonial and formal welcoming of guests, to the more impromptu gatherings of friends and family – with people relaxing, joking, sharing cigarettes and sweets, while listening to and sharing stories (Tomlinson, 2007). During my reconnaissance journey, I was invited into three Kava circles. In these cases, they were each informal sessions involving anywhere between four to fourteen Indigenous Fijian men and women sitting in a circle, each drinking Kava from a coconut shell. This gave me initial exposure into iTaukei cultural spaces and the Talanoa way of dialogue.

When compared to the iTaukei, Indo-Fijians are a much more varied community, with sub-cultural groupings of Punjabis, Gujarats, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. In Fiji they are generally grouped together through a presumed cultural similarity: the way they dress, their family units, the food they eat, the music they listen to and the festivals they run. They typically self-nominate as ‘Indo-Fijian’ or simply ‘Fijian’ (Prasad, 2009; Trnka, 2008). During the reconnaissance trip I connected with soccer teams that were coached and managed by Indo-Fijians, as is the norm. I was invited to share curry and rice with several of the Indo-Fijian players, whose interest – perhaps not surprisingly – was my knowledge (as being

someone from the UK) of the English Premier League. Sport, as I have found in many parts of the world, can be something of a connective language.

### **10. Understanding time, optimising time**

Globally, there are different understandings of time that alter according to culture and context. These varied conceptions are important in research design; for example, during my field research the concept of ‘Fiji time’ was regularly encountered (Aveni, 2000; Greenhouse, 1996). In essence, ‘Fiji time’ is associated with tasks and feelings that are more fluent and flexible than empirical understandings in ‘Western’ culture, which typically perceive time as digital, structured and linear (Fabian, 1983; Lewis & Edwards, 1993; Matti, 2017). In Global North research paradigms, the assumption is that data is gathered within a discrete and set period, typically within the temporal borders of interviews and/or observations (see Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In my case, ‘Fiji time’ meant that meeting with people was often unpredictable by way of schedule and unstructured by way of time, so it was necessary for me to be flexible and adapt. For example, I avoided asking probing questions of someone who had agreed to chat. I realised that sitting down, being relaxed and ‘shooting the breeze’ was the normal way of conversation in Fiji, and an unhurried dialogue was culturally appropriate. It became clear that the deepest and most profound conversations took place with people I had built a relationship with over time, whether through prior communication over the Internet, socialising activities, or by residing with them. In some cases, impromptu conversations would last hours as they meandered away from or towards the research project, or took place cumulatively over days, in small parts, as the relationship grew. For me, this immersion became both a socialising experience and an educational process.

That temporal variability underscored the importance of getting to know respondents beforehand: meeting each of them socially, whether for a meal, drink or a walk after football

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practice, provided a basis, subsequently, to hear frank discussions about complex matters. A postcolonial sensibility was vital: for example, iTaukei people invited me into their homes in rural villages, where local hierarchies, customs and norms meant that I needed to be attuned to cultural sensitivities about ‘who’ would be speaking on behalf of a group. One of my most vivid memories is being invited into the home of a village chief, where the purpose was to speak with his wife. After ceremonial greetings I was left alone to converse with her.

Together we talked for hours, while rolling long cigarettes from the local newspaper as the rain pitter-pattered outside. By contrast, other respondents seemed to epitomise individualism and liberalism and had less time to share. Most Indo-Fijian sport administrators, for example, were dressed in Western style, chose to meet in business settings or salubrious social environments. They were digitally engaged on smart phones and commercially attuned; I could have been speaking to them in New York or Tokyo.

Of course, I still had to negotiate the stark reality that I was only able to physically position myself in Fiji on two periods – 10 days and 10 weeks respectively. This meant the need for a strategy to make effective use of the limited time that I, as a researcher, had in the field. In this regard, the STE method – in order to be fit for purpose – required rich immersion in Fijian host communities, as well as a commitment to engage with a wide variety of groups and individuals relevant to the research. The aim was to maximise available time in an attempt to pursue a scholarly goal – a task that is undeniably easier in the case of temporally longer ethnographies (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

### **11. Walk the talk**

Ultimately, I spent a total of just under 12 weeks in Fiji and took part in 47 face-to-face discussions with relevant groups or individuals, some of which had been arranged in advance, while others emerged in a snowball manner with contacts recommending people with whom to speak. As an obvious ‘outsider’, I made no pretence about being anything other than a

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listener and learner, though I aimed to be someone who – as one Fijian described it – was prepared to “walk the talk”. In other words, I did not simply have a check list of individuals to converse with; I was prepared to chat with whomever wished to speak with me about rugby, soccer and group identities in Fiji. However, I was aware of different cultural nuances in terms of dialogue with iTaukei and Indo-Fijian communities: would I be able to actually walk all of this talk? I was also conscious that I would be speaking with people who had different representative roles – sport administrators, coaches, players, journalists, and so on – which meant that I needed to adopt to their individual sense of position and status.

As discussed earlier, I was fortunate to be welcomed into a range of Kava circles and other Talanoa gatherings consistent with iTaukei culture. Some of these social occasions took place over several hours. I was therefore immersed in an intimate and dynamic environment, where I listened intently. The people in those environments had already been made aware about the purpose of my journey to Fiji; without exception they were keen to tell their stories for that purpose. Indeed, I was overwhelmed by the generosity of these locals: they made me feel welcome, at ease in their cultural spaces, and were enthusiastic about allowing me to get a sense of their lives. This ranged from serious topics through to comedic recitals. These intimate experiences enabled me to engage in what the *locals* regarded as authentic dialogue; their warmth also made me feel privileged – especially as an outsider new to Fiji.

Impromptu invitations to Kava circles allowed me opportunities to speak intimately with, for example, a rugby team in Suva. After play, the team would sit in the shade near their home ground, drink Kava and chat the Talanoa way for anywhere between 3-8 hours. I never had to ask to join; as someone who initially watched the team and then been welcomed to train with them, it was offered as a natural extension of their openness to a (non-threatening) outsider. As a field researcher I witnessed what, for me, were unexpected group dynamics: senior members of the rugby team served Kava to more junior players, a reversal of the status

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order I had anticipated. I was also fascinated to see that the Indo-Fijians players in the team, though few in number, drank Kava side-by-side with their Indigenous counterparts, and were as deeply involved in the group's conversations.

These observations were out of step with academic research I had consulted before travelling to Fiji. For example, Singh (2009, p.112) has averred that "sharing of kava obviated ... marked status differentials and symbolized the drinkers' acceptance of the current political hierarchy." By contrast, and to use a pun, the Kava circles in the rugby club demonstrated a fluidity of intercultural engagement that was not obvious outside that intimate context. In these cases, the 'Talanoa way' had opened spaces for all invited into the Kava circle, with all accorded respect as equals based on a shared sense of humanity.

Lending support to that discovery, Aporosa (2015, p. 61) has since written that although "many iTaukei believe there is a moral obligation to consume this traditional drink as part of demonstrating 'Fijian-ness'", it is no longer a practice conducted *only* with other iTaukei. What is more, a fascination with kava has evolved across cultures. As Aporosa (2015, p.61) put it: "In taking up kava and selected practices that accompany it, Indo-Fijians have hybridised a quintessential expression of iTaukei identity with Indian culture".

While the 'Talanoa way' was crucial to me gleaning insights into Indigenous Fijian cultures, I was just as committed to exploring Indo-Fijian perspectives. By way of example, I had the opportunity, quite unexpectedly, to stay several nights with an Indo-Fijian family. Having met me briefly at a local soccer competition, the family asked where I was from and offered hospitality. Their generosity was matched by an enthusiasm to discuss sport and society in Fiji. For my hosts, the conversation was not as stylised as the Kava circles, nor as deeply emotional as Talanoa dialogue, but there was an earnest and forthright openness to what they wanted to say. Whereas the 'Talanoa way' emphasises personal experience and intimacy of dialogue, the more reserved 'conversation' with the Indo-Fijian family was 'third

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person' and 'big picture'. I listened intently to discussions about the country's colonial past, the challenges of ethno-cultural separatism, political instability as a reflection of that, and the normalisation of group differences and distance – Indigenous and Indian – through the sports of rugby and soccer respectively.

In addition to dialogue, my observations in the field prompted some unexpected outcomes. I had read that Fijian soccer is dominated by Indo-Fijian administrators and coaches, but I was surprised at the volume of iTaukei players in top-level local leagues. The stereotype in Fiji is that the iTaukei are physically suited to rugby but not adept at the deft movement required of soccer. Upon visiting Fiji's National Football Museum, I was struck by how many of the star players, past and present, were iTaukei rather than Indo-Fijian. When I attended soccer matches, the music and food were Indian, the crowd overwhelming Indo-Fijian, and the language on the field of play was Hindi (confirmed for me by a spectator). Thus, it dawned on me that the iTaukei players, in order to fit in with an Indo-Fijian dominated soccer culture, had learned sufficient amounts of Fiji's 'soccer' language in order to communicate with team mates. Much like the inclusive kava circles mentioned previously, the soccer pitch was a field of cross-cultural engagement in a country where ethnic division has been a cornerstone of intergroup relations.

Given my research focus on two major ethnic groups and two sports, those I spoke with needed to be representationally inclusive. I developed category levels that reflected the ethnicity, gender and 'position' of people I spoke with. In a structural sense, this involved segmenting respondents across a spectrum of three levels: 'micro' (community participants in sport), 'meso' (sport organisers and officials), and 'macro' (sport policy-makers and managers). As Table 1 indicates, there was hardly a 'perfect' balance across those categories. Moreover, I had very lengthy conversations with some of these participants and briefer dialogue with others. For several indigenous Fijians, a kava circle was the preferred Talanoa

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way of discussion, which meant them talking to me as part of a group. So, although from Table 1 there are only two iTaukei males indicated at the meso level, this hardly means they were under-represented in the study more generally. They simply preferred meeting with me in a kava circle alongside others rather than engaging in a one-on-one conversation.

Insert Table 1 here.

As previously indicated, when I joined a kava circle or shared a meal with an Indo-Fijian family I was overwhelmingly a listener. Individual conversations, though involving the same principle of deference on my part, became more interactive than I expected, for I was often prompted to engage in dialogue rather than sit quietly and merely listen. On reflection, this may have stemmed in part from my personal ‘style’. I tried to avoid a focus on the topic of my research on a first meeting; instead, the initial engagement was purposively social. My aim was to appreciate the person I was speaking with, and to build rapport – all prior to a more thematic dialogue in respect of sport and society. In this way, I learned a lot more about Fijian society, culture and people than I had ever hoped for. For me, ‘research’ conversations – in order to be valuable to participants and culturally respectful – should follow *after* socialisation.

Fiji is a multi-faceted society with a mix of traditional and modern (often Westernised) economic and cultural practices. From my reconnaissance journey, I realised that an adaptive approach to research – which was cognisant of these societal differences – would be beneficial to both myself and participants. Fiji is, after all, hardly ‘one’ field. In urban settings, such as Suva and Nadi, a meeting with a government official or a senior sport administrator was often a ‘white collar’ discussion. While they were pleased to meet with me outside of their office, and to socialise prior to a second meeting, they expected formal conversation. It was as though I needed to conduct a ‘Western-style’ dialogue with them as a measure of their own elevated social status.

Yet there was considerable variation. I realised that virtually ‘any’ mode of dialogue was possible. When I followed up a meeting with one senior sport official, I was invited to sit on the administrator’s office floor and drink kava. In rural areas the same invitation was often made, though in a village hut rather than an office. The conversations were almost always captivating, examples of which I will showcase in a further paper (under review) which evaluates more fully the role of sport and intergroup relations in Fiji.

### **12. Summary and recommendations**

This paper was prompted by a methodological and contextual quandary. As a scholar, I was excited by the prospect of conducting exploratory, qualitative research in a field about which I had experience – SDP, and with a method about which I had enthusiasm – ethnographic dialogue and observation. But I was faced with two problems.

First, although fascinated to investigate identity formation and intergroup relations between Indigenous and Indian Fijians, which I understood were embodied in the sports of rugby and soccer, I had no experience of these local cultures and had never set foot in Fiji. From that perspective I was unfit for purpose. Second, I eventually realised, after receiving university ethics approval and travel funding, that workplace commitments and a lack of resources would significantly limit the period I would be able to conduct field work in Fiji. From that perspective, there was a risk that I would not have enough time to engage sufficiently with locals, and that I would struggle to collect fulsome data.

This paper is, one sense therefore, a cautionary tale. I certainly feared arriving in Fiji being culturally ill-equipped for the research and being too time poor to produce anything of value. On the other hand, this paper is intended to speak to those who would – taking cognisance of those challenges – undertake exploratory, ethnographic inquiry in an environment outside their repertoire of experience. And within a timeframe that is less than traditional ethnographic endeavours. For me, learning from people outside one’s culture is

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like receiving a gift, but pursuing that benefaction requires careful planning and due diligence in terms of authentic local engagement.

I would like to conclude by providing four key recommendations. First, a researcher who wishes to conduct STE, assuming that this is their only choice logistically, needs to think strategically about their circumstances and the contextual challenges they face. As Wolcott (2008) has advised, ethnographic reconnaissance is likely to be very helpful. My ten days in Fiji prior to the field research provided invaluable exposure to Fijian society and culture, as well as an opportunity to set up meetings and contacts for the ten-week field trip six months after. A reconnaissance journey presented me, as an outsider, with tactile, observational and dialogical exposure: without that prior experience, my sense is that the three-month field trip would have been exceedingly difficult and, what is more, problematic in terms of local engagement.

When I arrived in Fiji in 2015, I had a long list of people who were expecting me to contact them. That targeted sample of interviewees allowed for a snowball effect, with a range of sport stakeholders – in organisations, in clubs, in the media – getting to know me socially, then chatting more earnestly. I had fewer contacts in rural villages – many of them did not have access to email – but as I was adept at both rugby and soccer, I ‘played around’ with locals until I was invited into training with clubs. In that sense, my experience in both sport and SDP volunteer work made me comfortable: someone without that background may have struggled to ‘connect’ as easily as I did.

Despite the short time frame, I was able to meet and engage with locals because of: extensive preparation, a reconnaissance trip, cross-cultural field experience in SDP, and familiarity with the ‘languages’ of rugby and soccer. Time, in the end, was not my enemy. I was able to achieve data sufficiency consistent with the aims of my research. Should that

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have not been the case I would be faced with an incomplete study and the prospect of trying to raise funds for a further trip to Fiji.

My second recommendation is that qualitative field work scholars – though especially those seeking to work with communities outside their experience – undertake a very rigorous process of preparation. This obviously involves *reading deeply* about a society and its cultural practices, *seeking advice* from academic colleagues (in my case supervisors in Australia with relevant experience), but especially by *engaging with* Fijian mentors. I was very fortunate to have substantial communication with local academics before ever setting foot in Fiji. Their expertise provided me with a sense of ‘big picture’ historical, sociological and political issues. They were also instrumental in preparing me for engagement with locals in Fijian rugby and soccer, as well as culturally appropriate ways in which to communicate with iTaukei and Indo-Fijian communities in those contexts. On reflection, I was fortunate that Fijians are accustomed to the presence of visitors to their land, most typically as tourists – the country’s biggest industry. In my case, locals made me – a ginger-haired, white-skinned Briton – feel very welcome; if anything, they were intrigued by my interest in them from a research perspective.

I am not claiming that the findings of my study are ‘complete’ or ‘final’. They were gleaned at a particular point in time and in delimited circumstances. With that in mind, I acknowledge the need for follow up research in Fiji, using Burawoy’s (2003, p. 655) ethnographic concept of “focused revisits”. This can have various purposes: one might be to pursue whether responses from previous dialogue and observations hold true; another might be to ascertain if anything has changed since the previous study; while yet another might be for the researcher to present – with appropriate de-identification – a sense of the overall findings for further feedback. All of this underscores a natural limitation of exploratory field work: it is a provisional snapshot in the absence of further evaluation.

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My third recommendation is for researchers to make use of a digital field to complement and leverage their (perhaps limited) time in a physical field. For me, a key strategy was to connect with Fijians before and after the reconnaissance journey and field trip: I made email contacts, Facebook friends, connections on WhatsApp, and similar. In other words, I made use of a digital field as a means of complimenting and leveraging my time in a physical field. This was not simply a before and after method: I had six months in between the physical journeys and was able to build relationships between the reconnaissance journey and the field trip. I met some people in the physical field as *respondents*; thereafter, when I was back in Australia, we continued conversations – they had become *(cor)respondents*.

This communication, while important in terms of establishing familiarity and trust, was also vital in the co-creation of knowledge that epitomizes a postcolonial sensibility. After compiling notes in my field notebook, I was later able to double-check – via the Internet – with many respondents about whether I had adequately captured their words, thoughts, and meanings. Yet there was more. These *(cor)respondents* engaged in back and forth dialogue with me in respect of the core themes stemming from the study and indeed the findings; this meant that locals co-created knowledge and recommendations (which I discuss in a further paper [details to be added]). That would have been impossible should I have adopted a conventional ethnographic approach in which the singular research environment is the physical field. I suggest it is time for ethnographic scholars to think more widely about the spatial-communicational dimensions of their research context.

My fourth recommendation, which applies equally to qualitative field work and SDP research in the Global South, is for scholars from the Global North to embed themselves in a postcolonial paradigm. This runs counter to a convention, first articulated in anthropology, of ethnography as an imperialist instrument, with researchers observing and recording from a perspective of authority and hierarchy (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2013, p. 80). In a

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postcolonial paradigm, the qualitative researcher is a facilitator rather than engineer of knowledge. Crucial to that approach is localisation: it is the stories and perspectives of those with lived experience of Fiji that are the essence of the research process. While an inclusive approach to the shared creation of knowledge may seem obvious, in practice sometimes it is not so (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011).

In summary, STE has very limited currency in field work scholarship. It has been ignored or overlooked by (a) qualitative researchers who insist that field work necessarily requires immersion over very long periods of time, or (b) in the SDP context, researchers who undertake short-term field work but ‘conveniently’ avoid reflecting on the temporal dimensions of their investigation. By contrast, this paper has wrangled with the often-neglected question of the time-sensitive nature of field work, along with questions about the nature and depth of immersion relative to the purpose and objectives of a research project. That is especially important, I have argued, where the field researcher is unfamiliar with local terrain and culture. I am asserting, therefore, that investigators ought to be more explicit (and indeed honest) about the temporal and positional boundaries, constraints and limitations within which they undertake field work.

In closing, this paper has advocated methods by which an outsider might plan for their immersion in, and experience of, an unfamiliar research field, given constraints of time. I have therefore provided insights into the opportunities and challenges of STE, means by which to develop cultural awareness both before and during field trips, and asserted that authentic engagement with locals be built upon a postcolonial, ethnographic sensibility. As an outsider, my role was to provide an overarching testimony that aimed to faithfully represent the perspectives of the numerous insiders – iTaukei or Indo-Fijian – I had the privilege of engaging with. An outsider attempting to tell an insider’s story is inherently limited; but it is a contribution that Fijians *said* they were happy for me to make. These

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people entrusted me with *their* stories. I hope that this paper serves as a guide to others who may be contemplating – perhaps out of necessity – a similar type of pragmatic-yet-authentic research journey.

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