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# Situating the self in religious tourism research: An author's reflexive perspective

## Abstract

*This paper reflectively examines aspects of the author's journey as an academic researcher and research supervisor to discuss and recognise the realities of situated knowledge creation within the study of religion tourism. Specifically, I focus on issues which have emerged from my experiences of researching religious tourism, and the issues and ethical challenges encountered during the supervision process when advising students in the same field. Two wider questions are posed in the consideration of the researcher's and supervisor's journey: Firstly, can we research the lived experiences of others when we hold different religious beliefs to those whom we study and collaborate with? Secondly, what are the key ethical issues in doing so? In discussing these questions, drawing on the experiences of the author and two of her research students, the paper aims to turn religious tourism discourse 'towards the self' in the hope of engendering further consideration of reflexivity within this field of enquiry.*

## Keywords:

*reflexivity; religious tourism; spirituality; subjective experience*

## Introduction

Recent literature has demonstrated an intensifying challenge within the tourism academy to advocate the situated or subject-centred nature of knowledge within the research process (see for example, Ateljević, Harris, Wilson & Collins, 2005; Dupuis, 1999; Everett, 2010; Feighery, 2006; Hall, 2004; Harris, Wilson & Ateljević, 2007; Tucker, 2009). These works have sought to persuade tourism researchers to write themselves into their work in order to "challenge methodological orthodoxes that have previously evacuated the researchers' voice" (Everett, 2010, p. 161). Herein, any tourism research journey is effectively one shaped by the autobiography of its author and the impact of his or her identity, and the emotions, values and beliefs he or she takes into their research. Indeed, the identification of 'self' is integral to reflexive approaches to research in order to 'situate' the research (Hall, 2004).

Telling the stories of ourselves as private individuals and tourism researchers, rather than just speaking for others, is argued to be an enlightening process that illuminates the knowledge creation process and positions our research within our own epistemo-

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logical journeys (Everett, 2010; Feighery, 2006). Reflexive practices "emphasise the agency of the researcher and the researched, and the dynamics of their intersubjective relationships" (Harris *et al.*, 2007, p. 42). Thus, reflexivity may also offer opportunities for 'a politics of articulation' or 'ethics of representation' (Feighery, 2010, p. 273). Reflexivity is an approach that I have come to value in my own research (McIntosh, 2008), and in the apprenticeship I seek to instil in my research students, if appropriate. However, many authors, particularly those referenced above, have described the rather lethargic and piecemeal response of the wider tourism academy toward embracing reflexive approaches in their research endeavours, despite reflexivity having long featured within social science research and among scholars working within qualitative paradigms (Botterill, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 2003).

The aim of this paper is not to describe what reflexivity is; the evolution and types of reflexivity are adequately discussed elsewhere (see for example, Everett, 2010; Feighery, 2006); nor is the aim to advocate a particular methodology in the pursuit of reflexivity; as Feighery (2006, p. 270) quite aptly states: "to do so, would deny the significant crossover in methodological practices within the social sciences". Rather, I take this opportunity to open the debate on reflexivity in religious tourism research and to critically evaluate how our situated position as individuals, researchers, co-researchers or research supervisors can shape knowledge creation in this arena. We are, in the words of Hertz, (1997, p. viii), 'situated actors' and active participants in the process of meaning creation. As researchers, we decide what to research, how it is designed and presented; research projects are therefore often very personal creations (Everett, 2010).

In discussing reflexivity in religious tourism research, this paper agrees with Feighery (2006) and Everett (2010), that it is important not to see reflexive approaches as offering more 'accurate' or valid accounts of truth. Rather, in contrast to the more common third-person accounts, reflexivity is a useful complementary approach that seeks to deepen our understanding of religious tourism through potentially uncovering new angles, insights or a fresh direction that may be effective in 'maturing tourism research' (Everett, 2010, p. 165) and take our research out of its 'safe boundaries' (Hall, 2004, p. 144). However, Feighery (2006, p. 273) warns that, "Though the reflexive practitioner may regard insights gained in the process as profound, others might regard them as pretentious, or evasive" and some institutional and disciplinary discourses may "disparage reflexive accounts as 'unscientific' (for example, that they do not report the 'facts')". However, adopting the practice of reflexivity allows a new direction of scientific enquiry to emerge – that resonant of Denzin and Lincoln's (2003) 'seventh moment' or 'narrative turn' – allowing the 'self' to appear in our religious tourism discourse through locating ourselves in our writings. As Tucker (2009, p. 459) succinctly puts it: "It propels us to search for further possibilities to be critical of and in our research practices". Otherwise, tourism is a force that can bolster "restrictive, monological, and heavily capitalized worldviews that tend to help concretize pseudocolonialist, urban-industrial, and pungently North Atlantic/Judao-Christian certitudes upon alterity" (Hollinshead & Jamal, 2001, p. 64).

A review of the religious tourism literature reveals evidence of the diverse beliefs and motives for visiting religious sites (Bremer, 2004; McGettigan, 2003; Shih Shuo, Ryan & Gui, 2009; Smith, 1992; Stoyanova, 2009; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Vukonić, 1996) and the differing perspectives of faith in the experience and presentation of religious tourism (Mansfeld & McIntosh, 2009; Mu, Li, Jian-Hong, Ji, Yan-Geng & Xiting, 2007; Ryan & Gu, 2010). Commonly, much literature on religious tourism and pilgrimage presents a Christian pilgrimage perspective (Clift & Clift, 1996; Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Jackowski & Smith, 1992; Rinschede, 1988; 1990; 1992; Shackley, 2001; Tsai, Hsiao, Chen & Huan, 2002), although other perspectives are increasingly evident (for example, Chen, 1995; Leiper, 1994; Long, 1979; Morinis, 1984; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; York, 2002; Zhang, Huang, Wang, Liu, Jie & Lai, 2007). The inherent differences among the paradigms of differing belief systems have also been stressed in the literature, for example, the distinctiveness of Buddhist thought (Ryan & Gu, 2010) and the Muslim ways of knowing and voice (Stonebanks, 2008). Thus, the religious tourism experience represents a hybrid of realities (Santos, 2003). Specifically, the narratives of sacred sites occur within the discourses of particular religious traditions, and those "tourists who do not regard themselves as members of the religious community ascribe different meanings to the place" (Bremer, 2006, p. 33). Sometimes, this difference is also evident among members of the same faith (Ron & Feldman, 2009) and those who claim different strengths of religious belief (Porja, Butler & Airey, 2003).

Despite noting difference, what are missing from these published accounts of the religious tourism experience are the differing cultural and religious perspectives and voices of the researchers involved – our human 'selves'; that is, how the knowledge production is situated in the personal. In noting the issue of who can and can't be heard within research reports, authors such as Hollinshead and Jamal (2001) and Feighery (2006) suggest that research has an invisible (other) voice usually hidden from the research audience; usually the researcher 'self' and the 'human self'. Without this perspective, arguably, the research process is not transparent. Of particular concern with regards to research methodology and religion, Stonebanks (2008) alludes to the lack of objectivity on the part of researchers studying Islam as most of the researchers come from a Christian background (yet, this is not explicitly acknowledged by the researchers). "In this atmosphere, the researcher is not only exposed to an experience that validates his or her own religious affiliations but, if not overtly taught against, can develop misconceptions over others" (*ibid*, p. 302). Thus, the important question is raised: Can (and should) researchers understand and appropriately represent the experience of others without misrepresenting or distorting their realities?

Clearly, ethnographic research has argued in the affirmative (Kirsch, 1999), and a review of the religious tourism literature suggests evidence of authors from different faiths and cultural backgrounds working collaboratively to expand scholarly understanding of religious tourism, although these authors generally do not disclose their own positioning. Yet, potentially, they may be researching a religious faith that is not

their own, or conversely, may in fact be an 'insider' and share the same faith; or, they may hold the same/different faith or culture to that of their co-researcher which may or may not be the same as the faith under study. One notable exception to the paucity of reflexive practice in religious tourism research, however, is the recent work by Ryan and Gu (2010) who illustrate the tensions of different cultural perspectives and voices of interpretation of a Buddhist festival in China from the pairing of authors of mixed culture and background. Locating the researchers' own interpretations and experiences into the research data, the authors describe a 'partially understood' Buddhist event through the lens of western education and understanding on the one hand, and a Chinese cultural perspective and training, generally divorced from the Buddhist traditions displayed in the festival, on the other.

Despite the general paucity of reflexive consideration and articulation of religious differences and subjective knowledge creation in religious tourism research, Indigenous peoples, around the world, are becoming ever more vocal about the implications and negative impacts of research conducted, primarily by non-Indigenous people, on their lives, cultures and experiences (Higgins-Desbiolles & Russell-Mundine, 2006). As such, Indigenous peoples are now claiming a new research space and developing an Indigenous standpoint theory that is empowering, seeks to create change and, most importantly, integrates Indigenous understandings of knowledge creation into research methodologies (ibid). Specifically, the researcher must consider how the research benefits and promotes self-determination for participants and avoid being judged in terms of neo-colonial paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In achieving this, Smith (1999) explicitly questions the right and motives of non-Indigenous researchers and the relevance of mainly Euro-centred research methods. For those non-Indigenous researchers who aspire to ethical engagement in Indigenous research, this can be a thorny issue. Such researchers must ask themselves ethical questions, for example, who does the research? For whom? For what purpose? Who will benefit? (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Smith, 1999). These same questions have been pertinent among feminist researchers (see Kirsch, 1999).

Arguably, the same questions above apply to a research process that seeks to understand any 'other' we might study, including that of differences in religious belief or subjective experience of religious sites. And if, then, research practice and ethics rule that we can study and co-research with those who hold different religious beliefs to our own, what ethical responsibilities do we have to our research participants and wider audiences? Do we have an ethical responsibility to share our own religious views and beliefs? What are the ethical dilemmas we encounter in conducting religious tourism research? How do we capture subjectivities through the methods we employ in our research? Do we know where misunderstandings or differences may occur? Do we seek to learn the religious language of our co-researchers or those whom we study? Do we respect a co-researched process that is beneficial to our participants? This paper argues that these questions can be effectively raised through a reflexive discourse that seeks an open-ended multi-voiced epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hall, 2004) and

wherein researchers' acknowledge their own voice, values and subjectivities within the research (Stonebanks, 2008).

From this epistemological standpoint, this paper thus seeks to make a contribution to understanding how religious tourism knowledge is situated and interpreted by the researcher drawing on moments of questioning by the author during her journey as an academic researcher and research supervisor. In doing so, this paper is quite purposeful in its interchange between the use of first and third person in its style of writing (Ryan & Gu, 2010). Whilst only limited questions and experiences are able to be shared here, Feighery (2006) reinforces that the reflexive approach requires continuous, intentional and systematic self-introspection – both on the part of the researcher and of his or her relationship with what is being researched - which starts even before the researcher enters the field and continues throughout the writing of the research stories. It requires reflecting on the emotional issues raised throughout the research process and how these shape the final research reporting; perhaps writing in a different way and describing and questioning factors that influenced the research process to pay due respect to the beliefs of the people we study. As Stonebanks (2008: 303) argues, this "does not necessitate that researchers be experts in theology; rather, it requests that they venture into the counter-narrative free of their own possible miseducation and be open to another way of knowing". Inherent in this approach, however, is the recognition that knowledge is value laden; the process of giving voice to other is never neutral (Hall, 2004; Tribe, 2009). In short, through our research, we need to become more situated as well as good listeners in order to avoid assuring knowledge.

### **Situating the author**

I am a secular white western woman raised in England and now working within tourism academe with an interest in understanding the lived experiences of others, especially through interpretive and critical approaches to research. As a trained life counsellor, I also have an interest in understanding the core values that individuals hold and the ways in which individuals seek meaning in their life. I come from a non-religious family, although my parents like to acknowledge themselves as Church of England. Thus, I have had relatively little exposure to the institutional nature of religion throughout my upbringing. Yet, throughout my career, I have found myself co-researcher or supervisor to research centred on issues of heritage, religion and spirituality. Below, I share examples of some of the issues arising from moments of my research journey. In particular, through reflection of the conversations and advice I have given my research students, I draw out moments of my own positioning within this creation of knowledge, and also demonstrate two of my student's own reflexive engagement in their thesis research.

### **Reflections of the co-researcher and research supervisor**

Who I am as a person and my own life experiences have influenced my research path. Throughout my research career, I have engaged in interpretive and critical research approaches that sit comfortably with my interest in exploring the values and subjectivi-

ties of others. Spanning a research period of some 17 years, I have undertaken projects to study the different heritages and beliefs of 'others'; for example, I have researched issues relating to Maori indigenous cosmology (McIntosh, Zygadlo & Matunga, 2004), the subjective experiences of tourists in heritage attraction settings (McIntosh, 1999) and conflict between hosts and guests of differing religious beliefs (Mansfeld & McIntosh, 2009) or other ideology (McIntosh & Bonnemann, 2006). Mostly, these studies have involved collaboration and partnerships with co-researchers of different cultural backgrounds to my own. My 'human self' (Dupuis, 1999) thus shaped the topics I have chosen to investigate, with whom and how I chose to collaborate, and the design, interpretation and presentation of data. Whilst I thought very carefully on each occasion about how I was going to approach the conduct of the research, and specifically, the partnerships in which I engaged, questions of should I be doing this research, and the ethical discomfort I felt in conducting and presenting research involving an ideology and personal value I had no intimate knowledge of increasingly began to gnaw away at me, especially as I sought to uncover the 'subjective lived experience' that 'emerged' from the data.

Similar to Dupuis's account of her own journey (1999), this led to my critical questioning of how as researchers we think about and conduct research, and how our 'self' may have influenced various aspects of the research. This had the impact of being the focus of discussion in a subsequent keynote address (McIntosh, 2008), and conversations I began having with my PhD students. In a similar vein, Tucker (2009) describes the experience of discomfort in her reflections on her ethnographic work in Turkey. She describes how, "Although uncomfortable, this incident at the conference was utterly useful because it pointed me towards a reinterrogation of the discomfort I felt during the encounter and, consequently, towards a recognition of my own researcher, and tourist, shame" (p. 453). Whilst collaborative research may be uncomfortable, especially if it seeks to study people whose beliefs are different to our own, or involves collaboration with co-researchers whose background and culture is different to our own, it is suggested that if one unpacks the inherent difficulties through ongoing dialogue between researchers and understanding the process as about "learning (about difference) *from* the Other, rather than learning *about* the Other" (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 471), then collaboration can be 'rethought' and reflections shared. It is such reflections that have had a significant impact on my research endeavours. "Throughout the journey both the researcher and the participants (or co-researchers) influence and are changed by the research process and together co-construct meaning through their interactions" (Dupuis, 1999, p. 45). This too influences the apprenticeship experience we have with our research students, as my reflections on the supervision journey with two of my research students below demonstrate.

### **WILLSON'S STUDY OF TRAVEL AND SPIRITUALITY**

Greg Willson (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of the ways in which eleven individuals found spiritual meaning in their life by interviewing them after returning from travel with a New Zealand tour operator, Hands Up Holidays, offering 'spiritual

tours'. Here, 'spirituality' is experienced as an individual transformative process (Zinnbauer, & Kadar, 1997); a subjective internalised reality, of which the public or social dimension (the objective, exteriorised level) is no more than a part (Santos, 2003). Greg commented on the emotional personal turmoil of engaging in phenomenological research to understand the spirituality of others whose worldviews or faith may be different to his own and becoming entangled in their particular life circumstances. He advocated the importance of reflexive practice and the support of one's research supervisor in 'objectifying' the research relationship.

Tucker (2009) argues that an understanding of one's own positioning helps researchers to understand how to 'choreograph oneself opposite the tourist' (p. 457). Indeed, Everett (2010) describes this as 'positionality' in the research process; that is, that our personal biography directly informs how we react when we investigate the world around us. Greg articulates his positionality in the thesis research:

*"As a phenomenological investigation, this thesis related closely to my own life journey... I, like most, have experienced personal difficulties in my life, and thus wanted to explore how spirituality gives individuals comfort during their own personal difficulties".*

(Willson, 2010, p. 5/6).

*"I continually explored my personal beliefs, and questioned myself about what it means to 'be me' throughout the entire phenomenological research process ... I kept a personal diary throughout the three years of the research process ... I made notes during all stages of the research reflecting on, for example, methodological and ethical issues, thoughts about myself and personal thoughts during the research process ... For example, one diary entry read: "The conversation today with my supervisor has challenged me to consider my positioning within this research. I am Christian and I need to think about what my faith means to me, and how this has influenced my research. I should not try and hide it, as I cannot hide who I am, and why should I?" The lengths of my diary entries varied but were compiled weekly and particularly after each conversation with the research participants. I read my diary entries on a weekly basis and share some of my entries throughout this thesis".*

(Willson, 2010, p. 77).

Perhaps here, as his supervisor, I became a vehicle for attitudinal change in asking him to consider the issue of subjectivity in his research practice. With this, however, comes an ethical question of how we prepare our students to rise to this task, in dealing with the perhaps unexpected, and in potentially putting in motion a situation that brings them closer (or conversely more distant) from the participants they inscribe in their research.

One of Greg's respondents, Laura, a 48 year old professional woman from New Zealand travelled to Peru with Hands Up Holidays in January 2008. She reported seeking "purpose in life". Laura has a strong connection with God and is a practising Christian and views herself as a very strong spiritual person. When asked about her reasons for travelling to Peru, quite unexpected by the student and supervisor, she expressed her

response as a poem or lyrical story as it was important for her to express herself in a way that showed how everything she does is guided by her belief in God. As such, she explained that travel is an integral part of her spiritual journey; "It's about my life journey really rather than just my journey to Peru". In her poem, Laura illustrates that she was questioning aspects of her faith, particularly in relation to the recent death of her younger sister to cancer, at which point she had begun questioning the role of God in her life. "Did it mean we didn't have enough faith? I remember saying at the time: 'It's not that I don't believe in God, it's just that I'm not sure whether I like him'. That was a defining moment for me". Other respondents in Greg's study chose to express their defining life moments and expressions of spirituality through, for example, the composition of a hymn, through blog entries, photographs or the recitation of scriptures.

Two questions are important here. Firstly, as researchers, do we offer scope within our research methods to allow respondents to choose the methods of expression most relevant to them in revealing their core beliefs? I would argue that mostly, we don't. Yet, there is increasing momentum for researchers to begin to collaborate with participants in all stages of the research – to co-engage in the process - from development of the research questions and design, to interpretation and reporting of data, if researchers want to ensure that their research contributes towards enhancing and not interfering with the lives of others (Kirsch, 1999). From a reflexive standpoint, then, we share a responsibility to write honestly about methodological as well as ethical dilemmas we have faced and how we attempt to address them through the co-engaged research that may see us 'entangled' in the process (as in Willson, 2010).

The second question is: how does the entanglement of research affect those involved? Of particular note to this paper, how does the uncovering of a respondent's subjective struggle or questioning of her faith, or articulation of life defining moments, affect the student conducting the interview? In the wider literature, Tucker (2009) alludes to the role of emotion, embodiment and reflexivity in the creation of tourism knowledge. Indeed, studies are increasingly attesting to the personal as well as religious purpose behind travel (for example, Stoyanova, 2009; Zahra, 2006), although the emotional entanglement of the researcher generally remains unheard. Further to this, Dupuis (1999) argues that reflexive researchers must recognise and account for the role of their emotions and personal experiences play in our research endeavours, and Hall (2004) asks us to question how our private lives affect the research we undertake. As Greg describes in his thesis:

*"I did not foresee many of the ethical considerations that arose during data collection. In particular, I did not anticipate the depth of emotional responses that would be elicited from certain individuals and the personal toll much of this discussion had on me personally... Discussion topics focussing on mental illness, death and other personal tragedies arose frequently and this was unexpected. I found the use of my reflective diary important during these times because through taking quiet time to reflect and write down my feelings ... I was able to minimise any personal stress that arose from this discussion. Further, at times I believed both myself and certain individual research participants experienced a degree of healing through our conversations." (p. 92).*



Kirsch (1999: xii) argues that moments of relative discomfort in research have value as they can "prompt us to be more reflective, self-critical, and sensitive in our interactions with participants". Yet, as research supervisors, we hold a responsibility to help support out students in that (perhaps unexpected) journey. Similar to Greg's experience, Dupuis (1999, p. 50) describes how, "As a student I had bought into the belief that we could remain neutral, untouched, unaffected by what we did as researchers. By taking on the role of the researcher, I was protected from whatever might happen during the research process, much like donning a shield in combat. We certainly never talked about the role of emotions in research and the consequences of doing qualitative research on the researcher. It was not until I went out to conduct my own research that I became very aware of the emotional aspects of what we do as qualitative researchers". Therefore, we perhaps need to stop viewing emotions as problematic in 'good science' and through our self-reflection examine how our emotions and experiences can instead inform us about other's experiences, or otherwise cloud our understanding of those experiences (Dupuis, 1999; Tucker, 2009). Furthermore, as our interactions with participants often involve developing a 'relationship' and possible mutual sharing of background information, religious beliefs or personal experiences with respondents, which may too be a source of emotion, a discussion in our research of the nature and quality of the relationship and interaction between the interviewer and those being interviewed is also important (Dupuis, 1999), especially in relation to ethical issues of how and when to 'close' the relationship. As Greg concludes in his thesis, sometimes the relationship with participants may be purposefully enduring:

*"Certain research participants periodically continue their communication with me. I feel that I have become close to these individuals; they inspire, interest and encourage me. Certain individuals who discussed particularly difficult personal issues with me have continued to converse with me about these issues; I have developed their trust and share a bond with them."*

(Willson, 2010, p. 204).

#### **WONG'S STUDY OF BUDDHISM AND TOURISM AT PU-TUO-SHAN, CHINA**

I noted very similar conversations during supervision meetings with another of my PhD students, Cora Wong (2010). Cora's doctoral research examined the perceptions of Buddhist monks and nuns towards tourism at the temples of Pu-Tuo in China. One of the holy mountains of Buddhism in China, Pu-Tuo is dedicated to the Bodhisattva of Compassion and is a site of religious significance to those of the Buddhist faith. It was clear from Cora's field notes that, in addition to our biography, our beliefs also influence the research process; they can invite us into 'a place of privilege' (Everett, 2010, p. 170). The following excerpt from her field notes highlights the rapport and affective engagement that can ensue between a researcher and participant of the same (Buddhist) faith:

*"I thanked Monk Wei Zhi sincerely for the fact that he trusted me and he shared with me lots of his experiences. He shared with me a lot of his personal feelings indeed. This monk behaved quite different from Monk Xin Xia or Monk Qi Ming in the sense that he was much too shy to talk to people; yet, he was also much more genuine and much*

*more willing to let me enter his inner world. I felt very happy because he truly shared with me what difficulties and ridiculous questions that he as a junior monk had encountered with tourists. During the sharing, I felt strongly how my emotion fluctuated. I felt happy when I saw him to be happy, like when he gave all his water to the old man, I saw satisfaction on his face. I also felt sad when I listened to how he was mocked by visitors and badly treated. He brought me into his inner world where I can find his very genuine human emotions and that certainly is very valuable to me. In fact, before we Buddhists can step forward into the world of the sacred, we should always treasure and preserve the feelings and emotions that we truly have when we are still in the world of the profane."*  
(Wong, 2009, p. 32)

Whilst Cora's reflections in many respects echo the emotional entanglement similarly experienced by Greg, there is also evidence of an intimate reflection of the faith ("we Buddhists") she shares with her respondent. Furthermore, Cora's field notes exhibit instances where she reflects critically, or questions, the responses of her Buddhist participants:

*"Throughout the conversation with Monk Xin Xia, I realised that the way he perceived the tourism world and visitors at Pu-Tuo was quite different from the one of the young Monk Wei Zhi. Monk Xin Xia always applied Buddhism theory in answering my questions. I guess it probably has to do with the fact that he studied in the Buddhist Institute for four years when he was only 19 or 20 years old. It is not surprising that someone who has received formal Buddhist education will have such ability. There is no doubt that Monk Xin Xia has acquired a lot of knowledge in Buddhism and therefore he always used Buddhism to support his interpretations. Yet, I have some doubts about some of his answers. I do not know whether he is deeply buddhalised and has achieved certain enlightenment; therefore I can no longer find much human emotional flows during his conversation. Is it really true that there is no differentiation between happiness and unhappiness to him? Is he really so deep that he understands the theory of emptiness, attachment and detachment so well, that he has such a kind and big heart, that he can take, digest and accept any challenge with absolute equanimity. I am still a little puzzled about that."*

(Wong, 2009, p. 41)

Critical reflections are important in reflexive approaches to research if the researcher's identity and agenda are acknowledged in how they shape the research narrative (Kirsch, 1999). For me, as an 'outsider', the above accounts provide rich insights into both the emotional engagement of a researcher and the uncovering of Buddhist thought in relation to tourism. Together, they produce a 'reflexive collage' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) for understanding religious tourism and the inter-subjectivity of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. However, as a non-Buddhist, it remains a challenge for me to fully comprehend the implicit sensitivities involved here in the co-engagement of research and Buddhist beliefs. Thus, as a supervisor, I rely more heavily on the reflections and embodiment of my student to shape and interpret the research narrative, advising at a distance, rather than trying to advise and potentia-

lly 'enforce' a particular interpretation style onto the process. Rather, the importance of advocating a reflexive approach gives the student confidence in this regard.

Reflexivity can also reveal moments of self-awareness within the research process and thus, a supervisor needs also to guide the student in dealing with this – as noted above, for example, with support for moments that can be unexpected. As Cora's field notes demonstrate, the dilemma of being a researcher and person of faith can unravel within the research context:

*"Emotionally speaking, I also felt a bit nervous on that day too. It is because as a Buddhist, having a chance on that day to join a puja to celebrate the Buddha's birthday, I should have been very focused while chanting the holy mantras. Yet, the need to be able to accomplish my PhD study forces myself to act as an outsider, a researcher, in order to be able to observe what was going on, how monastic members reacted and betrayed their emotions on their faces when they encountered such a challenge. If I had simply focused as I usually do, I would not have been able to do any observation. I would not have been looking around but I would have just closed my eyes and immerse myself in the meditation and visualisation. I do not think that this would have helped me much in my research. Therefore, in the puja I actually did not really chant the script with my heart; it was only my mouth that was moving. I felt I must do something and thus at night on that day, I prayed for two hours to compensate for my 'deception'."*

(Wong, 2009, p. 55).

As researchers we perhaps become 'performers' in the research process (Everett, 2010, p. 169); thus, through a reflexive approach, we might also need to negotiate the challenges we personally face in doing so. What is clear is that when we recognise the situatedness of our own position, presence and impact on our research and those we research, we might feel the impact of our research surroundings on us (Everett, 2010). As a result, the presentation of our research, or choice of future research projects, may also become negotiated – for some, that may mean the avoidance of such 'confessional' style of writing (Hall, 2004). Yet, the result of this is the process of knowledge creation devoid of the embodied personal challenges, confrontations and experiences of its authors. Rather, for me, reflexivity is a rich rewarding process that can lead to greater insights into the phenomenon of religious tourism research and the various 'selves' involved.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed issues and realities associated with the situated or subject-centred nature of knowledge creation in religious tourism research. Situating myself in my research endeavours, I have, in particular, drawn on my experiences of supervising the work of two doctoral students, and their reflections on their own research, to: firstly, demonstrate the intentional self-introspection and inclusion of the self in the research process and the rich insights that a reflexive approach can bring; secondly, to highlight the impact of the emotional entanglement in the research process for both the researcher and participant and to advocate the use of reflective

journals or field notes to support researchers in their reflexive journey; and thirdly, to shed light on the co-engaged process of religious tourism research through raising an understanding of potential religious or cultural differences or similarities and the journey that may ensue towards understanding the phenomenon and people we choose to study. Potentially, a reflexive approach to research may lead us to write the findings of our research in different ways, for example, through weaving our own religious narrative and personal experiences into the religious tourism research we report, and to advise our students to similarly embrace a reflexive tone in their thesis that is outside of the 'safe space' of the methodology chapter (Feighery, 2006).

As I conclude this paper, I sit reflecting on my present situation; that I am seven months pregnant with my first child is the most influential aspect of my life at the time of writing. As such, I reflect on the balance I must now achieve between my academic endeavours and those that are about to have an even greater affect on my life and way I see the world. I thus feel it important to acknowledge not only how my own research journey has been shaped by my present biography, but also that of my future, unexpected experiences. As this too will be the journey for other reflexive researchers. Certainly, 'revealing oneself is not easy' (Hertz, 1997, p. xvi), but through reflecting on moments of my own journey, this paper hopes to encourage others to increasingly accept the notion of 'self' in the research process through giving greater engagement to authorship and personal voice in research endeavours, especially those concerned with examining the religious or spiritual beliefs that may be at the core of who we are and how we seek meaning in the world – both of ourselves and the selves we seek to study.

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