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# **Navigating tourism ethnographies – Fieldwork embroiled in time, movement, and emotion**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper we reflect on the challenges of ethnographic fieldwork in tourism research. Specifically, we discuss the intense, messy and complex dynamics of doing (tourism) ethnographic fieldwork, highlighting how key challenges have affected us as researchers, our practises, relationships, and experiences in the field. Our reflections are illustrated considering respectively our research experiences of mountaineering in the Himalayas, walking tourism in China, horse-riding tourism in the UK and volunteer tourism in Peru. Although these fields have very different social and geopolitical contexts, we experienced similar issues. Our most commonly experienced challenges include time limitations, having ‘enough data’, accessibility to the informants and rapport-building. Through the discussion of these challenges, we unpack the often conflicting emotional contours of fieldwork which are commonly experienced but rarely spoken of. With this paper, we seek to open critical debates on the emotional aspects of tourism research which may be particularly useful for novice ethnographers and scholars constrained by the institutionalised pressures of academia.

**Keywords:** tourism ethnography; emotion; mobility; transience; fieldwork reflections; participant recruitment

## **Introduction**

Ethnography has long been associated with anthropology and sociology. However, the use of ethnography has also become increasingly prominent in tourism scholarship.

Different ethnographic approaches in tourism include visual ethnography (Haanpää et al., 2019), netnography (Jeffrey et al., 2019), autoethnography (Mair and Frew, 2016); ethnotheatre (Mura, 2020) and partigraphy (Jensen, 2020).

The increase in ethnographic studies within tourism is connected to the ‘critical turn’ during which the appropriateness of Western systems of knowledge and traditional, positivist approaches to developing tourism knowledge started to be interrogated and challenged (see Ateljevic et al., 2007; Ateljevic et al., 2013; Morgan et al, 2018). In line with Ivanova et al.’s (2020) call for more robust considerations to be given to co-creative and experiential methods in tourism studies, which is positioned to critique and disrupt the above noted epistemologies (e.g. Wilson et al., 2020), more reflexive and critical ways of conducting ethnographic studies have emerged (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019). In this respect, Stephenson and Bianchi (2007) have argued that ethnographic research is uniquely suited to highlighting the nuances and complexities of tourism development from a community and individual perspective, offering opportunities to explore “micro-experiences of the macro-dimensions of tourism development” (p. 10). Thus, the value of ethnographic research for the study of tourism is well substantiated.

With the critical turn advocating for the (re)positioning of the researcher’s self at the centre of the research process, as intrinsically interlinked with the field and the researched, positionality and reflexivity became paramount in (tourism) ethnographic approaches. Sustained interrogations of the self, of its multiple, subjective and inter-

related positions (and the implications of these relations) included also questioning the nexus(es) between tourism and the contemporary global economy, neoliberal development, social justice, and political power relations (Bianchi, 2009). As a result, recent and more critical ethnographic approaches have sought to explicitly include the self in the doing and writing of ethnography (see, for example, Kennedy et al, 2018; 2020). In hermeneutic phenomenological considerations this conjunction between the self and the “entire research assemblage” (Kennedy et al., 2020, p.2) enables a deeper understanding of how lived experiences, ourselves and others (however conceptualised in ethnographic approaches) shape research.

Emotions and affect necessarily form a crucial part of these ethnographic research assemblage (Prus, 1996), as they are integral forces for how we come to know and perceive the world (Ahmed, 2004). There are a variety of relevant and multidisciplinary reflexive authorial accounts dealing with the emotional contours of ethnographic research in fields such as organisational research (Gilmore & Kenny, 2015), queerness (Rooke, 2009), migration (Wajsberg, 2020) or nursing (Pellat, 2003) addressing issues such as exhaustion, self-care and frustration. In tourism too discussions concerning the emotional challenges of conducting ethnographic research, as well as the epistemological ramifications of an emotionally situated field researcher have recently gained some attention (e.g. Farkic, 2021; Sharma & Rickly, 2018) but remain limited within this field.

Following Hammersley’s (2006) argument that ethnographic research and its challenges are highly context-driven, we seek to further these discussions by focusing on the specific challenges of ethnographic fieldwork in tourism arising from the transience and hypermobility of researcher and researched, and their interplay with the ethnographer’s emotionality. We explore these challenges based on reflections on our

own fieldwork, and how these in turn affected us as researchers, our experiences and our practises in the field. By reflecting on our respective ethnographic fieldwork, we seek to advance discussions of emotional and epistemological reflexivity in tourism studies (Ali, 2011) which, we argue, can give readers critical insight into moments, times, places, experiences, and people which have influenced, shifted, or somehow tilted the process of knowledge production. Particularly, we wish to offer a starting point for novice ethnographers in tourism, or for those scholars constrained by the institutionalised pressures of academia, to consider that ethnographic research is an intense, complex and intrinsically human experience, which is far from the clean process often indicated in textbooks. Thus, we also hope to build other ethnographers' confidence in the knowledge that fruitless undertakings, missed opportunities, rejection, and other 'failures' are part and parcel of tourism ethnographic fieldwork.

We begin by briefly reviewing how issues of transience, mobility and emotionality have been discussed in the wider ethnographic literature, before turning to our own experiences as ethnographers. We reflect on the particular challenges arising from the interplay between hypermobility, temporal transience and emotionality through short vignettes from our respective fieldwork spanning mountaineering in the Himalayas, walking tourism in China, horse-riding tourism in the UK, and volunteer tourism in Peru. These are then drawn together, to discuss why we consider challenges associated with transience and hypermobility to be amplified within tourism ethnographies specifically, and how each researcher's emotions have, in one way or another, been involved in the process of knowledge production.

### ***Transience and Mobilities in Ethnographic Research***

Context-specific, spatio-temporal complexities are cornerstones of ethnographic fieldwork considering how the ethnographic field is both a spatial and temporal construct (Daalsgard & Nielsen, 2013). Across disciplines, issues of mobilities, transience, time limitations, and spatial dispersion of participants have featured in ethnographers' reflections on their associated challenges and resulting implications for ethnographic research practises (e.g. Marcus, 2013; Mortensen, 2017; Pink & Morgan, 2013; van Dujin, 2020). These have, for example, revolved around the impact of differentiated cultural conceptions of time and interpretations of time that the ethnographer has to negotiate in their fieldwork (Otto, 2013), conflicting and competing temporal dispositions of researcher and researched (Elliott et al., 2017), or dilemmas derived from competing requirements for time-efficient production of research outputs marking the contemporary academic landscape versus the traditional understanding of ethnography involving long-term sustained fieldwork. Regarding the latter, tight temporal constraints of research funding and a neo-liberal emphasis on regular production of research outputs have been argued to make long-term sustained ethnographic fieldwork an increasingly rare option outside of (some) doctoral studies projects (Amrith et al., 2008; Daalsgard & Nielsen, 2013; Neves et al., 2018). Partially in response to this, new ethnographic forms, such as short-term ethnography (Pink & Morgan, 2013) or temporal strategies such as Jeffrey's and Troman's (2004) intermittent, recurrent, and compressed time modes have been developed. Although such new strategies and approaches offer valuable pathways to working within given temporal limitations, time restrictions remain a challenge with methodological and logistical implications. Shannon (2017) for example, illustrated how her limited time in the field (three months), lack of familiarity with the social setting and an outsider status, led to significant difficulties in participant recruitment

and rapport building, resulting in a “drive-by ethnography” (p.19). Even when having successfully recruited and built trust with participants, participants may change, cancel or forget previously made arrangements, leading to a sense of frustration and anxiety as ethnographers find themselves under pressure to ‘finish’ fieldwork on time (e.g. Marcus, 2013). Reflexive engagement is required to elucidate how such conditions affect our practises as ethnographers in the field, the relationships we build with participants, and ultimately the knowledge that is produced. For example, Elliott et al. (2017) deliberate how they would at times attempt to assert “temporal domination” (p. 557) over participants, opening up questions regarding power relations between researcher and participant.

Participants’ spatial boundedness, dispersion, and mobilities also require attention in terms of their implications for methodological choices made and the kind of challenges they engender for ethnographic fieldwork. Kurotani (2004) remarked how her spatially dispersed participants, wives of Japanese expatriate workers, were only temporarily in the US and, therefore, did not seek to establish tight social bonds. Kurotani (2004) was, thus, unable to use common locales where prospective participants might congregate as access points. She found a solution in employing multi-sited ethnography, illustrating the methodological impacts of a community’s spatial dispersion and (im)mobilities.

Also working with highly dispersed participants in the health sector, van Dujin (2020) describes how she felt like she was “everywhere and nowhere at once” (p. 282), being unable to follow up on several potential leads of inquiry, causing concerns of missing out on important insights.

While issues of time and place affect ethnographic work across disciplines in a variety of ways, authors have pointed towards the specific challenges associated with ethnographies of transient and (hyper)mobile communities such as international

students (Mortensen, 2017), migrant workers (Crinis, 2012), seasonal workers (Lozanski and Beres, 2007), or backpackers (Sorenson, 2003). These communities tend to be unfixed, highly heterogeneous, and always in the process of becoming, as individuals enter and exit the community and the field frequently (Morensen, 2017). Ethnographers may find strategic 'contact zones' where meaningful and at least somewhat sustained encounters can transpire (see Graburn, 2002; Frohlick & Harrison, 2008). Reflecting on their ethnographies with backpackers and seasonal workers, Lozanski and Beres (2007) echo this experience of heightened logistical difficulties recruiting participants in such transient and mobile contexts due to a lack of key informants who could provide access to community members, constantly evolving memberships in the community, and participants leaving the field on short notice. Sorenson (2003) considered one implication of transience is the need to shift from sustained relationships with few participants to numerous, shorter, impromptu encounters with many. However, Crinis (2012) cautions that employing such strategies may result in a lack of immersion in the lifeworld of individual participants or groups. Further temporal constraints have been highlighted by Frohlick and Harris (2008) who discuss that tourism is a rare and brief pleasure-seeking activity making time spent as a tourist highly valuable to travellers. Thus, tourists may be reluctant to dedicate their precious leisure time to research participation (Harrison, 2003),

The literature illustrates that research on porous, transient and mobile communities poses particular challenges for ethnographers in terms of access, trust, and sustained engagement. Authors such as Frohlick and Harris (2008), Graburn (2002) or Sorenson (2003) have opened up discussions around the specific challenges of tourism ethnographies as well, yet the overall paucity of work addressing the implications for



ethnographic work derived from highly mobile and transient contexts such as tourism, as identified by Lozanski and Beres (2007), remains relevant.

### *Emotions in Ethnographic Research*

While publications reflexively engaging with the mobile and transient nature of tourism and resulting challenges for ethnographies are rare, even less attention has been directed at how these particular challenges can affect the researcher themselves and produce complex emotional entanglements during ethnographic fieldwork.

Ahmed (2004) notes how rationality, as the core ethos of enlightenment philosophy, was placed in a dialectic with emotions; after all, to be emotional is to have one's judgement affected. As such the consequences of enlightenment thinking have been that emotions are largely excluded from scientific thinking, particularly within positivist traditions. However, as the academy has become increasingly sensitised to itself as a culture—through the rethinking of its traditionally Western male-centred voice—it has come to scrutinise the limited repertoire of knowledges such a system can produce.

Denzin (2003) suggests that critical, reflexive, transparent, uncertain, and culturally polyphonic accounts can challenge ongoing colonial and patriarchal patronages which the academy itself has been bound up in and with. The inclusion of researchers' emotional reflexivity in ethnographic accounts is an epistemological tool to help researchers create transparent accounts which do not hide behind the presumed infallibility of the scientific tradition which “has disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies” (Conquergood, 2002, 146).

Thus, emotions-based research has gained traction across the humanities and social sciences, and more recently, tourism studies (see Buda 2015; Picard & Robinson, 2012; Tucker, 2016). Yet, the lens is rarely turned back on the emotional experiences of the researcher and their entanglements with the highly emotional process of conducting research (Pockock, 2015). Some exceptions include Farkic's (2021) discussion of discomfort and mental exhaustion while conducting ethnographic research in outdoor/adventure tourism, and Kennedy et al.'s (2018) work highlighting the complexities of having multiple roles (expedition member, friend, researcher) and positions (insider/outsider) while conducting ethnographic research. In the context of dark tourism, Sharma and Rickly (2018) describe the 'human costs' of emotional labour; burnout, feeling 'phony', 'guilt', and 'self blame' (2018, p. 49). While none of these papers claim to exhaust the topic of emotions and ethnographic fieldwork, they lend clear evidence to Prus's (1996) observation that ethnographic field researchers "inevitably find themselves engaged in various aspects of 'emotions work'" (p.186). He considered the varied nature of intersubjective encounters between researchers and research participants ranging from supportive to adversarial, and attended to the question of how emotions may be handled in the field, for example, through emotional management that projects a tolerable image to concerned stakeholders or to dissipate dissonances encountered between researchers and participants (Prus, 1996). However, in order to engage with any form of emotional management and debates in how far such is practical or, indeed, desirable, reflections on the *specific* challenges of our respective ethnographic fields, and the emotions invoked by the field and the many interactions we have, are needed.

In ethnography, where the researcher themselves is the main apparatus for collecting *and* interpreting 'the field', there is ample opportunity for emotions to colour the process. Emotions are integral to our sensing, interpreting and knowing the world (Ahmed, 2004).

Reflections upon the act of producing knowledge requires tourism ethnographers to be sensitised to the crucial question of what types of knowledge are produced in/through time constrained, high-pressure, exhausting, or emotionally complex scenarios.

## **Vignettes**

In the following sections we present short vignettes from each of our fieldwork experiences in order to illustrate various challenges of doing ethnography in tourism contexts. Our fieldwork settings were all very different, yet as the vignettes below illustrate, we experienced similar emotional challenges during our ethnographic research caused in part by the hypermobility and transience of the tourism context and, therefore, our (potential) research participants. While we acknowledge that these experiences affected our academic and personal selves long after we had exited the field (see also Sharma & Rickly, 2018), we focus here on the in-the-moment reactions, practises, concerns and reflections arising from them.

### ***1: Meeting the Minimum***

As a researcher in the field, the weight of the academy and my ambitions intended for that 'place' were ever present. The desire to simply 'do a good job' can easily translate as wanting to demonstrate thankfulness for the opportunity I'd been given, or even to be admired or respected, possibly congratulated for my efforts. Because of this, I pushed to conduct 75 interviews over 150 days of extremely challenging fieldwork conditions. The number crunching in the vignette below demonstrates how uncritically I reflected on the value of these exchanges that I was driven towards and into during my field work.

Nervousness has set in. I've done 33 interviews in Pakistan and 35 at Everest. Is that enough? I do the math, roughly 40 hours of audio recordings x 60 minutes x maybe an average of 40 words per minute = 96,000 words to transcribe (probably more), let's say 100,000. As long as roughly 20% of those words are usable, or let's say 10,000 words of interesting original collected material, then I think I have a thesis?

Part of this was spurred on by the following comment: “*Minimum 35 interviews ... for each case area!*” as had been suggested to me before embarking on my fieldwork journey. The words rattled around in my head on repeat, a constant presence during my fieldwork. Studying high-altitude mountaineering tourism on the world’s 14 highest peaks, my fieldwork took me through some of the most remote parts of Nepal and Pakistan to the Mount Everest and K2 basecamps; the point of embarkation for mountaineering expeditions to climb the world’s two highest mountains. A constant companion in my fieldwork was the weight and presence of the academy as manifested through those powerful and compelling three words of which the most pressing is the word *minimum*. That word made me *do things*, it made me *feel certain ways*, but more importantly, in the drive to meet the *minimum* I ultimately sought different types of encounters (and more of them) which had later consequences for the types of findings and discussions I could embark upon.

I trekked as high as Camp 2 on Mount Everest (at 6500 metres), through the notorious Khumbu Icefall (where many mountaineers have lost their lives) in search of interviews. I resided for weeks at these basecamps at 5000 metres above sea level where life is uncomfortable at best. The -20C nights turned my throat raw from breathing in the cold dry air. Exhaustion, and many days of poor nutrition and worse sleep make it difficult to feel outgoing at the best of times. Mountaineers, the people I’d come to interview (both workers and tourists), feel the same sense of exhaustion. When they aren’t on the mountain ‘acclimating’ to the extreme altitudes, they reside in the camp of their expedition company, ‘zipped’ into the tented privacy of small encampments cordoned off by barriers reading “company X clients only”. While these pauses in action provided an opportunity for me, these were also guarded moments for tourists who needed a refrain from the physical and emotional stress of the mountain. I felt the

constant pressure of the limited time I had to ‘meet the minimum’ and in this environment often my greatest struggle was with myself; feelings of shyness on days I didn’t feel emotionally competent, or brave enough to do the true leg work of ethnography—facing the crowd. A vignette from my fieldwork encapsulates these feelings well:

There is an ever-present social fear involved in this research. The fear of rejection, the fear of being viewed as an intruder or outsider. It is not to say that I am treated in such a way, however, the thought and pressure still exists. I feel that I have to be ‘on it’ for every conversation and cannot wander haphazardly into social terrain without being prepared. The exhaustion is debilitating, hampering mine (and others) ability to socially perform here. I feel slightly anxious sitting in the dining tent of my camp, as if I am not doing my job somehow. I feel as though I have to be patrolling about, hungrily searching for participants. Am I failing? Am I doing a good enough job?

Every missed or potential opportunity seemed a personal confrontation, a junction at which I’d have to prove who I was to myself by digging to meet the suggested benchmark. However, upon returning from the field, it was small passages in my journal notes that inspired me the most, moments of physically, emotionally immersed ‘knowingness’ that in some ways superseded what I could have possibly gained from an interview. It was the ‘not saying’ or the ‘not said’ that said everything.

It’s a 2 am wake up call, climbers are heading up the Icefall today before the sun warms the ice causing daily avalanches that we can hear everyday in basecamp. We sit in the stillness of the mess tent, listening to the repetitive hum of the diesel generators, the inaudible chatter of voices off in the distance, or the ‘pinging’ sound of metal climbing equipment which reverberates through the brittle silence. It is a moment of anxious apprehension, a tingling, expectant wonder. “It’s like it’s finally becoming real” someone had said during the team meeting last night. The biting cold is convincing enough, it is indeed real now. Nobody says a word.

Waking up at 2 am to see climbers off, to experience the apprehension of the morning,

to feel *in* it, and a part of it, was in some way underpinned by the time constrained nature of our time with one another. I acted as if, felt as if, my duty was towards every moment of the experience, even the smallest or most uncomfortable. But this too developed another ‘tension’, understanding *where, when, and with whom* the most interesting discussions may take place. Torn between the participants I had an established relationship with at my camp, and the opportunity to make new contacts, I often felt deeply conflicted. Time, and limited opportunities, created a tension wherein I struggled to understand how and where it was best to ‘spend’ those two crucial resources.

## ***2: Rapport and Rejection***

The mobile aspect of my research was an always-present companion. The walking tourists I encountered during my fieldwork in Southwest China frequently moved from one region to the next, rarely with a specified plan of how long they were going to stay in each place. I was also frequently on the move between different parts of the Ancient Tea Horse Road (ATHR) in search of participants and in the endeavour to explore the ATHR as a walking destination. These dual mobilities of participants and myself presented particular challenges for my ability to identify, approach and build rapport, attempts that regularly ended in failure.

I’ve been spending some time with a group of hikers over a few days, intermittently joining them for coffee, dinner, or a beer. [...] They had talked about their travelling in Yunnan and it became clear that hiking was a big part of why they had come. I started simply talking about my own enjoyment of hiking and mentioned here and there that I was doing research. I was trying to build rapport. That’s what all the texts on ethnography say you need to do. Finally, I felt that we had established just that and approached them about joining them on one or a few of their hikes. Jeany’s face fell and I panicked thinking I had asked too soon. But instead she explained that it would have been great to go on hikes together but they

were leaving Yunnan the day after tomorrow and had made plans for a bike tour tomorrow already. I had missed my opportunity.

Such encounters (or failures) were frustrating as I *had* been able to build the necessary rapport to gain further access in theory, only to later experience failure as my participants moved on. Constantly cognisant of the need to collect ‘rich data’, I frequently found myself preoccupied with re-visiting such missed opportunities in my mind, trying to determine when the ideal moment to broach a potential participant in my research had been. Duelling time constraints and the mobile nature of the walking tourism community vying with the need to be patient when building rapport, and the effort expended to gain access to certain participants underlie this challenge. It was often difficult to judge whether my attempt at recruiting new participants had any chance of success or whether it was going to be a “waste of time”. In my attempts to build rapport, sometimes over several days, there was always the possibility that my desired participants would simply move on. Such missed opportunities became even more upsetting when other potential participants simply denied me access to their walking experiences.

Still feeling the previous set-back, I decided to take my chances and asked if I could join them on a hike up Cangshan they were planning for the next two days, after explaining my research. Their responses seemed evasive (“uhmmm...”, “We don’t really talk much when hiking, so...”, “It’s kind of just to have fun, you know?”). I understood I was not welcome to join them for more than dinner at this point. But I was wondering whether I had broken the question too soon. Maybe I was too hasty after the previous rejection?

Once again, I had ‘failed’, this time after changing my approach in response to the previous rejection. The above encounter illustrates that in many cases gaining initial access to walking tourists in various enclaves such as hostels or cafes *did not* pre-

suppose a willingness to invite me on one of their hiking trips. These were of a much more intimate nature than simply sharing a coffee. Once on the trail, it can be difficult to get away from each other as ‘exit routes’ for both my participants and myself are reduced. While I understood this on a rational level, I still felt these rejections on an affective level, especially when comments implied that walking with *me* would not be fun. This situation reveals an important challenge for ethnographies in tourism: the potential for me to be seen as an intruder was heightened due to the temporal transience of the tourist experience. For many of the tourists I encountered, hiking in Yunnan was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, marking this time as highly valuable. This latter challenge came to bear explicitly in a third encounter.

I sat with a German hiker over coffee. We were talking about his travel plans and he told me he seeks out areas where he can go hiking. He is intending to travel to the Tiger Leaping Gorge next for a two-day-hike. I told him about my research but not asking him immediately whether I could join him after yesterday’s experience. Just trying to establish a rapport again. He pre-empted me though: “This sounds really interesting. I guess you might want to interview me too? I’m sorry but I kind of just want to relax and just enjoy the hike and nature. It’s just not something I want to do when on holiday.” [...] “I actually prefer hiking alone, too”.

I did not try to persuade this hiker after he had made his position clear.

Throughout my fieldwork, I had to abandon attempts at gaining access to people’s walking experiences. Initially, I carried these failures as burdens, coupled with the pressures of getting ‘enough’ in a constrained time frame. While I did come to realise that even such failed attempts did provide wider context for the life world of this particular community of tourists, failures and the emotional impact they had on me still caused me to change tactics at times and this became an important aspect of my ‘doing of research’.



### ***3: Intrusion and Exhaustion***

Over the course of one summer, I tried to find a ‘way in’ to the relatively closed social world of horse riders as they travelled round various sites in the UK for camps and competitions. I only ever encountered participants for a few days at a time, and always when they were away with friends and their horses, engaged in an activity they are passionate about and saved up their valuable holidays for. I was very aware that my presence was something of an intrusion into their holiday experiences and sometimes struggled to ‘read’ the situation effectively, to know when is or is not a good moment to try and approach and interrupt a rider on their holiday, as this vignette illustrates:

I move between the horse trailers, looking for someone else to speak to. It’s a hive of activity and so I stand back and watch, not wanting to disturb anyone as they make their preparations. By one of the large horseboxes, things are quieter, I think they are not riding until later in the day. Two women are sitting in foldable chairs, drinking tea, faces up to the sunshine. They don’t look like they’re doing much, so I think this is an ideal time for me to approach.

I walk over and am just about to speak when one of them looks at me, holds her hand up and says, firmly. ‘No’. She keeps her hand up in front of her – stop. I stop, smile nervously, mutter an apology and walk away, feeling chastised by her abrupt manner. I watch them from a distance and see that she talks to her horse in much the same way as she spoke to me. Firm, commanding.

After encounters like this I felt demoralised and had to force myself to carry on and approach someone else, smiling. I felt pressure from the knowledge that my participants were only going to be available for a short time, and also that they were there to enjoy themselves and so may not want to be interrupted by me and my research agenda. This required considerable emotional as well as intellectual investment to try and remain cheerful, friendly and proactive, even when I was rejected by potential participants.

Fieldwork can be exhausting, as the need to engage with people and try and understand their social worlds requires close attention, continual efforts to be attentive and the need to remain alert and aware of what is happening. Tourists are only ever in a place for a short time and are often only transiting through a particular space, visiting for a day or so, or on their way somewhere else. This heightens the pressure to engage with them quickly or lose out. I felt this pressure to take every opportunity to make connections and speak to people while I had the chance. Approaching strangers requires emotional energy, and sometimes I just needed a break. But taking a break felt wrong and like I was not doing my job properly, as a dedicated ethnographer:

It's my third day at the campsite and I've been up since 5am, watching the activities as the horse riders head out on their daily trails, speaking to as many people as I can, observing, making notes, constantly looking and writing. I'm tired. The need to continually approach different people who are just trying to enjoy themselves on a horse-riding holiday is taking its toll. I've been smiling constantly, trying to look approachable, interested, but not intrusive. Today is the last day and I do need to make the most of the time, there's more people to speak to, more things to observe before they start to go home. But I'm tired. A short break will help, I tell myself, then I'll speak to more people. I wander over to my car and sit in, leaving the windows open to let some air in. I begin writing notes, checking my recordings have worked, backing them up. It's been a good morning, research-wise. I've spoken to loads of people, taken photos, lots of good material. But it's so warm. I lean my head back against the headrest and close my eyes, just for a minute ...

**BANG!!**

What was that?! I awake with a jolt and hear a mixture of giggling and horrified gasps outside. In the mirror I see a horse's rear end quickly retreating. I get out of the car and rush around. The horse (with rider on board) is now bolting across the field, before the rider gets him under control and trots back over. "I'm so sorry," she explains, "I hope he didn't damage your car."

It turns out he did damage the car which now has the round imprint of a horse's bum-cheek in the back. Still, it was a physical jolt to remind me that time in the field is precious. The dent in the back of the car acted as a physical reminder to me to make the most of every moment. Before people move on and out of the field and my opportunities to engage with them and learn more about their experiences are gone.

I felt guilty if I took a bit of time away from the main action, as I was always hyper-aware that my time with these people was limited and I would only have one or two chances to engage with them. But sometimes I did need a break, even for a few minutes. This guilt was a constant undercurrent to my time in the field, feeling torn between the need to continually search people out and a desire to take a little break, rest and recuperate.

#### ***4: Social separation and Otherness***

During my ethnographic fieldwork, which took place in Cusco (Peru), I experienced emotional and physical challenges. These challenges made me reflect on my (multiple) roles in the field as complex, intrinsic and interlinked subjects of research and my feelings, including struggles, impacted the material collected. The time constraints of doing ethnographic work often intersected with my mental and physical exhaustion.

Being a volunteer, a tourist and a friend made me interpret and re-elaborate local narratives in a subjective and emotional manner. When my research experience started, I soon realised how difficult it was for Cusqueños to see me other than a *gringa*. This aspect had negative repercussions in the way I experienced parts of the fieldwork as documented in my research diary:

Cusco is a pleasant place but there are too many tourists. This is annoying because the way the residents see me it's just as a *gringa*...I live in the city centre and they always approach me to sell me something...it's annoying.

My position as a tourist, however, brought me to understand the ways Cusqueños interact with *gringos*, the ‘love and hate dichotomy’ experienced by residents towards tourists, as well as the residents’ and tourists’ spatial and social separations. The predominant perception of myself as Western tourist impacted the relational dynamics (at least at first) between myself and the informants:

They are nice people [in the shelter house], they didn’t ask information about me, they just explained what I have to do. [...] A mother was not very friendly with me; she was just ignoring me and not talking much. Time will be important.

The initial perceived separation between myself and some informants started to become less evident when the volunteering role was acknowledged as well:

This morning when I was changing the nappies, María told me ‘what can I do when you go?, who is going to help me?’...it was good, it means that she liked the way I worked and I felt useful.

Inevitably my perceptions of the ways Cusqueños interacted with me were part of the emotions, reflections and interpretations which constituted the material of this study. Some of my frustrations experienced during interviews and while working as a volunteer, were also recorded in my field diary. The exhaustion I felt whilst volunteering, for example, an important element which could have had an impact on the research:

It was my second day at the school. And nothing particularly relevant happened. Maybe I didn’t notice anything as I am still feeling pretty tired... Today has been quite tough at the school because the babies were crying a lot. Sometimes I stopped and thought ‘what am I doing here?’ I am exhausted and I don’t even have time to observe....

In the projects where I volunteered, I was mainly perceived as a privileged person who had much leisure time available. This resulted in feelings of frustration and anxiety, as a

reflection from my field diary shows:

Today has been very tough. I have done three interviews in total: I have started with the difficult ones at Asiri. I thought it was a bit easier really. I have interviewed Sonia and Nina [...]. I ended up in the morning being very frustrated...but on the one side I was happy to experience these types of difficulty as I think it's normal...on the other side – though – I thought: I spent so much time at the project for this?? So frustrating...but then – again – I thought, if I did not spend all this time there then probably I wouldn't have been able to observe...

There were times when I felt I could never be perceived as anything other than a tourist, as someone with much money and time available.

Cusco is a pleasant place [...] but I feel it is not the place where I want to live for a long time. There are far too many tourists. And that's annoying because the way the residents see me it's just like another gringa, no matter if you are here to work, to live or to do your research. Unfortunately, this has lots of consequences, such as conflictual relationships between and among tourists-residents. Many conversations I had with Cusqueños suggested that they think 'outsiders' have lots of money, time to waste and that life for them is much easier. Friendships here are difficult to build. And I am always an "extranjera". No matter what.

## **Discussion**

Our four vignettes illustrate some specific challenges of our ethnographic fieldwork. One key challenge we all observed was the duelling desire to produce deep insights into the communities we moved within and their lifeworlds, and the demand for efficiency and productivity placed on contemporary ethnography by modern academia. Across the four vignettes, the experience of anxiety resulting from academic and/or 'lifeworld' time constraints is palpable. Each vignette questions the ability to produce robust academic knowledge within given time constraints and resulting challenges for sustained contact with our respective communities. These particular challenges are however, not specific to tourism, and have been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Elliott et al.,

2017; Hammersley, 2006; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). In this section, we focus on particular challenges and their significance for emotional fieldwork that ethnographers are likely to face in tourism contexts specifically, as reflected in our collective vignettes.

A key issue is the pairing of various time constraints and the hypermobility of potential participants. Therein, the researcher's limited time in the field was coupled with the exaggerated mobilities of tourists, who moved in and out of our respective fields at high frequency. Lozanski and Beres (2007) brilliantly discuss the possibilities that arise from tourists' spatial and temporal transience in terms of gaining access as a result of open or non-existent hierarchies and researcher-tourists being well-positioned to be recognised as insiders to tourist communities. However, we also need to consider the constraints placed on our ability to gain access, the emotional feedback the researcher experiences from such constraints, and the ways in which such feedback affects field practises.

The inherent possibility, even likelihood, to miss out on opportunities as a result of tourists' often "fleeting presence" in one location (Graburn, 2002), becomes especially visible in Vignette 2 where the issue of timing during rapport-building and final participant recruitment comes to the fore. Reflecting on the significant time pressure when attempting to gain access and build rapport, a conflict emerges: as ethnographers, we understand the need to establish rapport and gain trust before trying to officially recruit anyone for our research, but as tourism ethnographers we are also aware of the likelihood of our participants moving on before we feel able to request participation. Moreover, similar to ethnographies with migrant workers (Lozanski & Berens, 2007), we usually have only one chance to 'get it right'. If an interview could not be arranged before the prospective participant moved on, no further opportunities with this participant were available. In comparison to ethnographic studies on more bounded communities (e.g. Bengry-Howella & Griffin, 2011) where rescheduling, and

even repeated interviews are at least possible, these opportunities are strongly diminished in tourism ethnographies. Thus, approaching, building rapport and eventually actively recruiting participants occur within short timeframes, adding pressures on the ethnographer to find the right balance the first time around. These may lead to epistemological worries as illustrated in Vignette 1's anxiety over where to 'best spend' crucial resources of time and opportunity which themselves may then lead on to methodological experimentations in the field, some perhaps initially more reactive than reflexive, as in the case of Vignette 2 experimenting with timing attempts to 'secure' participants during rapport building, and Vignette 1's exploration to higher camps on Mount Everest.

The hypermobility and transience of tourists also impacts on those tourism ethnographies focused on host communities, where this transience can be superimposed on the researcher themselves, making them more visible as outsiders. As Vignette 4 reflects, her positionality was often marked by an attribution of *gringa* status onto her, just another tourist among many, someone who is perceived *to have* the privilege of (leisure) time. This perception vis-à-vis her own hyper-awareness of the limited time available to her contributed to her frustration during periods that felt 'less productive' than hoped for. In this 'insider-outsider' dilemma (Sharma & Rickly, 2018) she is not alone, as each writer felt and expressed this in their own ways. However, in this particular case, due to her sense of commitment and duty towards the project/organisation, the dilemma of being an 'outsider' *felt* harder to deal with and as such came across stronger than in the other vignettes.

Time and transience also come to bear when valuing participants' time as tourists; each vignette expresses a sense where the research process is an interjection into an 'already-ongoing' backdrop that may not include us. Tourism ethnographers

need to reflect deeply on the value of tourists' time and the implications for ethnographic work that, by nature, may require precisely that. Quite visible in the vignettes is our sense and struggle with the fact that tourists' time and the quality of their experience is rare and cherished. The 'once-in-a-lifetime-ness' of the tourist experience heightened each of our concerns around becoming potential intruders given how the research process may drain a participant's time, energy, and emotions (Dennis, 2014). The 'intrusiveness' of the research process is heightened all the more due to the special treatment of tourism as a safeguarded time (Graburn, 2002). As we see in Vignette 3, tourism ethnographers need to be sensitised to the irreplaceability and perishability of the tourist experience and, moreover, try to empathise with those who share it with us.

This inherent challenge of time-value is further heightened when focusing on specific touristic activities, here volunteering, horse-riding, mountaineering, and hiking. Some tourism ethnographies explore a more loosely defined tourist community, such as backpackers (e.g. Sorenson, 2003), placing less demand on the ethnographer to gain access to one specific activity. However, many tourism ethnographies, including our own, are focused on niche activities that may act as defining social frameworks of the tourists' journey. In each of our cases, the experience arguably had a greater perceived value to our participants who may attain wider social and cultural benefits from being a voluntourist, Everesteer, long-distance horse rider, or walking tourist on the Ancient Tea Horse Road. Thus, these time and experience spaces become closely safeguarded and harder to access for ethnographers. As outlined in Vignette 2, tourists who were happy enough to have conversations over coffee did not necessarily wish to allow the ethnographer to partake in their hiking excursions, which were the primarily sought time-spaces to be accessed. In Vignette 1, even the time-spaces in-between the actual



climbing became highly valuable and guarded, albeit this time as a moment of recuperating and preparing for the next climb.

Frohlick and Harrison (2008) charge us to “attenuate our own presence so as not to disrupt these touristic experiences” (p. 6). What exactly such attenuation entails differs from field to field. However, regardless of the researcher’s skill in building rapport, rejection remains a likelihood, which brings us to our third key challenge. We all experienced, at times rather direct, refusals by participants. In Vignette 3, it was a “no” accompanied by a universal gesture to stay away, In Vignette 2 an indication that her presence on the trail would render the groups’ experience less enjoyable, in Vignette 4 being ignored by one of the mothers she was working with, whereas in Vignette 1 the added pressure of entering a private ‘zipped’ space illustrated the boundaries of particular groups of which he was not a part. Such encounters can be emotionally jarring for us as researchers. Participants have a right to refuse and no obligation to explain to us why they do so. Sometimes they do explain and it is not a particularly positive reflection of how we are perceived, and sometimes they are painfully brief and direct in their refusal to give us any time. As ethnographers, we have to remain friendly and approachable, but to do so we also need to prepare ourselves mentally for the often direct and, at times, personal nature of participants’ rejection.

This can take an emotional toll, especially as the rejections mount. Thus, allowing time for breaks and recuperation is needed, even though the need for breaks often stands in stark opposition to the drive to realise every single opportunity to be actively engaged in our community of interest. As Vignette 1 pinpoints, experiences of ‘failure’ often intersect with the pressures of *meeting the minimum*. The idea of ‘the minimum’ came to represent, for this researcher, quality, robustness, and accuracy. In this way ‘the minimum’ was a threatening presence which accused the researcher of

unworthiness. 'Self care' for ethnographic researchers in the field is often overlooked both academically and in institutional research ethics applications (Sharma & Rickly, 2018). Though steps are taken to ensure the physical safety of the 'lone researcher in the field', the researcher's psychological well being is rarely taken into account and even less so *after* the field work has been completed. In the above examples, we each were immersed in isolated, challenging and stressful environments, three of which lasted for roughly half a year. Unpacking *from* such experiences is stressful enough and for one of us it took over a year to recover from the field work experience both emotionally and physically. What each of the vignettes suggest above is that the researcher is emotionally entangled and woven into the research project *while in the field already* and that emotions are integral in the process of perception and understanding.

## **Conclusion**

As Sharma and Rickly (2018) note, while researchers may 'write themselves' into emotional experiences, discussions of how emotions affect the research process and interpretation are still lacking. In this paper we have offered four distinct vignettes which explore each writer's emotional experiences whilst conducting their research and have debated some of the sources which underpin these emotions. While challenges surrounding time and place in ethnographic fieldwork are not unique to tourism, we attempted to illustrate how the most fundamental characteristics of the tourist experience - limited temporality, heightened transience and exceptional mobility - amplify common challenges of intersubjective encounters on the affective level, to which institutional expectations provide the backdrop. We link these challenges and, indeed, failures, to the emotional entanglements of the researcher in the field, and how these permeate throughout the entire research process and later come to colour how the field itself is perceived, recalled, and written about. We do not suggest that ethnographic moments we have experienced in this context exhaustively illustrate the ways in which temporality, transience and mobility come to bear on emotional fieldwork in tourism, but rather that they illustrate how fundamental these issues are to

research practice in tourism ethnography at large. Although our field sites and research questions were all very different, we encountered similar challenges that are reflective also of the specificities of conducting tourism ethnography. We all experienced the anxiety of trying to ensure we engaged with enough participants in-depth to help us understand the tourism communities we were investigating, and the pressure to approach people and try and establish some kind of rapport quickly, before they moved on and out of our reach. We all experienced knock-backs and rebuttals, sometimes expressed tactfully, other times in more direct ways that caused us to question how we come across to others. Such rejection is a part of the ethnographic process, and is reflective of the other key challenge related to tourism ethnography: the value of tourists' time. Potential participants are only in our reach for a limited amount of time, but that time is highly valuable to them. In increasingly time-pressured societies, holidays are a precious commodity and so, understandably, many tourists do not want to spend some of that time answering researchers' questions and partaking in interviews. Tourism ethnographers thus face the added challenges of tourist transience/hypermobility *and*, very often, tourists' reluctance to open up their time and their highly valued tourism experiences to strangers (researchers). This does not make tourism ethnography impossible, as we and many other researchers have demonstrated, but it does make it difficult, intense and emotionally charged.

We argue that inadequate attention has been paid particularly to the emotional aspects of tourism fieldwork arising from these challenges. By sharing our own experiences of anxiety, failure, exhaustion and reluctance we hope to encourage other tourism researchers to be open about the emotional aspects of conducting research and invoke future discussions of epistemological reflexivity (Ali, 2011) in tourism ethnographies. We argue that the researcher's emotional experiences of conducting research contribute to how qualitative findings are produced, interpreted, disseminated and communicated. While not exclusive to ethnography, the emotional strains we have outlined above may be keenly felt by ethnographic researchers as they attempt to immerse themselves in the field for a limited and intense period of time. Acknowledgment of these emotional strains, in our view, is an important first step towards normalising discussions about

emotions as part of the interpretive lens of the researcher. We therefore urge other ethnographers to share their own emotional field experiences to demystify this aspect of fieldwork and help others, particularly novice researchers, to prepare themselves for some of the emotional challenges of ethnographic fieldwork, and to reflect on how these may shape their later writings and depictions of the field.

In this paper we have presented vignettes from four very different ethnographic contexts that illustrate shared feelings of anxiety, awkwardness, exhaustion, and isolation that had both emotional and physical impacts on us as researchers. We were not prepared for these impacts and had few opportunities to unpack them within academic settings on our return from the field, turning instead to our own individual coping mechanisms and support networks and often experiencing fatigue and self-doubt as we tried to make sense of our experiences. Reflecting back on our time in the field now at some distance, we all enjoyed aspects of the process and returned with interesting insights to help us achieve our academic aspirations. However, we were all deeply affected by those experiences and would have benefited immensely - personally and professionally - from support to unpack and make sense of those experiences. There is more that universities, and particularly PhD supervisors and mentors of early career researchers, can do to support tourism ethnographers in preparing for and recovering from fieldwork experiences.

Tourism ethnography is certainly challenging - both practically and emotionally - but we believe it offers an invaluable opportunity to explore different facets of tourism in rich and evocative ways. By being prepared for some of these challenges, we suggest tourism ethnographers can be better equipped to embrace the often conflicting emotional contours of fieldwork that can lead to rich and meaningful ethnographic encounters.

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