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Revealing researcher engagement in museum-related research: a reflective account

Ahmed Fouad Abdel Latif Abdel Fattah
Tourism College, Institute for Tourism Studies, Macao, China

The absence of extended discussions about the feasibility of carrying out qualitative research within the 'research methods' sections of most heritage and mainstream museum studies articles means there is not much direction provided to novice heritage and museum researchers as well as aspiring PhD candidates to augment their own methodological practices. Literature related to unexpected circumstances during fieldwork, the importance of human interactions in data collection and the self-reflection of researchers in heritage and museum-related research remains limited. This paper reflectively explores aspects of the author's journey as a PhD researcher at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt, and the challenges encountered during fieldwork. The paper concludes that recognizing and encouraging reflexivity and interpersonal engagement and reflecting on challenging moments during the research process in museums and heritage sites brings insight to the study, and brings the researcher/researchee closer to the reader.

Keywords: *reflective account, Egyptian Museum, interpersonal engagement, unexpected circumstances*

1 INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research involving observations, interviews and focus groups has been a popular method of collecting data in heritage and museum visitor studies (Abdel Fattah/Eddy-U 2019; Abdel Fattah et al. 2017; Horn et al. 2016; Moscardo 1992; Schorch 2010; Schorch et al. 2015). Yet heritage and museum visitor studies that discuss the practical aspects of arranging and conducting qualitative interviews and observations are still relatively rare (Munro 2014). Few researchers in heritage and museum visitor studies discuss in detail how they carried out their interviews and observations (Abdel Fattah/Eddy-U 2019; Munro 2014; Schorch 2010). The absence of extended discussions about the feasibility of carrying out qualitative research within the 'research methods' sections of most mainstream heritage and museum studies means there is not much guidance provided to novice museum researchers and young PhD candidates who wish to inform their own methodological practices. They are left thinking that organizing and carrying out observations, qualitative interviews and focus groups are straightforward processes. The lack of evidence to the contrary may also prompt university research and ethics committees as well as cultural heritage funding bodies to question field research strategies such as the researcher's role, making initial contact, collecting data, identifying respondents and developing trust (Wang/Park 2016). This paper specifically reports on the importance of personal disclosure during interviews, and the benefits of acknowledging and reflecting on

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The Lypiatts, 15 Lansdown Road, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 2JA, UK
and The William Pratt House, 9 Dewey Court, Northampton MA 01060-3815, USA

interactional/emotional challenges faced during the research process. The author provides these aspects as an example for other researchers to reflect on their personal experiences and research process, and what heritage and museum researchers do and can do in interesting and new ways.

Recreation and tourism research has been using reflexive and creative methodologies for some time (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Buckle/Corbin Dwyer 2019; Dupuis 1999; Everett 2010; Feighery 2006; Fountain 2002; Hall 2004; McIntosh 2010; Reis 2011; Willson 2010), but only recently have museum and heritage researchers referred to their role and engagement with research participants, albeit briefly (Abdel Fattah/Eddy-U 2019). Within contemporary recreation and tourism research, it is becoming more common to find recognition of human interactions with research participants' and researchers' personal experiences and emotions within the research context. Arguably, researchers who do not draw upon and/or discuss their personal experiences and interpersonal engagement with their participants, at least to some extent, within the research texts are in some ways being disembodied or detached from the research and the researched (Dupuis 1999; Reis 2011). As such, it has been argued that it is not possible to remove researchers' own emotions and thoughts; nor is it recommended (Harris et al. 2007; Johnson 2009; Hall 2004; McIntosh 2010).

However, discussion of the level of interpersonal interactions and the researcher's embodied presence during fieldwork activities in heritage and museum studies is very rare; this is despite a call by Abdel Fattah (2012), McIntosh (2010), Munro (2014) and Schorch (2010) for researchers in this field to explicitly reflect upon their role and their interpersonal engagement with research participants. Where such discussions are found, they tend to be very brief (Dodd et al. 2012) and relate to research populations of museum visitors that are perceived to be hard to reach – for example minority ethnic groups such as African Americans (Falk 1993; 1995) and Hispanics (Weiland 2015). These discussions rarely include the researchers' reflections on their interpersonal engagement with interviewees or self-reflections on their role in the process. Thus, much of current research reporting in museum visitor studies maintains an objective, distant written voice that glosses over any emotional responses or challenges in conducting and interpreting the research.

Building on the history of addressing these issues within the literature on recreation and tourism (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Buckle/Corbin Dwyer 2019; Buzinde 2020; Dupuis 1999; Everett 2010; Feighery 2006; Hall 2004; Harris et al. 2007; McIntosh 2010), this paper is concerned specifically with the role of interpersonal interactions and unexpected circumstances during fieldwork and the self-reflection of researchers in museum-related research. It focuses on the interpersonal engagement and unexpected incidents with participants during my PhD fieldwork, and highlights the resulting benefits and difficulties. The hope is that this will open up discourse relevant to novice museum and heritage researchers and aspiring PhD candidates, and make heritage and museum visitor studies more useful by allowing 'the silenced voices' of research participants and 'the silenced parts' of researchers to speak (Ellis as cited in Reis 2011: 16).

This paper also critically considers how our situated positions as individuals and museum and heritage researchers can generate quality data (Buckle/Corbin Dwyer 2019; Hall 2004; Reis 2011). We are, in the words of Cope (2002: 45), 'situated actors', and we should acknowledge the nature of our participation in what we know. We need to elaborate on our interpersonal engagement with research participants and write ourselves into our research texts in clear ways in order for the reader to discern our interpretations (Dupuis 1999; Lichtman 2010; Reis 2011). As researchers, we are

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free to choose our own research topics and decide how they are designed and presented (Patton 2014); research projects are therefore usually very personal creations (Feighery 2006; Hall 2004). However, in discussing interpersonal interactions and reflexivity in heritage and museum-related research, it is important not to perceive these approaches as providing more valid or accurate accounts of truth (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Everett 2010; Harris et al. 2007). Rather, these practices are useful complementary methods that help deepen our understanding of heritage and museum visitors' motives, experiences, needs, wants and personal goals through potentially revealing new insights or directions that may be helpful in maturing heritage and museum visitor studies.

2 BACKGROUND TO THE AUTHOR'S PHD RESEARCH

This paper emerges from a qualitative research project designed to explore the motives and experiences of international and domestic visitors at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The research project at the museum was part of my larger PhD research which explored the functions of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand in relation to different visitors (Abdel Fattah 2012). Following institutional ethics approval, the project was conducted at the Egyptian Museum in 2008 using an integrated qualitative methods approach which included semi-structured interviews, observation, researcher-reflective journaling, academic literature review and document analysis. My reflective journaling is utilized in this paper to highlight and discuss the researcher's engagement with participants and his reflexivity. I made sure that I took comprehensive field notes during and shortly after the interviews. I also kept a journal in which I recorded my own ideas and feelings of every interview, which served as an additional check on my cultural or political bias (Ellis/Bochner 2003; Woitek 2020).

In the PhD study, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. Approval to interview visitors and staff members had to be secured before the fieldwork period in the summer of 2008. International and Egyptian visitors were interviewed after their visit to the museum. Interviews also were carried out with museum staff. All interviews were carried out in English or Arabic.

The interviews with visitors took 40–50 minutes, while those with the staff lasted approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded, with participants' approval, and transcribed verbatim soon after completion, with notes produced during the transcription process (Lincoln/Guba 1985). Some interviews were conducted in the museum restaurant or garden, while others were carried out at various hotels in Cairo where the international respondents were staying.

This paper specifically reports on my positioning within the research, the unexpected circumstances in the field and meaningful interactions and dialogues with participants. I start by situating myself in my research approach and text (Feighery 2006; Harris et al. 2007). This process has been recommended as it allows researchers to explore past and present personal experiences in relation to the phenomenon under study, and to reflect on and offer possible explanations of research issues (Feighery 2006; Fountain 2002; Woitek 2020). My personal reminiscences described below bear resemblance to some of the Egyptian participants' experiences of the museum.

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3 SITUATING THE MUSEUM VISITOR RESEARCHER

My 'Egyptian self', my 'human self' or even my 'researcher self' shaped the PhD topic I chose to explore. My personal relation to the museum derives from two aspects: (1) family visits to the museum (social factors); and (2) the fieldtrips to the museum during elementary, secondary and tertiary levels of education (personal factors). The museum always brings back childhood memories of when I would visit it with my parents and their relatives and friends during the mid-year school holidays. My parents preferred chatting with their friends and relatives in the café or the garden to visiting the exhibitions; for my parents and their companions the museum was properly a space to socialize with relatives and friends, a motivation that could not be fulfilled merely by motionless ancient artefacts. While my parents socialized, we children would play games in the garden, such as dominoes, chess, soccer, backgammon and cards. My visits as a child evoke faint but pleasant recollections of the museum building; but we seldom visited the indoor exhibition area as typically my friends and I barely related to lifelessness, mummies and dead bodies, and a 'not exciting' space. I recall as a teenager being familiar with an expression, which I may have created: 'that Egyptian Museum eerie feeling'. It was an Arabic phrase that symbolized a kind of fatigue and claustrophobia I felt once I entered the indoor exhibition space and saw those long straight aisles inside the museum. Once I moved into that environment of endless linked area–visual area, tiredness and fatigue swiftly set in since there were no windows, restaurants, shops or interactive activities to break up the monotony.

Meanwhile, the absence of Pharaonic history on the curriculum in Egypt's public (state) schools led me as a youngster to a complete loss of orientation and resulted in a lack of knowledge of my country's ancient history and heritage. The national curriculum for history centred mainly on the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Islamic heritage and the history of Egypt, Arab nationalism, the occupied Palestinian territories and the October War of 1973. It was not until I began my undergraduate studies in history at the University of Alexandria that I developed strong connections to Pharaonic Egypt. Learning about ancient Egypt at university certainly developed my affinity and/or aptitude for Pharaonic artefacts. Accordingly, I became increasingly motivated to travel to Cairo to visit my parents, and to visit the indoor space of the museum to view many ancient artefacts I had already studied and read about during my university years.

At the beginning of 2004, I arrived in New Zealand to undertake specialized courses in tourism management that were generally required for entry to a PhD programme. Then, about two years after my arrival in the country, I met and married my New Zealander wife and fathered our first child. I made subsequent visits to Cairo and took my wife to the Egyptian Museum. The museum visit for her did not revolve around pastime experiences and socialization. She did not associate the indoor exhibition area with boredom or dead animals and mummies. She arrived at the Egyptian Museum with great admiration for Pharaonic artefacts, the glory of ancient Egyptian sculpture and architecture, and the thrilling veil of mystery surrounding archaeological discoveries. She expressed a desire to learn more about the ancient artefacts that drew her to the museum. During these family visits a number of questions arose due to the obvious differences I noticed in the experiences visitors had at the very 'traditional' Egyptian Museum. Hence I chose to explore the role of traditional museums vis-à-vis visitors' motives and experiences as part of my larger PhD research project.

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My personal experience of the museum directly informed how I reacted as a researcher when exploring my PhD topic. Harris et al. (2007: 44) define this as the researcher's 'positionality' during the course of research, since our social identity and personal history influence how we react when we explore 'the world around us' (McIntosh 2010: 219). I came to conduct research at the Egyptian Museum already carrying memories of former visits and knowledge about the site. Since I was raised in Cairo and attended the museum at different phases of my life, the site holds layers of experience for me personally. Furthermore, attending the site at different phases of my life has meant that I have been learning about the museum informally for most of my life. I believe this provides me with a specific perception and understanding about the site, its staff and the domestic visitors' motives and experiences. Although this could be deemed an intrinsic bias, it could also be considered a meaningful opportunity with respect to empirical understanding (Denzin 2001). I believe that the researcher's reflections and insights can generate a 'creative synthesis' in the research project and enhance the theoretical framework (Patton 2002: 467).

Following thematic analysis of my reflective journal, I elicited three specific elements related to the research process, namely: the significance of human interactions with research participants; responding to the unexpected; and self-reflection on some challenging moments in museum-related research. These elements seem to be related to balancing objectivity and personal response throughout the research process. The following sections highlight these particular components related to my engagement with interviewees and my experience within my research.

4 SELF-DISCLOSURE AND THE RESEARCHER–RESEARCHEE RELATIONSHIP

I first provide some comments on the development of the researcher–researchee relationship, which were at the heart of my PhD thesis. Over the six months in which I was actively conducting interviews with research participants, I stepped away from the traditional qualitative methodology, which emphasizes objectivity in research and the neutrality of the researcher (Lincoln/Guba 1985), reminding myself that I was dealing with human beings in my research endeavour (Dupuis 1999; Mitchell/Irvine 2008). This is not to say that I tried to guide the participants on how to answer, which would invalidate the data collected. Rather, I tried to make the interviews as friendly and conversational as possible, focusing as much on developing and maintaining a positive relationship as on collecting answers to my interview questions. I thought this was important since I was examining the emotional nature of participants' interactions with exhibitions. Museums have moved away from didactic displays in favour of new modes of communication that aim to generate emotional responses from visitors (Abdel Fattah/Eddy-U 2019; Schorch et al. 2015). Maintaining positive relationships will work towards recognizing research participants' expressions and emotions and any motives that would otherwise be untold.

All interviews were face-to-face exchanges between myself and visitors or museum staff members. Each encounter started with a description of the aim of the research and presentation of the consent form. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality of the information they provided and assured of their right to refuse to give information or even to retract statements or comments at any stage before or during the interview. Each respondent was presented with an interview guide to check, which they all glanced at before the interview began. All respondents were calm and keen to talk in a

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more natural, informal style. I started the interviews by becoming acquainted with the participants by talking about sport, politics, hobbies, travel experiences, culture and past educational experiences in a sociable and open way. During the interviews, I also let the participants bring up their own discussion topics. This type of exchange proved valuable in establishing the basis for effective communication (Grbich 1999).

I found relating to the participant's life at the start of the interviews very useful. By employing self-disclosure and sharing about myself, I was able to create a dialogue rather than an interrogation. With Egyptian and international participants (from Western Europe, North America and Israel), this personalizing style was not difficult for me since I had lived, worked and travelled in these regions. My journal elicited the following:

> Researcher: The interviewee number 27. He is thirty-four years old and lives in Michigan (USA) working as an engineer. It was quite easy to create a sense of reciprocity since I could talk with him about my own time in the USA and Minnesota at the beginning of the interview. He was easy to talk to and encouraging especially after I said that I lived, studied and worked in the USA.

This experience of participants opening up about the research topic after my own personal disclosure was repeated in a number of interviews.

Self-disclosure was also a natural and necessary part of the reciprocal conversation since, although participants were enthusiastic about the topic, nearly all (staff and visitors alike) were equally interested in discussing things unrelated to the topic. They wanted to steer the interviews into a more personal dimension. Although questions about my personal experience were *unanticipated*, answering them was actually a positive influence in developing rapport with the participants. In fact, in such cases, acting as a detached, distant researcher would be antithetical to the research process (Ateljevic et al. 2005; Glass/Ogle 2012; Reis 2011). To withhold these personal details would distance me from the conversations and relationships I was trying to develop. Museum staff participants showed similar curiosity about me and my personal experience, apart from the research topic.

> Researcher: Some staff members asked me personal questions and I tried to satisfy their curiosity. They asked me questions such as: oh you are a researcher of heritage tourism from Egypt. How do you get to be a researcher in New Zealand? Do you work at this university? Do you like your university? Do you get along with your supervisor? Do you live in Cairo or in New Zealand? And, why do you want to study this topic? Do you have funding for your research? What other research have you have done in Egypt? And, are you married to an Egyptian or Western woman? Did she come with you to Egypt? Is she a Muslim? Does she know how to cook Egyptian food? Do you have children? (12 June 2008)

Based on the above questions, I disclosed personal information about myself where appropriate in the interview in order to motivate interest in the topic and establish open, trusting and comfortable relationships. This is an approach that some researchers choose to employ, and one that facilitates openness and trust between the researcher and interviewee, as well as letting the researcher gain valuable insights (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). For instance, when asked 'Why do you want to study this topic?' I described in some detail that I had visited the museum at various phases of my life and that the site held childhood memories and personal experiences that influenced my interest in the research topic I had chosen. This prompted museum staff participant number 7 to respond:

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> Oh it's exciting to pick out a topic you are familiar with. This makes your doctoral journey enjoyable. It will be also easy for you to interpret what visitors tell you. I will do my best to answer all of your interview questions and if we go on for over an hour, we can always have a friendly chat at the restaurant after I finish work. (23 July 2008)

Since I was mindful that researchers can affect researcher–researchee interactions, I carefully balanced the personal interactions with the actual research topic to ensure the required data were collected (Glass/Ogle 2012). An example of this situation is the following:

> Interviewee number 33: Oh I'm interested in your research topic since I'm just finishing my BA in Social Sciences. I am also currently doing an internship at an elementary school in Arizona. I teach history classes there and also organize museum field trips for students. By the way, I'm thinking of pursuing [a] Master degree then [a] PhD. I know it's important if you are employed in a university. I've heard it's cheaper and easier to work on your PhD in New Zealand because, unlike [the] US, you don't go through training, coursework, etc. It's like sitting at home reading books. Do you think it's easier to study PhD in New Zealand? And which university in New Zealand would you recommend for social science?

To direct the questions back to the research, I responded:

> Researcher: New Zealand has good universities that have a lot to offer and it cares a lot about its international students. Besides, international students pay reasonable tuition fees there and several scholarships [are] available to them. I can tell you more after we finish the interview and answer any questions you may have on studying there.
>
> Interviewee number 33: Oh yeah, that would be great. I've got time for that. I stay at the Nile Hilton next to the museum. Let's get back to our discussion of my experience at the museum. I've got some really interesting things to share with you.

By practising self-disclosure and sharing about myself, I stimulated the participants' interest in the topic, and also managed to move from being a stranger to being a friend (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). Self-disclosure provided me with the opportunity to establish rapport and to minimize 'the hierarchical nature of the research encounter' (Johnson 2009: 199). As our interactions with research participants often involve reciprocity, flexibility and possible sharing of personal experiences and background information, discussion in the literature of the quality and nature of interactions between interviewer and interviewee is also significant (Johnson 2009; Weeden 2005).

A second benefit of personal sharing, particularly at the beginning of the interviews, was to set the tone for an interactive, participant-led format. Almost all participants started with a preconception of being interviewed in a systematic and structured manner guided by a 'system of relevancy' (Schorch 2010: 55). I therefore had to repeatedly emphasize that the focus of the interview was *them* and whatever *they* wanted to share with me, which opened the door to in-depth accounts that revealed glaring differences between participants.

> Researcher: I sensed right from the start he [interviewee number 27] was unfamiliar with the interview format which caused him to ask me twice for reassurance if he is giving the correct answers. During the interview, he talked about his visit in a very chronological order (from visiting the Old Kingdom Period till the Late Period/Graeco-Roman era). Sometimes he got into much detail. The interview went on for much longer than we both expected. In fact, after

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> the interview concluded we shared some ideas on the Egyptian Museum and talked a little bit about Obama's presidency.

Although my questions remained central in guiding my focus in the interviews, the questions themselves lost their centrality in structuring the interaction as participants initiated discussions and led conversations, and reciprocity ensued. This allowed participants to share ideas and express opinions as they felt comfortable doing, using their own structure.

> Researcher: Most of the interviews today in the morning with museum staff and visitors became a semi-structured interview type conversational situation between an active listener and an active participant. For example, a number of museum staff wanted to discuss in detail how visitors interacted with particular museum presentations and offerings and not be constrained by a structured interview format. However, they finished the professional part of the interview and then began asking personal questions.

Self-disclosure/personal conversation prior to the interviews helped me create a friendly, unrushed tone during them. A few participants struggled to articulate or verbalize their experiences of the museum. Accordingly, I adopted some strategies that helped me deal with such challenges during the interviews. I did not prompt or guide the participants for answers, which can typically call into question the validity of the research (Patton 2014). Instead, I provided them with all the time they needed and made them feel at ease during the interview. I never rushed through the questions, turning the interview into a cross-examination and thus undermining rapport (Decrop 1999). Any unease or embarrassment on my part would have communicated itself to the participants and could have made them reluctant to talk about their thoughts and experiences in detail (Lincoln/Guba 1985). For example, my reflections revealed the following:

> Researcher: Interviewee number 17, a British visitor, sometimes struggled to express himself and find the appropriate words reflecting his experiences and thoughts. Sometimes also, there was a long silence, but I was not uncomfortable. I realized that his long silence was important because he was realizing something for the first time and having an insight about a particular exhibition. He continued when ready. I never rushed him, gave him all the time needed and made him feel comfortable. This was simplified by his great sense of humor and uncomplicated and friendly manner. He was actually good fun to be with and I enjoyed his company.

5 SELF-DISCLOSURE AS VALIDATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

The phenomenon of self-disclosure manifested itself particularly in interviews with Egyptian participants, albeit in a slightly different way. My personal reminiscences regarding my childhood experiences with the museum, mentioned earlier in this paper, bear resemblance to some of the participants' experiences. One Egyptian respondent stated that when he visited the museum he felt 'bored' since he did not have sufficient preexisting knowledge about the Egyptian artefacts. He explained that he often visited the museum 'for 40 minutes during his working day lunch breaks'.

The responses above triggered nostalgic feelings about the sense of connection I felt at that time. This motivated me to share my own museum experience with the participants and let them know that I already had a sense of what they were talking

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about. I noticed that once the participants felt that I was familiar with their experiences, they seemed more willing to elaborate and talk in more detail about their visit. Sharing my own museum experience allowed openness, empathy and honesty, and validated participants' experiences (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). The aforementioned nostalgic feelings are akin to that documented by Woitek's memory of her mother's immigrant story during analysis of personal notes from immigrant students' academic and social experiences in the classroom. Woitek (2020: 62) approached the recollections of her mother's account by writing about them as part of her 'personal history'.

Self-disclosure in such cases is not self-indulgent; rather, it is useful to reflect on how oneself as the researcher is situated in the study, and how similar motives and experiences might locate oneself in relation to the respondents (for example, Egyptian participants). My experiences and past events at the Egyptian Museum enabled me to interpret the deep motives and experiences of the Egyptian participants. Self-disclosure does, however, entail abandoning the search for objectivity in favour of critical provisional analysis based on plurality of visitors' motives and experiences (Woitek 2020). As a result, my past personal events and experiences were embedded in my research reporting within broader processes, and better explanations garnered of visitors' motives and experiences.

6 DEALING WITH EMOTIONS AND SELF-REFLECTION ON SOME CHALLENGING MOMENTS IN FIELDWORK

McIntosh (2010) showed that researchers should acknowledge that, during fieldwork, unexpected situations will always occur. In the context of recreation and tourism, research shows that certain visitor or tourist responses are expected and encouraged, while others are unexpected or discouraged (Weeden 2005; Willson 2010). In turn, these three components (expected and unexpected circumstances or discouraged responses) collectively become essential elements of the relationship between the researcher and individual research participants, which is a key aspect of the research process (Willson 2010). My experience during qualitative interviews concurs that unexpected situations will always occur during the research process, and thus researchers should be aware of this certainty. Even the most well-prepared research projects are likely to encounter some unexpected circumstances with participants (McIntosh 2010).

One difficulty I encountered was managing emotional reactions during interviews, in particular during a variety of unanticipated situations. When preparing to conduct my first interviews with visitors, one of the museum staff members (number 9) had warned me that I should be prepared for 'sensitive situations' as I might be interacting with a 'group of Jewish visitors who are unique type of visitors'. Moreover, he asked me to be careful, especially as I was potentially going to ask them about particular exhibits and objects. This staff member clearly elucidated that the Israeli visitors have 'a special and strong bond' with different types of exhibit in the museum. He explained that they perceive many of the objects as part of their identity and religious history.

As the staff member had hinted, the four Jewish participants did reminisce about particular artefacts, and openly voiced their concern and displeasure at finding no mention on the exhibit labels of 'the patient endurance of the Jews', or 'of Moses and his life story', or of 'their experience of bondage in Egypt under the Pharaoh Ramses II' and of 'the subsequent wandering in the wilderness'. To illustrate, I will discuss

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one Jewish visitor's response, which is representative of similar reactions to certain exhibits. This female participant felt extremely upset by the museum guide's comments that 'there is no evidence whatsoever that the Jews were ever enslaved in Egypt or built the pyramids and that the pyramid building had ended before the Israelites arrived in Egypt' (interviewee number 31). Talking about her experience of the mummy of King Ramses II in the Royal Mummy Room, she continued:

> The Jews played an important role under the Egyptian Pharaoh. It's so upsetting when you hear the guide of the museum saying things that aren't true. He's actually ignorant. I believe that the Jewish people built the pyramids under the whips of the Pharaoh … Why [do] they [museum management] want to erase our history? We are part of this Egyptian civilization. Why don't they allow these objects that belong to us to be displayed in Israel? Don't we have a peace treaty with Egypt? Egypt should share these objects with Israel. It shouldn't only be owned by the Egyptian Museum. (Abdel Fattah 2012: 128)

The participant's words caused a conflict between maintaining an objective, professional role as an academic researcher and my own, personal identity. Having grown up in Egypt, I had not been taught a version of history in which the Jews had been slaves building projects for Pharaohs in Egypt. Thus, I was surprised at how the participant spoke in anger against the museum tour guide and how willing she was to talk about this sensitive subject and her own discomfort. Thus, this participant likely visited the museum precisely because she hoped to learn more about the Israelites' life in Egypt during that period of history, only to hear the existence of that enslavement flatly denied by the Egyptian guide. Perhaps she only felt comfortable expressing her thoughts and feelings about certain exhibits because I came across as modern, reasonably understanding and representing a Western, rather than an Egyptian, mindset. When the participant experienced a strong emotional response, in this case disappointment or anger, the first signs were expressed through her tone of voice. The question one may ask is: How did I react to being surprised? (which is the point of this section). My personal reaction to the situation is framed below as an example with lessons that other researchers can learn from.

Despite the participant's reaction, I remained calm, acknowledged her responses, made clear that emotional responses were fine in the interview, and encouraged her to say more about her thoughts and experiences of the museum or what underpinned them (Mitchell/Irvine 2008). I was also careful to phrase my comments in a neutral way that did not imply that her emotional response was inappropriate (Renzetti/Lee 1993). In this balance of being objective and being personal during the research, the objective, professional element was given priority – not out of a lack of being personal, but because the emotional reaction was too strong to deal with in the interview situation. I suppressed emotional reactions in the interview out of fear I would lose or alienate the participant if I showed anything less than professionalism (Johnson 2009). However, at the same time – to avoid immediately dealing with both the respondent and my own emotional responses to her words – I steered the interview in a slightly different direction. Hence, in this situation, the challenge is balancing when it is appropriate to be personal or objective. To sum up, during the fieldwork I chose to put being personal before being objective in an effort to gain understanding, build rapport and acknowledge the human-to-human relationship. Although in this particular case – where the participant's and/or my emotional response bordered on overwhelming – I fell back into the more objective role as a researcher in order to mask my own emotional response and attempt to keep the interview from ending abruptly and being unusable for research purposes.

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Kirsch (1999) argues that occurrences of relative discomfort in research are significant as they can encourage us to be more self-critical and sensitive in our interactions with research participants. My challenge during the interview centred on the denial of my own emotional reactions to the participant's claims and what these stirred in me about my identity (Egyptian) and religion (Muslim). Yet these moments of relative discomfort remain unheard in my research reporting, as they are in much of the published research. The result is that my thesis is devoid of embodied personal frustration, challenges and experiences. Scholars encourage researchers to carefully recognize their emotions and experiences in the field and in the final text since they can provide valuable knowledge and worthwhile insights into the topic (see Cope 2002; Dupuis 1999; Ellis/Bochner 2003; Everett 2010; McIntosh 2010; Reis 2011; Woitek 2020). The purpose of writing about these experiences in the final text is to provide feelings and expression to what would otherwise be untold (Willson 2010; Reis 2011).

Through a reflexive approach, we as researchers can understand more by considering the challenges we personally face during our fieldwork. We are, in the words of Everett (2010: 169), 'performers'; hence, reflexivity is a valuable satisfying practice that can reveal 'the various selves involved' (McIntosh 2010: 223). As researchers we are not machines that record facts; we are social beings bringing our feelings, thoughts and ourselves into our research (Dickson-Swift et al. 2007). Further to this, Hall (2004), McIntosh (2010), Ellis and Bochner (2003) and Reis (2011) ask us to question how our identity, religion and culture affect our behaviour and reactions during fieldwork and in our texts. There were critical moments during the interviews where I was aware of the difference between myself and the Jewish participants in terms of identity, religion and politics. Though I did not react outwardly, as this would impede my ability to maintain my role as a researcher, my reactions came when the interview was over. After the interview I revealed the following in my reflective journal:

> Today was incredibly stressful. I did not foresee the irritations that would be elicited from another Jewish visitor and the personal toll much of her responses had on me personally. For example, in her answers she used some of the exhibitions to ascertain the belief that the Jews built the pyramids. She also criticized the museum guide harshly and accused the museum management of wanting to hide some of the facts with regard to certain exhibitions. Besides, she stated that Egypt should share its Pharaonic objects with Israel. I felt happy because she truly shared with me her emotions and thoughts towards particular exhibitions without hiding them from me. Yet, I was never able to strip myself from my identity, my Islamic religion and my 'Egyptian self'. My interview with her remains a felt rather than a spoken experience. Emotionally speaking, I felt really disturbed. I had some doubts about some of her claims. Is it really true that the Jews built the pyramids? Is it really true that the management intentionally hide some of the facts concerning certain exhibitions that related to the Jews? Yet, the need to be able to complete my PhD thesis compels me to act as a researcher, an outsider, in order to be able to acquire insights into her motives and experiences and use her own expressions and words that can be employed to demonstrate issues about the roles of traditional museums. I masked my own annoyance and stayed happy and calm in front of her. This incident taught me a lot about interviewing, about taking, accepting, masking and digesting any challenges with equanimity.

I experienced unpredictable moments of emotionally disruptive sentiments unlike that felt by Buzinde's memories of her spiritual tourism experience in India which yielded a sense of inner joy or elation. Buzinde (2020: 7) regarded the recollections of her spiritual experience as a 'need satisfying episodic memory' that resulted in personal

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growth and wellbeing. By contrast, my disruptive thoughts during field research can be regarded as a ‘need thwarting’ that yielded ‘disinterest, ill-being’ and intense negative sensations (Buzinde 2020: 8). Reflective journals can reveal moments of self-awareness during the conducting of fieldwork (Reis 2011; Woitek 2020). My reflective journal demonstrates the dilemma of being a researcher and an Egyptian Muslim. However, the above account also provides rich insights into both the emotional engagement of a researcher and the depth of a participant’s engagement with the museum’s presentations and offerings. Together, they produce a reflexive tapestry for understanding personalized museum experiences as well as the inter-subjectivity of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Similarly, Woitek’s use of a reflective journal and analytical memos is purposefully intended for: highlighting the often absent voice of the researcher’s identity as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL); engaging relatively under-researched aspects of subjectivity and consciousness; exploring traditional methods to gain knowledge of the teaching of English learners (ELs) in the language classroom as well as students’ identities; and presenting a relational narrative.

The role of emotions operated on other levels during my fieldwork. For an Egyptian female participant, attending the museum and viewing specific artefacts reminded her of the past relationship and time spent with her deceased husband. The interview also revealed the therapeutic function of the museum for this participant who had lost her loved one. She explained that some objects brought back fond memories of her beloved in the museum. In this particular case, the participant found herself fighting back tears during the interview. In this situation I did not ignore the participant’s emotional reactions; to maintain rapport I extended emotional support (Mitchell/Irvine 2008). My reaction was: ‘Take your time I can wait for you’; ‘It’s okay to cry’; ‘Would you like to take break from the interview for a few minutes then come back?’ I attempted to cut short the interview and reschedule the remaining questions, but the respondent insisted on continuing.

As a result of this experience, I concur that sensitivity is needed when asking people to recount their experiences (Kirsch 1999). It is evident from this incident that engagement with participants may require emotional support from researchers, and that researchers have to be prepared to work with participants’ emotions (Glass/Ogle 2012; McIntosh 2010; Willson 2010). We, as researchers within qualitative research, are not detached, disembodied, neutral or dispassionate individuals, but instead humans trying to understand the phenomenon under study and cope with the research experience (Hall 2004). Our reporting needs to acknowledge that the often emotional responses of research participants are communicated to researchers who may offer them support during the research process (McIntosh 2010). The following field notes are adapted from my reflective journal:

> It was a bit stressful today. Today in the morning, I interviewed an Egyptian female visitor. She was in her late 50s. We both felt pretty comfortable which prompted her to talk about her deceased loved one. Her museum visit usually reminds her of her late husband. She got emotional and started sobbing … I felt like it was my fault that her husband’s memory came up – I brought all those emotions forward by asking her to tell me about her museum experience. But I believe she experienced a degree of healing through our interviews. I found that the tearful Egyptian female visitor is the easy one. I know that she’s upset and that is an emotion I can cope with. But the Jewish female visitor was the difficult one because of her complicated emotional claims but I just pretended I was calm.

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In this way, my internal reactions during the interviews appeared on a continuum, between those that are easy and those that are difficult. It is a key principle within qualitative interviewing to learn to be comfortable and calm in the presence of even the hardest emotions (Mitchell/Irvine 2008). Thus even participants' difficult emotions are 'allowed free rein, and participants retain their emotional autonomy, with no one telling them their emotional responses are right or wrong' (Munro 2014: 54). That said, in the researcher role, one needs to be aware of one's own emotional response. When the researcher's own emotions are sufficiently under control, offering emotional support to the participant may be appropriate. However, when the extent of emotional response warrants a polite but professional change of topic in the interview, reflection after the interview may be more appropriate to help in understanding and interpreting its content.

7 UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS RELATED TO RESEARCHER IDENTITY

The participants' perception of my identity also led to some unexpected situations. Although I was carrying out my fieldwork in my home country, Egypt, I spent as much time as I could (eight days) at the museum before starting the actual observations and interview process in order to build rapport and trust with the management and staff (Decrop 1999). Most personnel who were approached were happy to give me interviews, except for two staff members who were highly suspicious of my research project. For example, one female museum employee displayed scepticism of my intentions, especially the fact that my research project was financially supported by a Western university. I exercised caution to explain the aim of my project, her rights as an interviewee and the possible outcomes of the interview, especially when detecting that she was highly suspicious of me. It was made clear that she could withdraw from the interview at any time, with no explanation needed. I also assured her that my research would be publishable only on condition that she would not be identifiable (Patton 2014). Nevertheless, my request for permission to conduct an audio-taped interview with her met with a flat refusal.

This participant perceived me as a semi-outsider, and this caused her to be reluctant to participate in the interview. She saw me as an Egyptian researcher from a Western university, a non-resident of Cairo (non-Cairenes), an Egyptian (in terms of my shared nativity with the museum staff and domestic visitors) and a naturalized New Zealand citizen. My request to record the interview further accentuated my semi-outsider status, leading to her distrust and scepticism. She explained that she did not want there to be any record of her responses. Her reluctance was attributed to a belief that I would share the data with Western media, or even worse Israeli newspapers and news media, and report false information about the museum. Somewhat unexpectedly, she explained her refusal by saying that I could have been 'an undercover journalist ready to exploit the information'. Below is the relevant extract from my research diary notes:

> She was lukewarm and somewhat suspicious of me. She asked several questions that really made me feel uneasy and inadequate. Are you an Egyptian? Do you consider yourself an Egyptian or a New Zealander? Which university do you represent? Did they pay you to do this research? Why do you want to know about this museum? Why am I supposed to tell you about the museum? Why do you assume that I am going to tell you the truth about the museum? Why do you want to audiotape my voice? She did not feel comfortable when someone audiotapes her responses. She told me that I could have been [an] undercover journalist working for an Israeli channel or news agency and ready to exploit the information

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> and publish things she did not say. This was unexpected considering that I look like an Egyptian and speak perfect Cairene dialect. I did my best to assure her [of] the confidentiality of the interview and I explained to her the nature of my research. Besides, I also showed her my university ID and my Egyptian passport. However, in the end, she refused to participate in the research. She saw me as an imposter, a perfect stranger. She pushed her chair back from the table and walked toward her office. This was unexpected! This incident made me feel that I am a foreigner in my home land.

This incident raised another unexpected dilemma for me as a fieldwork researcher, which similarly remains unmentioned in my reporting: am I an insider or outsider? One may argue that, as an Egyptian, to the museum staff and domestic visitors I am an insider in terms of identity, religion and nativity. Yet, in terms of residency (having lived as an Egyptian for a long time in Western countries) and institution (representing a Western university), I am an outsider. I found myself in a situational time and space where belonging and identity had different aspects. Perhaps time and distance and the way of interpreting the participant's refusal to engage in the research had made me an outsider in the museum space. Buzinde's (2020) auto-ethnographic narrative is relevant here as she also had several moments of identity negotiation (nationality, gender, age and ethnicity) that required self-reflective processes and formation of new meanings that transcended (or rose above) original self-constraint. She negotiated her identity, gender and presence in various contexts during her experience of spiritual tourism at a yoga retreat in India; for example, when she replaced her Western clothes with the spiritual yoga attire so as to blend in. Buzinde engaged in experiential and self-reflective processes in a way that yielded a satisfying sense of self related to her spiritual tourism experience. Aamodt (1981) also draws attention to the fact that, although one may claim that he cannot take the outsider role in his own society, it is a misunderstanding to assume that in conducting research in one's own society and culture one may be perceived by research participants as a native. In some situations there is a risk that research participants may perceive the researcher as a potential threat or an imposter, thereby limiting access to information. Such situations may affect not only the data collected but also the researcher's understanding of him/herself.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current paper indicates a number of avenues for future research in museum-related fields. Future research should consider how heritage and museum researchers can provide scope within their research methods to let the research participants choose the ways of expression most pertinent to them in unearthing their deep motives, thoughts and feelings at the sites. It is worth exploring how novice heritage and museum researchers as well as aspiring PhD candidates can collaborate with their participants at every phase of the research process – from the design and development of research questions, through data collection and analysis, to interpretation of the findings. This collaboration process has the potential to not only offer the possibility of yielding more insightful understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, but may also serve to ensure pure and honest self-expression on the part of the research participants, with non-interference from the researchers.

Future studies also could fruitfully explore how researchers can use the different theories around emotion management strategies (that is, affect control theory, coping theory, dramaturgical theory, exchange theories, symbolic interactionist theory and

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affective labour theory) within heritage and museum studies, given that the researcher and participant may unwittingly steer conversations towards topics that could be enormously stressful and emotionally taxing for both parties. Emotions are central to the experience of visiting heritage sites and museums, and feature in the most unexpected and ordinary settings (Abdel Fattah/Eddy-U 2019). Schorch (2010) briefly noted that the emotional nature of the researcher's interactions with participants at museums and heritage sites is often ignored in the literature, and yet researchers always seek to produce emotional responses in visitors. In this sense, one may recommend that museum and heritage researchers need to explore and embrace emotion management strategies since the embodied experiences brought about by engagement with heritage sites and museums can have unexpected effects on researcher–researchee interactions; for example, if the researcher focuses the interview on trying to understand traumatic, controversial or painful historical events.

Other areas for future research can adequately explore three wider questions. First, can supervisees share with supervisors their invisible, hidden and perhaps even repressed (other) 'self' or voice when supervisees hold different cultural, political and religious perspectives to those with whom they work and collaborate? Second, how can such sharing between academic researchers and supervisors shape knowledge creation in the study under investigation? Third, how can supervisors and human research ethics committees protect or support the emotional challenges of supervisees during the data-collection stage? There is an eerie silence in heritage and museum visitor studies as well as tourism scholarship about ensuring the emotional comfort of supervisees. Typically, the focus has been on protecting research participants from physical, psychological and/or emotional harm. But it is also important to consider in what ways institutional ethics committees for tourism, heritage and museum management studies can outline tactics and methods for managing supervisees' emotional challenges in order to ensure that interviews with research participants are fruitful.

Finally, another avenue for future research is to use visual data, in addition to interviews and observations, to provoke feelings that may allow the reader to engage him/herself with the material presented in a more embodied and meaningful way. While different academic disciplines such as education (Woitek 2020), psychology (Buckle/Corbin Dwyer 2019), tourism studies (Cederholm 2004; Balomenou/Garrod 2019), sociology (Becker 1995) and geography (Rose 2008) have a longstanding interest in utilizing visual representations in research as a means of communicating and stimulating emotions and feelings through the provision of an affective context, researchers in heritage and museum studies (Camp et al. 2000; Schorch 2010) have been slower to join the application and exploration of these methods. The implementation of visual approaches and the practices in which it created distinctive advantages in different academic fields can be transferable and relevant to heritage and museum studies, providing the opportunity to enhance and augment quantitative and qualitative research. Visual images help create ambience (Balomenou/Garrod 2019) and can serve as representations of emotional/embodied aspects of heritage and museum experiences (Woitek 2020). Further research into all the issues outlined above is warranted and needed.

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