Speak, Friend, and Enter? Fieldwork Access and Anthropological Knowledge Production on the Copperbelt

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The 'gate' has been a recurring metaphor for moments of access and denial in ethnographic fieldwork. However, access challenges during fieldwork represent not only 'gates' opening up or foreclosing scientific opportunity: rather, they tell us something about fieldwork as a collection of scientific practices, and, more precisely, how practices of power mark the process of anthropological knowledge production and anthropology as a social science. Based on fieldwork in Luanshya from 2015 to 2016, the study of metatexts from ethnographies on Zambia's copper mines, archival research and personal communication with Copperbelt scholars, I argue that ethnographic fieldwork has been able to challenge persisting power structures and social hierarchies in colonial and post-colonial Zambia. Similarly, as I will explain, ethnographic fieldwork made the anthropologist a social scientist who was being 'chased' by the practices of power that structured his or her prime work place – that is, the field. I set out as a historian of social anthropology, retracing how anthropologists on the Copperbelt gained or were denied access to their field sites from the studies of the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute (RLI), founded in 1937, to my own ethnographic research project up to 2017. Moments of fieldwork access and denial have occurred in this region in an especially clear form. I seek to contribute to the historiography of the Copperbelt as an anthropological field site and the understanding of anthropology as a social science. It is a science that is capable of illustrating power hierarchies through passing moments of gaining fieldwork access, continuous negotiations to maintain it, and prolonged efforts, ending in denial. These instances are not mere embellishments to be relegated to the introductions, appendices and postscripts of ethnographies or retrospective assessments of academic careers. Fieldwork access should be central within every reflection on the production of anthropological knowledge and the nature of anthropology as a social science.

Keywords: anthropology; fieldwork; access; Copperbelt; China–Africa; methodology

Introduction

On its journey to the East, the Fellowship of the Ring in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* ventured to traverse the Mines of Moria. Arriving at the western front of the Misty Mountains, the company searched for the mines' gate. It revealed itself in moonlight. Above

the gate appeared the words 'Speak, Friend, and Enter'. The Fellowship's wisest member tried different tongues in pronouncing a certain password. He recalled that gates sometimes only open at one particular moment. Time passed before he eventually remembered the riddle's solution: the word 'friend' itself. Into darkness the company continued its journey.[1]

The 'gate' has been a recurring metaphor for moments of access and denial in ethnographic fieldwork. This applies particularly to social research on the inner workings of power structures and, more literally, to ethnographic fieldwork in closed sites like mines. Moreover, in the process of gaining fieldwork access, the ethnographer is required to become recognised as a 'friend',[2] that is, a friend to research participants and more so to gatekeepers. However, challenges to access during fieldwork are more than simply 'gates' opening up or foreclosing scientific opportunity. Rather, they tell us something about fieldwork as a collection of scientific practices and, more precisely, how practices of power mark the process of anthropological knowledge production and anthropology as a social science. The circumstances of gaining fieldwork access offer 'the first glimpse of the political lay [*sic*] of the land that surreptitiously shapes the field site as well as the object of study'.[3]

Drawing on fieldwork in Luanshya in 2015–16, the study of metatexts from ethnographies on Zambia's copper mines, archival research and personal communication with Copperbelt scholars, I argue that ethnographic fieldwork has been able to challenge persisting power structures and social hierarchies in colonial and post-colonial Zambia. Similarly, ethnographic fieldwork made the anthropologist a social scientist who was being 'chased' by the practices of power structuring his or her prime work place: that is, the field. In using the word 'chase', I refer to the intrinsic haste of conducting fieldwork in adverse settings accessible only temporarily through 'gates', the necessary stamina of the social scientist during prolonged processes of bargaining for fieldwork access, and the resilience required to find suitable methodologies in the face of corporate protective mechanisms. I show how the question of fieldwork access not only shaped anthropologists' research but dominated their methodology. I thus bring fieldwork access to the centre of an epistemological enquiry. Fieldwork access and its denial represent a prism that refracts the process of anthropological knowledge production, revealing the underlying interactions of ethnographic and imperial practices, the local and the global, and the nature of anthropology as a social science.

In this article, I build on Nader's call for 'studying up', anthropological reflections on 'studying elites', geographers' experiences with 'gatekeepers', sociological perspectives on 'access as a relational process' and more recent initiatives that draw attention to the experience of access denial.[4] I set out as a historian of social anthropology, retracing how anthropologists on the Copperbelt gained or were denied access to their field sites from the

1 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London, Harper Collins, 1995), pp. 296–300.
2 Powdermaker described the position of an anthropologist in the field as that of a 'stranger' becoming a 'friend'. H. Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1966), pp. 285–95.
3 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China: Politics, Labor, and Foreign Investment in Africa* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 177.
4 L. Nader, 'Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained From Studying Up', in D. Hymes (ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 284–311; R. Hertz and J.B. Imber (eds), *Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods* (London, Sage, 1995); L.M. Campbell, N.J. Gray, Z.A. Meletis, J.G. Abbott and J.J. Silver, 'Gatekeepers and Keymasters: Dynamic Relationships of Access in Geographical Fieldwork', *Geographical Review*, 96, 1 (2006), pp. 97–121; M.S. Feldman, J. Bell and M.T. Berger, 'Introduction', in Feldman, Bell and Berger (eds), *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers* (Walnut Creek, AltaMira Press, 2003), pp. vii–xvi; A. Pollard, 'Field of Screams: Difficulty and Ethnographic Fieldwork', *Anthropology Matters*, 11, 2 (2009), available at https://www.anthropologymatters.com/index.php/anth_matters/article/view/10/10, retrieved 15 May 2019; E. Burns and C. Rocha, 'CFP: Edited Volume "Access Denied: When Anthropologists Cannot Enter the Field"', available at https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind1701&L=ANTHROPOLOGY-MATTERS&P=R203886, retrieved 15 May 2019.

studies of the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute (RLI), founded in 1937, to my own ethnographic research up to 2017.

Moments of fieldwork access and denial have occurred in an especially clear form on the Copperbelt. The RLI was co-financed by the copper mining industry. The industry used this position to intervene occasionally in ongoing fieldwork projects that it perceived not to be in its interests. Moreover, fieldwork in mining towns depended upon the industry granting fieldwork access, because, like the mining sites, mine townships for the local labour force were also corporate property.[5] Finally, labour relations in the copper industry have always been strained, complicating the work of a social scientist in the field, from the colour bar and the dual wage structure under colonialism to the employment of expatriates and local labour casualisation today.

Theoretically, I take up Schumaker's definition of 'the field' as 'a constructed and negotiated space for the production of knowledge rather than […] a mere source of data'.[6] This construction and negotiation derived from the 'imperial formation' that reigned in the field site with its 'broader set of practices structured in dominance'.[7] Scholars showed that this reign was particularly all-encompassing in the case of southern African mines when they likened the industry's company towns to Goffmanian 'total institutions'.[8] This abstraction from fieldwork and power hierarchies to their underlying practices enables me to unpack the reciprocal relationship between a social scientist and the particular context of her or his fieldwork, in which she or he produces knowledge. Anthropology as a social science and fieldwork as a scientific practice have changed over time but, as I show, connections between fieldwork access and its possible effects on the process of knowledge production have existed throughout the period under discussion.

I seek to contribute to the historiography of the Copperbelt as an anthropological field site and the understanding of anthropology as a social science. It is a science that is capable of illustrating power hierarchies through fleeting moments of gaining fieldwork access, continuous negotiations to maintain it, and prolonged efforts ending in denial. These instances are not mere embellishments to be relegated to the introductions, appendices and postscripts of ethnographies or retrospective assessments of academic careers. As the 'question of access' is 'the first issue that must be confronted in a research project'[9] and moments of denial are 'part of the very nature of fieldwork',[10] fieldwork access should be central within every reflection on the production of anthropological knowledge and the nature of anthropology as a social science.

Ethnographic Fieldwork, Local Politics and Anthropological Topics

Fieldwork access has been an issue in the anthropological research on Zambia's urban mining areas since the country was known as Northern Rhodesia under British colonialism (1924–64). Brown showed how the RLI's foundation, its research focus on social change in urban areas induced by corporate industrialisation and the ethnographic methods, with

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5 In this sense, I deal with what Ortner termed 'the possibility of participant observation' in her twofold typology of access challenges. I cover less the issue of access in regard to 'obtaining interviews'. S.B. Ortner, 'Access: Reflections on Studying Up in Hollywood', *Ethnography*, 11, 2 (2010), p. 213.

6 L. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, Networks, and the Making of Cultural Knowledge in Central Africa* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 227, 255.

7 A.L. Stoler and C. McGranahan, 'Introduction: Refiguring Imperial Terrains', in Stoler and McGranahan (eds), *Imperial Formations* (Santa Fe, School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), p. 8.

8 See, for example, P. Carstens, *In the Company of Diamonds: De Beers, Kleinzee, and the Control of a Town* (Athens, Ohio University Press, 2001), pp. 190–91.

9 G.A. Fine, 'Participant Observation', *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 17, (2015), p. 533.

10 Ortner, 'Access', p. 212.

participant observation at their core, resulted in ongoing negotiations over access to urban field sites and their African inhabitants.[11]

The copper industry had developed since the late 1920s and had given the Copperbelt its name. Its co-operation has been essential for social research ever since. Until the industry's reprivatisation in 1997, a mine's premises comprised not only the site of mineral extraction and production – that is, the shafts, smelters, plants and offices – but also the residential areas and social facilities where mine workers lived with their families. Every study of the newly developing mining towns at the time required the research permission of the relevant mine management. Moreover, the mining industry and social research on the Copperbelt were financially intertwined. The mines regularly contributed to the RLI's budget.[12] As such, the RLI was founded as a social research institute in a colonial setting with corporations represented on its board.

Hence E.A.G. Robinson's elaborations on indigenous and industrial forms of value creation in 'The Economic Problem' – the 'foundation text in Copperbelt studies', according to Macmillan – would not have been possible without the 'co-operation of [Roan Antelope and Nkana mines] staffs'.[13] Letters of reply to Audrey I. Richards by Roan Antelope Copper Mines (RACM) in Luanshya from the early 1930s revealed that she had been negotiating directly with the top management to gain fieldwork access for an ultimately unrealised research project in corporate compounds.[14] These early interventions of social research illustrate how visits to, let alone fieldwork on, the Copperbelt mines required a top-down approach. Fieldwork access presupposed a 'high-level entrée',[15] an approach to entering the field that keeps reappearing at the beginning of anthropological knowledge production on the Copperbelt.

Much better known than the contributions to J. Merle Davis' 1933 volume *Modern Industry and the African* became the work of the RLI's first director, Godfrey Wilson. He conducted research in Broken Hill, now Kabwe and the site of a lead and zinc mine, from 1939 to 1940.[16] Initially, Wilson wanted to conduct fieldwork on the Copperbelt mines and he approached the respective general managers. However, the mines strictly foreclosed fieldwork at the outbreak of the Second World War, and the provincial commissioner also opposed Wilson's research.[17] The Broken Hill Development Company, which ran the mine, and the municipal government withdrew their permission for Wilson to conduct fieldwork in mid 1940. A letter from Wilson's wife, Monica Wilson, née Hunter, herself an anthropologist, to her father points to the incompatibility of ethnographic fieldwork, corporate control and colonial government.

11 R. Brown, 'Anthropology and Colonial Rule: The Case of Godfrey Wilson and the Rhodes–Livingstone Institute, Northern Rhodesia', in T. Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York, Humanity Books, 1998), pp. 181–90.

12 R.J. Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman: The Ethnographic Life of a 'Luckyman' in Africa* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2018), pp. 169–70.

13 E.A.G. Robinson, 'The Economic Problem', in J.M. Davis (ed.), *Modern Industry and the African: An Enquiry into the Effect of the Copper Mines of Central Africa upon Native Society and the Work of the Christian Missions* (New York, Augustus M. Kelley, 1967), pp. 130–224; H. Macmillan, 'The Historiography of Transition on the Zambian Copperbelt – Another View', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 4 (1993), p. 691; J.M. Davis, 'Foreword to the First Edition', in Davis (ed.), *Modern Industry and the African*, p. xxviii.

14 The London School of Economics and Political Science Archives (hereafter LSE Archives), *Richards, Audrey Isabel (1899–1984), anthropologist*, RICHARDS/19/1, Correspondence with Roan Antelope Copper Mines, 1931–1933.

15 M. Useem, 'Reaching Corporate Executives', in Hertz and Imber (eds), *Studying Elites*, p. 27.

16 G. Wilson, 'An Essay on the Economics of Detribalization in Northern Rhodesia, Parts I and II', *Rhodes-Livingstone Papers*, 5 and 6 (Manchester University Press for the Institute for Social Research, University of Zambia, 1941, 1942).

17 Brown, 'Anthropology and Colonial Rule', pp. 190–91; Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman*, p. 265.

G[odfrey]. has been having battles with the local mine management and with the town council who after the troubles at the copper belt withdrew permission for him to work in the mine compound + town compound (the former under the mine, the latter under the town council). They have made it quite clear that the objection was to a white man '*visiting Africans in their houses + sitting talking to them*'. That apparently is 'letting down the prestige of the white man' much more than having coloured families or anything like that!

Both bodies were quite nice – said there was absolutely nothing personal in it + suggested if G. would only have an *office* and sit respectably at a desk with informants standing at attention on the other side that would be perfectly all right.

After a lot of discussion G. has permission to work in the mine compound until June [1940] (when we're returning to Livingstone anyway) + the matter is being referred to the mine's London office. He also has temporary permission to work in the town compound + will probably be given a permanent licence to do so – they have no legal right to keep him out anyway. The mine [has] a legal right to do so. All the discussion has wasted a lot of time, however G. has been awfully polite + tactful and I think he'll get permanent right of access to both compounds.[18]

Fieldwork starts with an encounter, an 'engagement' that opens up a dialogue on multiple levels: between the observer and the participant, local processes and extra-local forces, generated data and existing theory.[19] Segregation pre-structured personal encounters through the 'color bar': that is, practices of 'interracial etiquette'.[20] These practices rendered a sincere ethnographic enquiry into black Africans' lives impossible. Informed answers immediately challenged the ruling whites' image of society and knowledge.[21] At the time of Wilson's fieldwork, the idea of an African population becoming permanently resident in the Copperbelt towns had not yet been accepted by corporate or municipal authorities.[22] The RLI's research on the Copperbelt transformed fieldwork itself by shifting its focus from supposedly remote, closed societies to particular social phenomena in the highly interconnected urban sites of a global industry.

Wilson had openly challenged the 'master–servant relationship' at the heart of the colony's racial segregation, as Brown noted, and the industry attempted to keep Wilson as far away as possible from the social realities of potential research participants.[23] He had transgressed the colour bar, the barrier to fraternisation; he was 'letting down the prestige of the white man' by entering African homes, sitting down and talking to people in their language with greater fluency than the mines' compound managers, as his wife later described.[24] However, these social practices were necessary for ethnographic fieldwork and the foundation of anthropological knowledge production. Anthropology has become a science that originates in the social embeddedness of the scientist. It is rooted in the social context that the ethnographer wants to understand.

18 University of Cape Town Archives, *Monica and Godfrey Wilson Papers*, ZA UCT BC880_1_B_B5, B5.1, Monica Wilson to David Hunter, 21 April 1940 (emphases in original).
19 M. Burawoy, 'The Extended Case Method', *Sociological Theory*, 16, 1 (1998), p. 5.
20 Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman*, p. 265; R.J. Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants: Life in a Namibian Mine Compound* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), pp. 120–42.
21 Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, pp. 127, 123.
22 Colson later noted that the RLI 'as always, was under some suspicion among settlers and many civil servants' because it challenged the assumptions social policy was built on in the colony. E. Colson, 'From Livingstone to Lusaka, 1948–51', *African Social Research*, 24 (1977), p. 304.
23 Brown, 'Anthropology and Colonial Rule', pp. 188–9, 191, 193.
24 M. Wilson, 'The First Three Years, 1938–41', *African Social Research*, 24 (1977), p. 279. See also Brown, 'Anthropology and Colonial Rule', p. 193; Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, p. 62; K.T. Hansen, 'Urban Research in a Hostile Setting: Godfrey Wilson in Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia, 1938–1940', *Kronos*, 41 (2015), p. 197.

In her letter, Monica Wilson also explained to her father the peculiarity of conducting fieldwork in the context of the mining industry in Northern Rhodesia, namely that 'the mines [had] a legal right' to keep out social scientists. Mine management had a clear idea about how research was supposed to be conducted by summoning informants and having them 'standing at attention', following corporate patterns of European–African interracial etiquette.[25] Local authorities asked Wilson to change his methods.[26] According to Monica Wilson, her husband's pacifist views exacerbated the situation, since the mines were preoccupied with labour discipline after the 1935 Copperbelt strike and in the onset of the Second World War.[27]

Wilson had been chased out of both corporate and municipal parts of Broken Hill. As Schumaker has shown, the denial of fieldwork access in the context of urban field sites loomed large over the RLI, its second director, Max Gluckman, and subsequent research projects.[28] With the foundation of the African Mineworkers' Union (AMU) in 1949 and the amalgamation of the colony of Southern Rhodesia and the protectorates of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland into the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1953, the situation for social scientists navigating colonial, corporate and African authorities became ever more complex. Just like the price of copper, fieldwork access was highly volatile.

Hortense Powdermaker wanted 'to do a study of the effect of mass communications on the values, images and behavior of a group of natives in east or central Africa'.[29] Initially, she had no idea where to conduct her fieldwork and relied on Audrey Richards' advice. It was she who directed Powdermaker to Northern Rhodesia.[30] Powdermaker considered fieldwork access and 'the cooperation of those in authority' as a necessary prerequisite for conducting her study.[31] The way in which Powdermaker obtained the permission of the RACM management to carry out research in the African mine township of Luanshya, today Roan township, is noteworthy:

> [b]y coincidence and good luck, I had a letter to Sir Ronald Prain, who turned out to be the Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Rhodesian Selection Trust, which included the Roan Antelope mine in Luanshya. The husband of an old English friend from my L.S.E. days had given me the letter of introduction, just as I was boarding the ship at Southhampton [*sic*], and there was no time to even ask who was Sir Ronald Prain. In Lusaka, when I asked the question of a government official, the answer was, 'Only the most important man in Northern Rhodesia!'[32]

Apparently, Powdermaker realised only after her arrival in Lusaka in September 1953 what a precious gift the husband of her friend had given her prior to her departure from Southampton to Cape Town. Apart from being in the possession of a high-level letter of introduction, which established a direct connection to RACM's top management, Powdermaker later revealed that it was the perceived innocuousness of her research topic – mass media – and her decision to work 'within the European power structure of the mine and more or less "played it safe"' that resulted in 'the general manager [trusting her] not to cause "trouble"'.[33] Her gender certainly played a role, too. She was probably not considered

25 Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, p. 184.
26 Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman*, p. 266.
27 M. Wilson, 'The First Three Years', pp. 280, 283; Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman*, p. 420.
28 Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, p. 65.
29 LSE Archives, *Firth; Sir Raymond William (1901–2002); Knight; anthropologist*, FIRTH/8/1/100, Hortense Powdermaker to Raymond Firth, 9 November 1952.
30 Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, p. 236.
31 H. Powdermaker, *Copper Town: Changing Africa* (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), p. xv.
32 Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, p. 241.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 249.

a threat in the all-male environment of the industry at the time. However, it was also the way in which Powdermaker approached the Africans living in the corporate mine township by going through the management that set her range of opportunities apart from A.L. Epstein's.

Arriving in Luanshya, Powdermaker moved with Epstein into a house rented by the RLI. It had previously been used by J. Clyde Mitchell, the institute's fourth director.[34] Much like the course of their respective fieldwork experiences in Luanshya, Powdermaker and Epstein's starting positions could not have been more different. Epstein recalled:

> Powdermaker was a respected senior American anthropologist who worked in Luanshya for part of the time I was there myself and in that period shared my house […] She had come from New York with a letter of introduction from a prominent personality with links with the world of mining, and she had no difficulty in winning the approval of the authorities at Roan for her study.[35]

Epstein had also negotiated his initial fieldwork access to the company's African mine township with RACM's top management. However, his permission was revoked 'as a result of a series of unfortunate misunderstandings', which came to be known as the 'union incident'.[36] In contrast to Powdermaker, who had focused on her relationship with the mine management in order to find research participants and avoided contact with the AMU,[37] Epstein initially saw his project put in jeopardy not by the mine's management but by a lack of support from union officials. He sought permission to conduct fieldwork amid mine workers and their families from Lawrence Katilungu, AMU's president, and consequently addressed the union's annual conference in an effort to win the support of potential research participants.[38]

Epstein and his fieldwork subsequently became 'chased' by the dispute between capital and labour. His direct engagement with the AMU resulted in RACM's withdrawal of his research permission for the corporate mine townships of Luanshya. He had to relocate his fieldwork to the municipal African township Mikomfwa. At one of the RLI's staff conferences in Lusaka, the chairman of the Chamber of Mines visited Epstein and Mitchell. He expressed the mines' suspicion that Epstein was interfering in a dispute between the mines and the union on the side of the AMU. Epstein's project was to be cancelled immediately.[39] Moreover, in London, Mitchell was approached again and requested to withdraw Epstein from the Copperbelt altogether:

> I was visited in London one evening by the Secretary of the Chamber of Mines and asked to withdraw Epstein from the Copperbelt because of, as I remember it, his alleged interference in trade union affairs. When I went to see the President of the Trustees about this he showed me a 'Special Branch' report in which Epstein was accused of supporting the African Mineworkers' Union on an issue with which they were in dispute with the companies. Epstein's own account to me of the incident was that it was at the beginning of his fieldwork and he had asked the Union representatives if he could address the Union meeting on the topic of his research.[40]

Clearly, as Schumaker concluded, 'fieldwork itself had become politicised'.[41] This politicisation had its origin in the relationship between social scientists and research participants across the colour bar. As such, ethnographic research 'undermined segregation

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34 *Ibid.*, p. 241; Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, pp. 152, 173.
35 A.L. Epstein, *Scenes from African Urban Life: Collected Copperbelt Papers* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p. 18.
36 A.L. Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1958), pp. xvii–xviii; Epstein, *Scenes from African Urban Life*, pp. 9–12; Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, pp. 185–6.
37 Powdermaker, *Stranger and Friend*, p. 250.
38 Epstein, *Scenes from African Urban Life*, pp. 7–9.
39 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11.
40 J.C. Mitchell, 'The Shadow of the Federation, 1952–55', *African Social Research*, 24, (1977), p. 313.
41 Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, p. 187.

and raised African expectations'.[42] Fieldwork fostered interracial co-operation not only in the production of anthropological knowledge but also in formulating political aims. Ethnographic insights touched upon social policy. Processes of political activism from all sides had followed fieldwork practices of social enquiry. Consequently, social scientists were met with suspicion from the European and African perspectives. Colonial and corporate politics had eaten up the room available for ethnographic fieldwork, forcing social scientists into constantly declaring their motivations and loyalties.

The juxtaposition of Powdermaker's and Epstein's research trajectories illustrates the serendipity and arbitrariness that were involved in facilitating fieldwork access in a corporate setting. 'Personal contact' on the level of elite relationships[43] – that is, mine and union top management – could open and foreclose research opportunities at the same time. In a context where paranoia over labour mobilisation penetrated the management's attitude toward social research, ethnographic fieldwork was perceived as 'traitorous'.[44] Epstein himself considered his initial project 'caput'.[45] However, he maintained contact with research participants who had access to the African mine township.[46] Epstein saw echoes of Wilson's case re-emerge in the denial of his own presence and research methods by RACM: the two men's 'fraternising with the Africans might give them "wrong ideas"'.[47]

The dismissal of Wilson from his field site in Broken Hill in 1940 has been explained by Brown from the perspective of the industry – avoiding any disturbance of labour discipline in a strategically important sector during war time; the perspective of the colonial regime – ethnographic fieldwork transgressing the colour bar; and the perspective of the anthropologist – Wilson's pacifist leanings. In addition, Brown offered a fourth perspective: Wilson's research interests. By carrying out fieldwork on the urban life of mine workers and their families, Wilson gathered empirical evidence for 'urbanisation', a 'sensitive issue' that, officially, was not taking place on the mines at the time.[48] His fieldwork showed that the division of the social sciences according to the status of their research subjects – that is, 'civilised and primitive peoples', as Gluckman later argued – was 'not logical, particularly since the "primitive" African today is part of modern industrial civilisation'.[49] As the cases of Wilson, Powdermaker and Epstein show, fieldwork access on the Copperbelt was determined by the practices of ethnography, the politics of the field and the research topic itself.

By the time Michael Burawoy arrived in Zambia in late 1968, political independence had been achieved. The copper mines remained in private corporate hands with high profits, which the new Zambian government wanted to harness. Economic independence from the country's most important industry and equal pay for the Zambian part of the labour force were unrealised goals. Burawoy wanted to study this process of transition: the dissolution of the dual wage structure, the promotion of local labour and the substitution of the expatriate workforce. The process built on 'African advancement' under British colonialism and was propagated by the industry as 'Zambianisation' after independence.

42 *Ibid.*
43 S. Ryan and J. Lewer, 'Getting In and Finding Out: Accessing and Interviewing Elites in Business and Work Contexts', in L.L.M. Aguiar and C.J. Schneider (eds), *Researching Amongst Elites: Challenges and Opportunities in Studying Up* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2012), pp. 76–7.
44 J. van Maanen and D. Kolb, *The Professional Apprentice: Observations on Fieldwork Roles in Two Organizational Settings*, Research in the Sociology of Organizations series, vol. 4 (Greenwich, JAI Press, 1985), p. 24.
45 Epstein, *Scenes from African Urban Life*, p. 12.
46 Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, p. 182.
47 Epstein, *Scenes from African Urban Life*, p. 18.
48 Brown, 'Anthropology and Colonial Rule', p. 189.
49 M. Gluckman, 'The Difficulties, Achievements, and Limitations of Social Anthropology', in R.A. Manners and D. Kaplan (eds), *Theory in Anthropology: A Sourcebook* (London, Routledge, 2004), p. 32.

In order to gain fieldwork access, Burawoy approached the top management of the Anglo-American Corporation (AAC), one of the two major corporations dominating the copper industry at the time. However, he did not request research permission but aimed at being directly employed by the corporation:

> [s]o I visited Dennis [Etheredge], one of the top AAC executives, in search of a job that would allow me to study the management of the mines. At that time the mining companies were flush with profits from the high copper price, and so he offered me two possibilities. I chose a position in the newly created Personnel Research Unit (PRU), part of the Copper Industry Service Bureau.[50]

Burawoy walked a well-trodden path up to the top management, which had previously been used to obtain the mines' permission to carry out research. After the industry's support for Harries-Jones's fieldwork at Luanshya in 1963/64 and Coleman's research project at Nchanga in 1966, AAC's Dennis Etheredge and the Copper Industry Service Bureau, namely Norrys Davis, assisted a series of scholars: Sklar for his research from 1966 to 1968, and Berger and Bates in 1967/68.[51] However, Burawoy's research methods – ethnographic fieldwork through taking up a job at the Personal Research Unit – and his thematic interest, 'Zambianisation', set his project apart from those of these predecessors. Like urbanisation in Wilson's times, Zambianisation was a sensitive topic within the copper industry in newly independent Zambia.

> Our investigations were carried out with the mines' full co-operation and at no time did we find obstacles placed in our way, though our research led us into sensitive areas. […] Though I had earlier asked to be allowed to carry out a study of Zambianization, I had been politely told that this was a sensitive area and perhaps better left alone. Therefore, though our investigation was formally an inquiry into 'the determinants of work behaviour', all of us kept eyes open for material that would be relevant to the problems of Zambianization. It was equally impossible to tell employees – expatriates or Zambian – that we were looking into the problems of Zambianization, since that would immediately have put them on their guard and created suspicion, so in our interviews we had to tackle the subject in a roundabout way.[52]

Foreshadowing Nader's call for 'studying up', Burawoy studied the mines as institutions that were shaped by the practices of their managements. He analysed the relationship between mine workers and managers, Zambians and expatriates. Burawoy was well aware of the fact that his interest in the 'sensitive area' of Zambianisation could result in the mine management perceiving his 'research as threat'.[53] His research topic necessitated 'covert' ethnographic fieldwork. He became 'chased' by the sensitivity of the social phenomena that he studied, a fact that Burawoy alluded to in the study itself, as quoted above, but concretised only in retrospect:

> knowing just how sensitive was the racial hierarchy, I never told the mining companies of my interest until late in the study. This was covert participant observation, the sort of

50 M. Burawoy, '*The Colour of Class* Revisited: Four Decades of Postcolonialism in Zambia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40, 5 (2014), p. 964.

51 P. Harries-Jones, 'Marital Disputes and the Process of Conciliation in a Copperbelt Town', *Rhodes–Livingstone Journal*, 35 (1964), p. 29; F.L. Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt 1899–1962* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1971), p. ix; R.L. Sklar, *Corporate Power in an African State: The Political Impact of Multinational Mining Companies in Zambia* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975), p. viii; E.L. Berger, *Labour, Race, and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. viii; R.H. Bates, *Unions, Parties, and Political Development: A Study of Mineworkers in Zambia* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1971), p. x.

52 M. Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines: From African Advancement to Zambianization* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 10–11.

53 R.M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics* (London, Sage, 1993), pp. 4–9.

research that would be impossible today with human subject protocols that require the researcher to secure the consent of the participants. Such protocols make it very difficult to 'study up': the rich and powerful can hide what they are up to by refusing consent, whereas the poor and marginal have less to hide and fewer means to self-defence.[54]

Burawoy had carried out 'covert participant observation' while being employed by the mining company that he studied. This was a method replicated by others in similar contexts, where a powerful corporation wanted to control the information available on its inner workings or a particular subject.[55] Social scientists had to adapt their methodology in order to maintain fieldwork access. Research ethics, as Nader went on to argue, were different where a study potentially produced insights of 'broad public impact'.[56] This was very much the case with Burawoy's study. It revealed that the 'colonial "economic base"'– that is, the colour bar – persisted on the mines after independence.[57] AAC opposed the publication of his study. However, the copper sector was nationalised in 1969/70, and ultimately the Zambian government had the final say. It granted Burawoy permission to publish *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines*.

I sent the report to the official responsible for Zambianisation – an expatriate previously employed in the mines – and he proposed a meeting. It was a long meeting – he was clearly looking me over to see if I was a respectable scientist or, as my reputation suggested, a trouble-maker. After a few hours he said that he loved the report and that I should publish it immediately. In a state of shock and elation, I asked him why he was so enthusiastic, which elicited a curious response: this is an objective report and should be published. 'Objective?' I asked. 'Yes', he said, 'you criticise the miners, their trade union, the Zambian successor, white management, the mining companies and even the government; you criticise everyone, and *therefore* it is objective'. An interesting notion of objectivity.[58]

Corporate Co-operation, Political Power and Fieldwork Access

In 1969/70, Zambia's copper industry was nationalised and later combined into the state-owned company Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), incorporated in 1982. This transition in ownership shifted the authority over fieldwork access for social scientists to the Zambian state. The state inherited the power over who was permitted to enter the mines, their production facilities, offices, archives and company towns. Until this point, corporate mine archives had been more accessible field sites for most researchers. This remained the case in the nationalised mines in the 1970s.[59] However, and more importantly, ZCCM opened its mine townships for social research. James Ferguson has emphasised the supportive attitude of the parastatal's management in the context of his fieldwork in 1985–86: '[t]he research was also made possible through the kind cooperation of the officers of […] ZCCM […] who have maintained over the years a commendable policy of not only permitting but facilitating social research'.[60]

54 Burawoy, '*The Colour of Class* Revisited', p. 964; see also M. Burawoy, *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2009), pp. 267–8.
55 See P.C. Yeager and K.E. Kram, 'Fielding Hot Topics in Cool Settings: The Study of Corporate Ethics', in Hertz and Imber (eds), *Studying Elites*, pp. 44–6; J.L. Pierce, *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995), pp. 18–19.
56 Nader, 'Up the Anthropologist', pp. 304–5.
57 Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines*, p. 114.
58 Burawoy, '*The Colour of Class* Revisited', p. 969 (emphasis in original).
59 See, for example, C. Perrings, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa* (London, Heinemann, 1979), pp. vii, 272; J.L. Parpart, *Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1983), p. xiii; G.J. Chauncey, 'The Locus of Reproduction: Women's Labour in the Zambian Copperbelt, 1927–1953', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 2 (1981), pp. 135–64.
60 J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), p. xv.

This 'cooperation' comprised a standardised procedure of local academic affiliation and state-issued research permission in order to carry out fieldwork and reside in the mine townships of ZCCM's Nkana division in Kitwe. Moreover, Ferguson was offered the use of an office in the community service department. ZCCM officials provided him with copies of documents that he had requested, although there were some that they refused to supply.[61]

The politics of the field had changed substantially since Wilson's and Epstein's experiences of access denial. In stark contrast to his predecessors, impeded by the colour bar and measures against unionisation, Ferguson was able to observe mine workers in their living environment and participate in their everyday lives. Ferguson made clear that his research, and ultimately his insights into 'rural connections', 'urban styles' and retirement migration,[62] would not have been possible without fieldwork access to the mine townships and their residents. He was not 'chased' for his methodology or research interest. However, the Copperbelt as a field site remained politicised. Ferguson noted that 'ZCCM officials were increasingly guarded during [his] research stay as concerns mounted about South African spies'.[63] In South Africa, by comparison, fieldwork access to mining sites required intense 'personal diplomacy' in the first place, as Donham elaborated,[64] a condition that would soon return on the Copperbelt.

In 1997, Zambia's copper mines were reprivatised. The sale of ZCCM resulted in the unbundling of the parastatal and each of its mines. What had been different divisions of the same state-owned company became separate mines run by different companies owned by a multitude of shareholders.[65] Investors refocused on mines as sites of mineral extraction, not of social existence. The mines' social extensions into the residential areas, from corporate housing and basic infrastructure to welfare facilities, were abandoned. Mine townships became municipal entities with their different infrastructures often unmaintained. This retreat of the mines further lowered the barriers for fieldwork access to the residential areas beside each mine. At the same time, the remaining corporate spaces – the mines, their production facilities and offices – became fortified against any sort of scientific penetration.

Gaining fieldwork access to mine operators and their parent companies became increasingly difficult. The industry was under pressure to revive the mines despite a low copper price. Costs had to be cut, an ongoing process that has involved a decline in social spending and an increase in casualisation and outsourcing. Mining operators shielded their sites from ethnographic scrutiny, which had the potential to uncover the social downsides and ruptures of the reprivatisation process and consequent ownership changes in the industry.[66] Corporate measures to control social scientists followed, as summarised by Hertz and Imber with reference to research on the business sector in general:

> [s]ocial-scientific study of business requires the most special kinds of introductions in order to establish confidence that the research will not undermine the organization's competitive edge and goals. In its most extreme form, individual researchers may be asked to submit background checks. In less extreme circumstances, letters of entrée and personalistic ties are often essential.[67]

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61 James Ferguson, personal communication, 22 February and 9 March 2019.
62 Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, pp. 82–122, 123–65.
63 James Ferguson, personal communication, 9 March 2019.
64 D.L. Donham, *Violence in a Time of Liberation: Murder and Ethnicity at a South African Gold Mine, 1994* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), p. 190.
65 For detailed studies of ZCCM's privatisation, see J. Craig, 'Putting Privatisation into Practice: The Case of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Limited', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39, 3 (2001), pp. 389–410; A. Fraser and J. Lungu, *For Whom the Windfalls? Winners and Losers in the Privatisation of Zambia's Copper Mines* (Lusaka, Civil Society Network of Zambia, 2007).
66 Fortunately, we have documentation, thanks to social research in post-reprivatisation years; for example, J-B. Gewald and S. Soeters, 'African Miners and Shape-Shifting Capital Flight: The Case of Luanshya/Baluba', in A. Fraser and M. Larmer (eds), *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism: Boom and Bust on the Globalized Copperbelt* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
67 R. Hertz and J.B. Imber, 'Introduction', in Hertz and Imber (eds), *Studying Elites*, p. x.

Protective mechanisms – such as background checks, introductory letters, personal ties to the management, confidentiality agreements[68] – became the challenges of fieldwork access to the successors of ZCCM. These corporate shielding practices against social scientists have been experienced at most mining companies since reprivatisation. However, ZCCM's successors have been assessed differently in their corporate secrecy by Zambian politicians and the public. Investors from Europe and North America whose corporate social responsibility programmes selectively reconnected with the dependencies maintained under ZCCM and established by the state-owned company's colonial predecessors have been romanticised through industrial nostalgia. By contrast, the business activities of private and state-owned companies from the People's Republic of China, new to the Copperbelt, aroused suspicion from the start and became a politically sensitive topic in Zambia. In Luanshya, the subsidiary of China Nonferrous Metal Mining (Group) Corporation (CNMC) fell short of local expectations for the maintenance of corporate infrastructures, let alone for the revival of formerly corporate social facilities. At the same time, the company did provide fenced-off residential facilities for its Chinese expatriate workforce.

When I started to prepare my fieldwork in early 2015, I could only have imagined the 'ethnographer's odyssey' that Ching Kwan Lee made public in the appendix of *The Specter of Global China*.[69] Apart from Lee, I came across only Li, and Sautman and Yan, who had managed to gain fieldwork access to CNMC's subsidiaries and interview their top management between 2008 and 2012.[70] No social scientist, to my knowledge, apart from Lee had managed to procure research permission and carry out ethnographic fieldwork in Chinese-state-run copper mines or their residential compounds on the Copperbelt. This condition is a major weakness, if not *the* major weakness, in the literature on China in Africa: the imbalance between ethnographic data available on, and the thematic discourses about, China–Africa relations on the ground.[71]

CNMC began investing on the Copperbelt by acquiring ZCCM's 'package D', the Chambishi mine, in June 1998.[72] Ten years later, 'package B', the Luanshya mine, was available for sale for the second time since its reprivatisation in 1997. CNMC took over that mine in 2009.[73] These sites of Chinese state investment became a source of interest for Lee. She wanted to carry out a comparative study of labour relations and what she saw as different 'kind[s] of capital'[74] at work in international private and Chinese-state-owned companies investing in Zambia's mining and construction sector. In 2007, Lee first entered the Copperbelt.

In the beginning, Lee had 'no inkling' about how to gain fieldwork access to her potential research sites. Nevertheless, she commenced her project on the Copperbelt. She assessed the

68 James Musonda, personal communication, 15 February, 24 April and 15 May 2019.
69 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, pp. 167–85, see also pp. 25–8.
70 P. Li, 'The Myth and Reality of Chinese Investors: A Case Study of Chinese Investment in Zambia's Copper Industry', *SAIIA Occasional Paper*, 62 (2010); B. Sautman and H. Yan, 'The Chinese Are the Worst? Human Rights and Labor Practices in Zambian Mining', *Maryland Series in Contemporary Asian Studies*, 3, 1 (2012).
71 For a critique of the study of China–Africa relations, see J. Monson and S. Rupp, 'Africa and China: New Engagements, New Research', *African Studies Review*, 56, 1 (2013), pp. 21–44; K. Giese, 'Perceptions, Practices and Adaptations: Understanding Chinese–African Interactions in Africa', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 43, 1 (2014), pp. 3–8; M. Hirono and S. Suzuki, 'Why Do We Need 'Myth-Busting' in the Study of Sino–African Relations?', *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23, 87 (2014), pp. 443–61.
72 Craig, 'Putting Privatisation into Practice', p. 402.
73 CNMC, 'Fazhan licheng 发展历程[Milestones]', available at http://www.cnmc.com.cn/outline.jsp?column_no=0102, retrieved 15 May 2019. CNMC is listed as one of 97 state-owned companies under the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC). SASAC, 'Yangqi minglu 央企名录 [Company list]', available at http://www.sasac.gov.cn/n2588035/n2641579/n2641645/index.html, retrieved 15 May 2019.
74 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, p. 153.

risk of not being able to obtain the research permission reasonable for a tenured academic like herself.[75] While apparently not being able directly to gain fieldwork access to the mining site of Non-Ferrous China Africa (NFCA), CNMC's subsidiary and operator at Chambishi, Lee succeeded in interviewing Chinese mine workers and management personnel.[76]

However, Lee wanted to get into the sites of Chinese state capital investment. She did not want to talk only to the people working for the mining companies. She decided to follow her teacher, Burawoy, and attempted to conduct 'covert participant observation'. Getting in was extremely difficult at a time in which the political sensitivity in Zambia surrounding Chinese state investment had increased the secrecy of CNMC's corporate politics. Lee applied for a job at Chambishi Copper Smelter, another of CNMC's investment projects on the Copperbelt that was integrated into the Zambia–China Cooperation Zone (ZCCZ).[77]

In line with Nader's approach to 'studying up', Lee defended the omission of 'informed consent' and followed a different set of research ethics when it came to studying the powerful.[78] However, she came to realise that 'covert' research was more difficult in times of the internet than it had been when Burawoy worked at the Copper Industry Service Bureau. At her job interview, the 'party secretary-cum-general manager' confronted her with an article she had published. She had planned to 'chase' Chinese state capital and instead became 'chased' herself by its representatives on the ground. For the time being, Lee had to put her research on CNMC's mines aside and she focused on the Zambian construction sector instead.[79]

Opportunities for fieldwork access changed tremendously for Lee once her research gained the backing of influential political figures. She became acquainted with Guy Scott, a political ally of Michael Sata within the Patriotic Front (PF) when the party was still in opposition. Sata came to power in 2011, appointing Scott as vice-president. Lee became 'his informal advisor on Chinese affairs' in Zambia.[80] Scott's position as number two in the country and his co-operation with Lee opened the doors of CNMC's mines for her: '[l]ike a magic carpet, his personal phone calls to the CEOs of the mines, including the Chinese, ushered me into these powerful corporations in a breeze, rescuing my project, and wiping out three years of anxiety and the occasional self-indulgent thought of giving up'.[81]

The core of Lee's interview and participant observation data, on which she based her subsequent publications, was gathered during Sata's presidency (2011–14).[82] Her position was both fortunate and complex. Fieldwork access to NFCA did not guarantee the co-operation of the company's management, illustrating the multiple layers of research permission.[83] Gender and identity complicated her ethnographic encounters and made research participants question her true intentions and loyalty: a sociology professor from the

75 *Ibid.*, pp. 167–8.
76 These data went into a seminal article; see C.K. Lee, 'Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves', *China Quarterly*, 199 (2009), pp. 647–66. The article was reprinted in C.K. Lee, 'Raw Encounters: Chinese Managers, African Workers and the Politics of Casualization in Africa's Chinese Enclaves', in Fraser and Larmer (eds), *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism*, pp. 127–53.
77 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, p. 174. On the ZCCZ, see also D. Bräutigam and X. Tang, 'African Shenzhen: China's Special Economic Zones in Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49, 1 (2011), pp. 27–54.
78 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, p. 181. See also Raymond M. Lee's typology of researchers' positions on covert research, R.M. Lee, *Doing Research on Sensitive Topics*, pp. 143–7.
79 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, pp. 27, 174.
80 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
81 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
82 C.K. Lee, 'The Spectre of Global China', *New Left Review*, 89 (2014), pp. 29–65; *The Specter of Global China*, pp. 187–201 (listed interviews).
83 See also Laurila's typology of 'access' in J. Laurila, 'Promoting Research Access and Informant Rapport in Corporate Settings: Notes from Research on a Crisis Company', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13, 4 (1997), pp. 409–13.

USA, born in Hong Kong, working on Chinese investment in Zambia on the side of the government.[84] Nevertheless, Lee succeeded in answering her initial research question and argued convincingly for a dichotomy of 'Chinese state' and 'global private' capital.[85] Her 'good access' case, as Laurila termed the successful obtaining of research permission, was 'the result of a successful combination of research problems, situational circumstances and the skills of the researcher'.[86]

Upon the death of Sata in October 2014, Scott became acting president. He was soon replaced by Edgar Lungu, after the bye-election in January 2015. The politics of the field changed again. Lee conceded that '[w]ith my patron losing power, so went my access to the power elite'.[87] Her case confirmed that the Copperbelt remained a politicised field site. It also showed that her attempt to follow Burawoy's 'covert' field methods had become outdated. Her success in 'studying up' was based on the fact that Lee herself temporarily managed to be 'up' in the Zambian power hierarchy.

In contrast to Lee, and along the lines of Giese's research on China–Africa relations,[88] I was interested in the socio-cultural aspects of the relationship between Chinese and Zambians working in the copper industry. During a preliminary field trip in April 2015, I managed to establish relations with my future affiliation institute and became acquainted with German Embassy staff. Sino-German relations had been constructive both internationally and in Zambia. In October 2014, the German diplomatic mission in Lusaka had successfully organised a visit of the personal representative of Germany's Chancellor Merkel to CNMC Luanshya Copper Mines (CLM).[89]

I opted for a top-down strategy and wanted to get in touch with CNMC's subsidiaries directly. I contacted CLM's Chinese public relations manager who had been involved with Merkel's representative's visit. My formal e-mail in Chinese, introducing my research project, asking for a meeting and enquiring about fieldwork access, received a swift and polite reply: the company was in an 'unusual situation' that made fieldwork impossible.[90] My further enquiries and expressions of interest in CLM's affairs resulted in one more reply also referring to the 'unusual situation' in which the company found itself. I knew that this assessment was not fabricated. President Lungu had visited NFCA in Chambishi to discuss the forced unpaid leave of CLM's Baluba shaft mine workers just three days before my initial contact with CLM.[91]

My timing was unfortunate and the overall situation difficult to navigate. First, CLM had already decided to put the Baluba shaft under maintenance in September 2015. This decision followed a decrease in the mine's energy quota due to Zambia's electricity shortage.[92] Second, the copper price had been plummeting since 2011, remaining below US$6,000 per tonne. This fact put pressure on the mining companies to cut costs. Third, a 2011 Human

84 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, pp. 28, 178, 182–3.
85 *Ibid.*, pp. 153–9.
86 Laurila, 'Promoting Research Access', p. 413.
87 C.K. Lee, *The Specter of Global China*, p. 185.
88 K. Giese, 'Same-Same But Different: Chinese Traders' Perspectives on African Labor', *China Journal*, 69 (2013), pp. 134–53.
89 German Embassy, Lusaka, 'Personal Representative of German Chancellor Angela Merkel Pays Visit to Zambia', available at http://www.lusaka.diplo.de/Vertretung/lusaka/en/06_20-_20EZ/German-Zambian-Cooperation/seite__Nooke__Besuch__Okt__2014.html, retrieved 23 January 2017.
90 E-mail by CLM's Chinese public relations manager to the author (translated from Chinese), 5 November 2015.
91 'Luanshya Mine to Keep 1,600 Jobs after Closed Door Meeting with President Lungu', *Lusaka Times*, 3 November 2015, available at https://www.lusakatimes.com/2015/11/03/luanshya-mine-to-keep-1-600-jobs-after-closed-door-meeting-with-president-lungu/, retrieved 15 May 2019.
92 'Government Will Not Tolerate Mines Laying Off Workers because of Load Shedding – Kambwili', *Lusaka Times*, 8 September 2015 2015, available at https://www.lusakatimes.com/2015/09/08/government-will-not-tolerate-mines-laying-off-workers-because-of-load-shedding-kambwili/, retrieved 15 May 2019.

Rights Watch (HRW) report about poor health and safety standards had directed a lot of negative attention towards CLM and NFCA as well as their respective Chinese subcontractors.[93] It is generally understood that the report resulted in a growing scepticism toward non-governmental organisation staff members, journalists and social scientists across the entire mining sector. Moreover, the report had to be seen in the context of pre-existing anti-Chinese discourse on Chinese investments in Zambia.[94]

In a similar case, filmmaker Bodil Furu was denied access to a Katangan cobalt mine run by Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt after critical coverage of its local subsidiary Congo Dongfang International Mining (CDM) on the part of Amnesty International in 2016 and the television channel Sky News in 2017.[95] In short, my position in the field was precarious. Corporate practices of shielding were aimed at undermining fieldwork altogether. The structural setting made it clear that gaining fieldwork access would be as difficult for me as it had been for Lee.

I attempted to change my position in the field and followed the contacts provided by the institute to which I was affiliated. These contacts had also been part of Lee's network for fieldwork access. However, Zambia had a new president. Scott remained 'merely' a member of parliament. Eventually, the CEO of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Investment Holding (ZCCM–IH), a company that held minority shares in CNMC's subsidiaries, and the Director of the Mines Safety Department (MSD) under the Ministry of Mines and Minerals Development, an agency that supervised the mines, contacted CLM and NFCA. The MSD's letter opened a new door. CLM's reply read:

> Mr Christian Straube had contacted us directly to conduct his research project and was told that due to the current situation prevailing in the company; it was not possible for him to do it this time. However, based on the ideology of employees' human rights and the cordial relationship which China enjoys with Zambia, it is only the Chinese Embassy that can approve of his visit to our mine.[96]

CLM delegated my case to the Chinese Embassy. Apparently, there was a formal procedure, and the diplomatic mission was responsible for foreigners who wanted to visit the mine. I needed the full support of the German Embassy in order to approach its Chinese counterpart. A formal letter was channelled from the German Embassy to the Chinese Embassy. Unfortunately, my timing was bad again. It was February 2016 and CLM's CEO had left Zambia to spend Chinese new year at home. Later, I learned that his departure from the country was permanent. CLM installed a new CEO, and my case, which I knew had reached his desk, was lost. My attempt to gain fieldwork access through the diplomatic

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93 Human Rights Watch, '"You'll Be Fired if You Refuse": Labor Abuses in Zambia's Chinese State-Owned Copper Mines', available at https://www.hrw.org/report/2011/11/04/youll-be-fired-if-you-refuse/labor-abuses-zambias-chinese-state-owned-copper-mines, retrieved 15 May 2019. For a discussion of the report, see *Pambazuka News*, 'Debate: Critiquing the Critique on China in Zambia', available at https://www.pambazuka.org/global-south/debate-critiquing-critique-china-zambia, retrieved 15 May 2019.

94 In 2006, Sata had run an anti-Chinese presidential election campaign, while Chinese President Hu Jintao had to change his itinerary in 2007 on a visit to Zambia owing to protests in Chambishi. See J.J. Schatz, 'Zambian Hopeful Takes a Swing at China', *Washington Post*, 25 September 2006, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/24/AR2006092400915.html, retrieved 15 May 2019; C. Freeman, 'Africa Discovers Dark Side of Chinese Master', *Daily Telegraph*, London, 4 February 2007, available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1541566/Africa-discovers-dark-side-of-Chinese-master.html, retrieved 15 May 2019. For an analysis, see B. Sautman, 'Chinese Defilement Case: Racial Profiling in an African Model of Democracy', *Rutgers Race and the Law Review*, 14 (2013), pp. 87–134.

95 Bodil Futu, personal communication, 31 August 2018. See Amnesty International, '"This is what we die for": Human Rights Abuses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Power the Global Trade in Cobalt', available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr62/3183/2016/en/, retrieved 15 May 2019; A. Crawford, 'Meet Dorsen, 8, who Mines Cobalt to Make your Smartphone Work', available at https://news.sky.com/story/meet-dorsen-8-who-mines-cobalt-to-make-your-smartphone-work-10784120, retrieved 15 May 2019.

96 Extract from a letter by CLM's CEO to the Director of MSD, 22 December 2015.

channel, and with it the entire project, was terminated with a message from CLM's Zambian public relations manager: 'I have spoken to the Chinese person in charge of foreign visits and I have been advised that your request has NOT been acceded to, unfortunately'.[97]

By April 2016, I had given up on my initial fieldwork endeavour.[98] The assessment of a representative of the German Embassy put my case further into context. The Chinese Embassy insisted on the claim that it was not in a position to issue instructions to CLM. Furthermore, worries about negative research findings seemed to dominate the Chinese perspective. The argument that the research project could also lead to an improvement in China's reputation was not rejected by the Chinese Embassy. Still, Embassy staff indicated that it did not want to follow the matter up.

Lee and I had stood in front of similar gates. However, our personal capacities and positions of power within the politics of the field and the context of our fieldwork differed substantially. The processes of obtaining and being denied fieldwork access were based on similar practices, both on the side of the social scientists – networking up and recruiting the support of gatekeepers; and on the side of the Chinese state-owned company – shielding their business and limiting fieldwork access. Fieldwork had been possible for Lee and likely for me where the government managed to penetrate corporate spaces, for example through official studies of foreign investments or safety regulations in the copper-mining sector. In comparison to other mines that were the focus of fieldwork conducted previously on the Copperbelt, CNMC's mines were volatile, politicised field sites. There were no standardised procedures to gain fieldwork access to them. Social scientists remained highly dependent on individuals and their concrete position in the local power hierarchy.[99] These conditions certainly contributed to the lack of 'studying up' within the extractive sector in general, which Gilberthorpe and Rajak recently addressed.[100]

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined challenges to fieldwork access in the context of ethnographic research conducted on the Copperbelt from the foundation of the RLI in 1937 up to the end of my own ethnographic research project in 2017. I analysed how the ethnographic practices of fieldwork interacted with imperial formations – colonial and corporate practices structured in dominance – which set the political context of this particular field site. This interaction of ethnography as a social encounter, industrial work as a segregationist regime, fieldwork as networking for access, corporate politics as a mechanism of control, government co-operation as a prerequisite for social enquiry, corporate secrecy as shielding and observation of the local as a window on to the production of the global have shaped how the anthropological knowledge produced by the ethnographers referred to in this article has been constructed. The different levels of interaction offer a perspective on the 'chase' of the social scientist and the nature of anthropology as a social science.

Fieldwork access determines how social scientists encounter their research participants. Ethnography aims at generating anthropological knowledge from an encounter within the research participants' social context. Intentionally, the social scientist inserts him- or herself into the process as a social being, introduced as stranger and potentially parted from as friend. The encounter ought to be based on a reciprocal exchange, or, to go further, on the

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97 Short message service (SMS) by CLM's Zambian public relations manager to the author, 21 April 2016.
98 I realigned my project and took up fieldwork in a former mine township next to CLM's mine. C. Straube, 'After Corporate Paternalism: Material Renovation and Social Change in Times of Ruination' (PhD thesis, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, 2018).
99 See also G. Dobler and R. Kesselring, 'Swiss Extractivism: Switzerland's Role in Zambia's Copper Sector', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 57, 2 (2019), p. 242n1.
100 E. Gilberthorpe and D. Rajak, 'The Anthropology of Extraction: Critical Perspectives on the Resource Curse', *Journal of Development Studies*, 53, 2 (2017), p. 189.

apprenticeship of the social scientist in his or her field site. This apprenticeship challenges existing power hierarchies as it decentralises authority over knowledge. As I have shown, the room for such reciprocal exchange is limited by the politics of the field.

Fieldwork access relates to the question of what kind of anthropological knowledge social scientists can or cannot generate. Ethnography reveals and explains social phenomena that might undermine existing power hierarchies. This linkage of fieldwork access and research topic is particularly evident in studying up corporate structures and investigating the exploitative character of the extractive sector. Turning from stranger to friend in a corporate industrial setting poses an even greater challenge to the social scientist. The sincerity of the ethnographer is tested by what he or she publishes and which perspectives on the same phenomena the process of knowledge production supports.

Fieldwork access and its denial are expressions of activated power relations. They position the social scientist within the local power hierarchy. In the case of the Copperbelt mines, studying up meant 'being up' as a social scientist. Anthropological knowledge was generated only if the process had been approved by the authorities of the relevant field site. The politics of the field is shaped by the changing dynamics of power and its representatives: gatekeepers who open and foreclose scientific opportunity. Moreover, activated power relations offer a glimpse of the reciprocal production of the local and the global – how mines, extractive communities and corporations are intertwined. This was illustrated in the case of CNMC's subsidiary in Luanshya, where fieldwork access involved the local management, government ministries, diplomatic missions and the Chinese state-owned parent company.

Looking at the history of anthropological knowledge production on the Copperbelt, I have observed anthropology as a social science that produces ethnographic data not only about a particular social or political context but in interaction with these contexts. Social scientists, ethnographic methods, field sites and structuring contexts are not isolated from each other but emerge as the distinctive composite nature of anthropology as a social science. I encourage anthropologists of the extractive sector to resist, and at the same time interact with, the imperial formation that marks the field site. The politics of the field may affect our ability to ask uneasy questions, but we must try to remain faithful to unearthing the perspectives of those whose views on social phenomena are rarely heard and the inner workings of corporate power structures.

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