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Title:

Landscapes of desire: Tourists, touts and sexual encounters at the World Heritage site of Thebes

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Abstract: Cultural tourism capitalises on archaeological sites with World Heritage status on a global scale. The encounters of visitors from all over the world with local residents and other stakeholder groups, like local and international entrepreneurs, set off complex processes of interaction in which the physical and social space of the heritage site is negotiated, shaped and consumed. In a case-study from Luxor/Egypt, this paper investigates a particular facet of these interactions, namely sexual encounters between tourists and members of the local community. It delineates the economic and social conditions of this phenomenon and discusses the role it takes in the production, perception and use of the World Heritage site of Thebes.

Key words: world heritage, tourist-local sexual encounters, enclaving, Luxor (Egypt)

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Introduction

Archaeological heritage spaces attract the interest and involvement of a wide range of individuals and groups of stakeholders. Their interplay sets off multiple processes of voicing, negotiating, mixing and interlinking cultural concepts and practices. These concepts and practices in turn shape the trajectory of the archaeological heritage space. It was this intricate web of interactions and the consequences they have for the production of the physical and social space of the Theban Necropolis, which I wanted to explore when I embarked on the project "Archaeotopia" in 2010.[2]

History has its own pace, and the 25 January 2011 revolution and its aftermath did not only interrupt fieldwork but also drastically changed conditions at the study site. Questions about Egypt's future and how developments would impact on local stakeholders' lives came to the fore. While these concerns, particularly with regard to the disruption of tourist flows, governed conversations on the ground, some things – at least superficially – stayed the same. Among these were the general patterns of how local stakeholders interacted with tourists and how these interactions shaped the perception and the production of the site's social and physical space. Setting out to work on this subject, I was immediately drawn into a whirl of identifications and interactions myself, in which I occupied a marked position due to my gender, ethnicity and presumed economic status. As a 'Western' woman visiting Egypt I was a target in one of the most prominent socio-economic strategies of Egyptian men of the younger generation: namely getting involved in a sexual relationship with a 'Western' partner. While walking on the streets of Luxor and through the foothills of the Theban Necropolis I was not allowed to escape this role even for a moment. Initially I turned this experience into an object of investigation out of pure self-preservation: taking this perspective allowed me to distance myself from what happened to me, and it enabled me to twist some unpleasant encounters into unthreatening, open and cheerful communicative situations. Later, I realised that the phenomenon merged several aspects of my own research interests and some issues which were repeatedly brought up by my interview partners in the course of our conversations. Thus, I came to study tourist-local sexual encounters and their repercussions on the World Heritage site of Thebes.

I want to underline that while I have singled out this topic, it must neither be seen in isolation nor understood as a simple reproduction of superordinate power relations characterising foreigner-local relationships in Luxor and wider Egypt. Of course, the phenomenon brings to attention all of the problems inherent in our 'Western' appropriations of Egypt, ancient and modern, in that they are "the result of exploitive and colonial histories, and […] remain saturated with exploitive and colonial resonances" (Kulick 1995: 24, note 1). But – as will be argued throughout this paper – neither do the repercussions of these histories determine foreigner-local sexual relationships "in any simplistic or straightforward way" (Kulick 1995: 24, note 1; cf. Donnan and Magowan 2010: 111), nor must these relationships be reduced to representing those histories and the past and recent power imbalances arising from them.

The World Heritage site of Thebes

Luxor with its archaeological attractions was inscribed in the World Heritage List with the official designation "Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis" in 1979 (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/87). The chosen toponym 'Thebes' comes from Θῆβαι, which was the Ancient Greek name of a city that in Ancient Egyptian was called *Waset*. The remains of this city lie under parts of the modern town of

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[2] See http://www.topoi.org/project/topoi-1-72/ (all websites referred to in this paper were last accessed on 07/10/2013).

Luxor,الأقصر, on the east bank of the Nile, approximately 500 km south of Cairo. Its most prominent heritage sites are Karnak and Luxor temples, close to the Nile and connected by a 2.5 km long corniche. The 'Necropolis' is an area of extensive burial grounds stretching over several kilometres on the west bank of the Nile, opposite present-day Luxor. Its most prominent feature is the Valley of the Kings, situated far away from the cultivation zone in a *wadi* amid the desert mountains (fig. 1). Further attractions on the west bank are the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir al-Bahari, several New Kingdom mortuary temples along the edge of the cultivation zone and the so-called 'Tombs of the Nobles', i.e. the non-royal elite necropolis in the foothills of the terminal desert escarpment. Since the 19th century and until very recently the area of the 'Tombs of the Nobles' had been co-occupied by various hamlets, usually subsumed under the name of the central village, al-Qurna (van der Spek 2011; Tully and Hanna, this volume). A series of relocation acts between late 2006 and 2009 spelt the end to these agglomerations, with the inhabitants being moved to purpose-built new villages outside the heritage zone and all but one of their old villages being destroyed.[3] These resettlements have received a wide critique (van der Spek 2011; Tully and Hanna, this volume with further references). Already, in its 2007 report, ICOMOS had commented disparagingly on the process: "As a result, little attention has been given as to how best to maintain the complex set of historic layers which underlie the Thebes inscription on the List, and that indeed many significant parts of the site are being needlessly discarded. […] In particular, the loss of Gurnah, whose residents have provided the bulk of the excavation effort at Thebes from the 19th century forward, would involve loss of a place of great importance within the original nomination" (http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1095). In the 2013 "State of Conservation" report, prepared by the UNESCO Secretariat and the advisory bodies to the World Heritage Committee, "demolitions in the villages of Gurna on the West Bank of the Nile and transfer of the population" are again quoted among the threats to the site without further comment (http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/1892).

As a major move in the attempt to re-design Western Thebes as an 'open-air museum', reserved for international tourists and ancient monuments, these measures indeed had dramatic consequences for the face and the space of the heritage site.[4] What had been a lived-in environment is now reduced to a deeply scarred and fragmented space which prioritises remains of the Pharaonic past over all others at the expense of physically removing testimonies of subsequent date, primarily those of the (sub)recent past and the present. As a result, the Pharaonic component of the site has been separated from all its later contexts and stripped of its meaningful associations and links to the present. Physical and conceptual segregation have thus been achieved to a terminal level, being irreversibly inscribed onto the landscape. The places which had been occupied by the houses of the villages are now open wounds, which cannot possibly be closed, as there is no 'ancient' substance or meaning to fill them (cf. Weeks in van der Spek 2011: XIX).

One of the negative consequences of the destruction of Qurna, raised by the former inhabitants of the village itself, is that with their relocation they lost easy access to the tourists to whom they sell souvenirs, tea and their services as guides when visitors come to see the tombs (e.g. van der Spek 2011: 322-324, 343-345). This claim is at the centre of the rhetoric with which the local population ties itself to the heritage site of Thebes. However one does rate this argument, it is true that the Qurnawis do not only have to cope with the loss of their homes and the physical distance between their new villages and their old workplaces, but they must also absorb the irrevocable loss of cultural capital that

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[3] For a discussion of previous relocation attempts and the objectives connected with them, see Mitchell 2002.
[4] The buzzword of the "open-air museum" was coined in the master-plan "Luxor 2030" which was developed and inaugurated under former Luxor governor Samir Farag. See http://www.samirfarag.com/ for a copy of the plan and a list of the implemented measures.

came from their unique connection with the heritage space of 'Ancient Thebes' (cf. van der Spek 2011: 343-345).

The informal employment sector

Despite recent developments and all attempts to segregate tourists and local communities, Luxor and the Theban Necropolis continue to be arenas for multiple interactions between locals and visitors of all sorts. An important group of actors in this context are informal guides and vendors. These are mostly younger men, between their late teens and mid-thirties, who work in the environs of the heritage sights and in the streets frequented by tourists, selling souvenirs, advertising transportation, such as rides on a *calèche* or a *felucca*, or offering their services as guides. The content and boundaries of their businesses are fluid, which makes it difficult to give them a proper name. Gamblin (2007: 223-225) speaks of '*khaltiya*', a term which is, however, not commonly used. Many tourists call them 'touts'. I will stick to 'informal guides and vendors' on the understanding that I use this designation in the widest sense, encompassing the advertising and selling of all goods and services one can possibly think of. Investigating the activities of the informal guides and vendors in the streets of Luxor is a challenge. As Karl Anthony Schmid (2008) has noted, ethnographic standard procedures of data gathering are of limited use. Observation of, or participation in, concrete interaction situations is delicate, as it may curtail the flow and in turn the success of the transaction. Schmid (2008: 119) underlines that "it is important to recognize that there are strong interests at play in each relationship and that the ethnographer cannot insert himself or herself unobtrusively into the midst of these relationships", especially when transactions are of a sensitive nature or when timing is crucial to forge a contact and establish further dealings. Likewise, the guides and vendors will not, for example, readily disclose their earning capacities, lest these data should reach the police or other representatives of the State. Also, when earnings are low and supplemented by other sources of income, a disclosure of such data might weaken the above quoted argument that access to tourists is their primary or sole basis of existence. Despite these challenges, the informal guides and vendors have formed the subject of several studies in recent years (Gamblin 2006a, 2007; Schmid 2008; van der Spek 2011). Embedded in larger-scale analyses of the dynamics of the World Heritage site of Luxor and its prime stakeholders, investigations centred on the demographic profile of the guides and the socio-economic parameters of their business. In unison, the authors highlighted the marginal position and the difficult economic circumstances of this occupational group. The involved men and boys – seemingly, there are no women in these roles – are locals from Luxor town and the west bank villages. Most of them have a low level of formal education and depend totally or at least in larger part on the informal labour market for their income. Their workplace is the public space of the heritage site, and their strategies are adapted to the specifics of this environment and the movements of their potential clientele through it. Recent statistics are missing, but in 2009/10 Luxor's archaeological sites were visited by over eight thousand persons a day on average (Weeks in van der Spek 2011: XVII). In pursuit of them, hundreds of guides and vendors roam the Corniche – the avenue bordering the Nile which links the city's major tourist attractions on the east bank. On the west bank sights are more dispersed (fig. 1). The Valley of the Kings is approached by a 3 km long tarmac road leading through a lonely desert wadi away from the cultivation. The other main attractions stretch along a route of roughly 3.5 km which skirts the desert edge. Package tourists traverse these distances by coach or minibus, backpackers and other independent travellers may take a taxi, a bike or, more rarely, hire a donkey, or even walk. Informal guides and vendors are banned from the Valley of the Kings and the other major sights of the Theban Necropolis. Instead, they concentrate on the minor sites and their environs, to which access is less

strictly regulated, giving them better chances to approach potential clients, follow them around and strike a deal (fig. 2).

When moving as a foreigner in these areas, or indeed in any other public space in Luxor, one is inevitably faced with a constant flow of propositions by young men – many but by far not all of them informal guides. These encounters constitute a primary experience of tourists in Luxor, and they are eloquently described on many traveller sites and blogs.[5] While some visitors enjoy these contacts, many feel pestered. It is not without reason that Luxor has acquired the reputation of being the "hassle capital of Egypt" (Schmid 2008: 107). Often, the approaches include more or less explicitly phrased sexual offers. Given my clearly visible identities as female and 'Western', I frequently found myself in this situation when venturing into a public space. I usually tried to answer politely phrased propositions and enquiries by stating that I was not a tourist, but an archaeologist working in Luxor and as such not interested in the offers. I had used this explanation many times when I first explored the Theban Necropolis for my PhD research in the late 1990s. Back then, many guides and vendors would react to my statement by instantly switching the tone of the conversation. After ascertaining my nationality, they would enquire about German colleagues they knew, issue greetings, or tell me who of their family worked with the German archaeologists. By this the guides would acknowledge that we were part of a common social network which was separate from tourist-local interactions, and this would preclude further business-oriented approaches from their side, if I did not invite them. The social control apparent in these earlier exchanges has clearly diminished over the last ten years. During my visits in 2010 and 2012 my explications would only rarely trigger this switch in the conversation, more often they would go unacknowledged, and on occasion they would evoke plainly hostile reactions. In a rather wild rhetorical twist, some guides would ask why I refused to talk to them and accuse me of being racist.[6] To me, this reaction at first seemed paradoxical, as insulting a potential client would certainly not further business. In hindsight, I understand these responses as unchannelled outlets of frustration and attempts to reverse the power relations which had become unacceptable for the guides upon my rejection (cf. Schmid 2008: 116-117). However, I also experienced other reactions, which allowed me and the guides to part on friendly terms, with them 'melting away' in order to reappear at some distance pursuing the next potential client a few minutes later.

When analysing the contact situations and the interactions in which I participated during my fieldwork, which I observed or which were reported to me by interview partners, two further observations struck me. The first concerns an element of ambiguity inherent in many of these encounters. Often guides would not set out with a specific offer, but with more general enquiries relating to the nationality of the addressed, his or her name, his or her impression of Egypt etc. In this initial phase it was often not apparent what was actually offered or sought: services as a guide, a *felucca* ride or a sexual relationship. I perceive this ambiguity as a deliberate strategy on the part of the guides who try to first engage the potential client in a communication, before deciding towards which end the dealings can be most successfully developed, i.e. what could be sold or which other benefits could be made. Ultimately, one result may lead to the other. The second aspect is related to this ambiguity: like several interview partners, I felt that a sexualised component resonated in many of these encounters. This

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[5]   See   e.g.   http://www.escapeartistes.com/2012/04/16/an-open-letter-to-the-touts-of-egypt/, http://lauratraveler.net/2011/10/a-long-overdue-update-from-luxor/,   http://www.traveldudes.org/travel-tips/luxor-also-known-hassle-capital-egypt/2962,
http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Africa/Egypt/Muhafazat_Qina/Luxor-2008656/Warnings_or_Dangers-Luxor-Harrassment-BR-1.html   or   http://www.tripadvisor.com.au/ShowUserReviews-g294205-d321166-r122513073-Valley_of_the_Kings-Luxor_Nile_River_Valley.html.
[6] The same pattern has been described in some of the travel logs and blogs quoted in note 5.

subtext permeates the interactions between local men and 'Western' visitors, male and female, in the heritage space of Luxor and Thebes, in very much the same way as it does in tourist centres in Gambia, Kenya or some of the countries in the Caribbean (see e.g. Egger 2008; Kleiber and Wilke 1995; Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Herold, Garcia and DeMoya 2001; Donnan and Magowan 2010: 93-127). As Deborah Pruitt and Suzanne LaFont (1995: 426), quoting Ben Henry, have remarked regarding Jamaica, the frequency with which foreign women get involved with local men has led to "the sexualization of routine encounters" between the two groups. Today, it is impossible to traverse the public space of Luxor without being frequently approached by Egyptian men as a gendered and racialised individual, namely a non-Egyptian, non-local woman. Perceptions of space and decisions on personal movements are dictated by this experience. For example, I would avoid some places like the Corniche, where I knew that guides clustered, or I would try to cover these areas quickly. I would also try to circumnavigate approaching guides in the hope that they might divert their attention to other visitors. After sunset, male colleagues would usually offer to accompany me when I wanted or needed to be out, and I would have to decide whether I wanted to accept this offer or risk unpleasant encounters by going alone.

Tourist-local sexual encounters in Egypt and beyond: more than putting a name to them

Sexual relationships between 'Western' tourists and members of their host societies have been studied extensively in many destinations of the global South. Particularly when involving 'Western' women, the phenomenon is highly debated with regard to its conceptualisation, valuation and terminology (Jeffreys 2003). What this interaction is called depends primarily on how the intentions of the two partners and the power relations between them are perceived and judged by the researcher. The central question is whether – and to what degree – the women and the men involved in these relationships are understood as perpetrators, victims or empowered agents. The views on these points also determine whether such encounters are subsumed under the heading of prostitution and aligned with male sex tourism (e.g. Sanchez Taylor 2006). In an effort to distance herself from this categorising perspective, Jessica Jacobs (2010) in her study on Sinai speaks of "ethnosexual encounters", "romantic 'sex tourism'" and "romance tourism". The latter term was coined in an influential paper by Deborah Pruitt and Suzanne LaFont (1995) who analysed similar relationships in Jamaica. Subsequently, their conceptualisation has been critiqued in relation to several points (e.g. O'Connell Davidson 1998: 180-188; Sanchez Taylor 2006; cf. also Herold, Garcia and DeMoya 2001: 979-980). In a powerful rhetoric against belittling the exploitive character of these relationships by emphasising their 'romantic' component, Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor (2006) has coined the term 'tourist-local sexual-economic exchange'. Beyond the academic debate, a number of colloquial designations for such encounters and their agents have emerged in different regional contexts. In other parts of northern Africa, particularly in Tunisia, the term '*bezness*' is widely used, having come to prominence after the eponymously titled movie by Nouri Bouzid.[7] In the Middle East, such relationships and the involved partners are often referred to as MMD – "My Mohammed is different" – a topical statement which involved women make about their partners when confronted with the potential risks and drawbacks of their relationships.[8] While the term may originally have held somewhat different connotations,[9] its current use in Egyptian

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[7] "Bezness", Nouri Bouzid, France, Tunisia, Germany, 1992.

[8] See e.g. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1294752/Why-does-middle-aged-woman-think-HER-holiday-seducer-real-deal.html and http://simplyleanne.blogspot.de/2012/01/letters-from-egypt-my-mohamed-is.html.

[9] The earliest mention of MMD I could trace is by blogger LizzieD on http://lizzied.blogspot.de/2005_09_01_archive.html from 2005.

contexts embraces all of the dimensions of 'sexual-economic exchanges' surveyed in the following discussion.

Tourist-local sexual encounters in Egypt have so far received little attention in the global discussion of the subject. Still, they are an integral component of the local tourist world, as the studies of the beach-and-desert holiday destinations on Sinai by Mustafa Abdalla (2007) and Jessica Jacobs (2010) have shown. Both authors' extensive qualitative analyses delineate the specific conditions of the local version of this phenomenon. Quantitative data, however, are hard to come by. Abdalla (2007: 81) maintains that tourist-local sexual encounters "can be observed on a large scale and are practiced extensively" in Dahab. He holds "global trends, economic hardships in addition to social problems in Egypt" liable for their emergence and spread (Abdalla 2007: 79). While he identifies "underprivileged young men" as the main actors of this practice (Abdalla 2007: passim, esp. 79), Jacobs (2010: passim, esp. 76-77, 112-116) asserts that many of her interviewees have a middle class background. This is in accordance with the education level which Abdalla indicates for the men he talked to. Both, Abdalla and Jacobs, highlight the economic benefits the men derive from their relationships, but they also underline that these benefits are not the sole motivation to enter into these encounters. Due to economic problems and the impossibility to meet the financial requirements connected with marriage, young people in Egypt marry later than ever before (El Feki 2013: 36-42; cf. Hoodfar 1997: 266-267; Abdalla 2007: 37-38). Men enter matrimony at the age of twenty-nine on average (El Feki 2013: 35). Encounters with 'Western' women present the rare chance for an active sex life outside marriage, which is still almost impossible to have in intra-Egyptian relationships. In fact, Abdalla (2007: 39) sees the relief of "sexual frustration" which arises from the "complications of marriage" as the main reason for what he calls the "Dahab phenomenon". Finally, relationships with 'Western' women are also considered a quick route to modernity – as the Egyptian agents perceive it – and as a resource for enlarging their cultural capital. In this context, it must be noted that the tourism-connected flows of people to Sinai and the Red Sea differ from those in the Nile Valley in that not only visitors, but also most of the personnel working in the tourism industry at the beach resorts are not 'local' to the area. Many of these workers have come from the Nile Valley – often equally attracted by the labour chances and the 'spirit' of the place, which includes the promise of becoming part of its highly specific 'modern' setup and its tourist-'local' interactions (Abdalla 2007; Jacobs 2010: 80-95, 121-122).

While tourist-local sexual relationships have been acknowledged as an important aspect of the tourist landscape of the Egyptian beach resorts on Sinai and at the Red Sea coast, their existence at the World Heritage site of Luxor has hardly ever been noted, let alone been included in the analysis of the site's social dynamics. In their 2010 book on "Tourism, Performance and the Everyday", the case studies from which range from package tourist settings at Red Sea resorts to sightseeing in Cairo, Michael Haldrup and Jonas Larsen stress the experiential, performative and embodied aspects of tourist travel. The dimensions of gender and sexuality, let alone sexualised bodies and practised sex, do not feature in their volume. Likewise, Karl Anthony Schmid (2008), who investigated the working conditions of Luxor's informal guides, does not even mention that establishing sexual relationships with tourists is one of their main economic strategies. Timothy Mitchell, who did fieldwork in Qurna in the 1990s, reiterated the stereotyped version of the phenomenon, stating that "a few dozen young men did better by finding a foreign tourist to marry – usually a much older woman, who might visit each winter for a few weeks and with luck was wealthy enough to set the husband up in business" (Mitchell 2002: 197). In his magisterial work on the Qurnawi community, Kees van der Spek (2011: 278, 358) noted in passing that "financial support obtained from intimate relations with westerners is not uncommon" and that "marriage between young Qurnawi men and middle-aged European women [...] may offer an economic base for some". Only Sandrine Gamblin maintains that for local youths who work as informal

guides and vendors "la rencontre touristique et le mariage avec une étrangère, pour les plus démunis, sont les seules voies opératoires de promotion individuelle et économique qui leur sont accessibles" (Gamblin 2006a: 93) and that these constellations constitute "une ressource première d'enrichissement économique et symbolique pour des individus qui se situent aux marges sociales et ne possèdent ni biens, ni terres, ni capital éducatif négociable sur un marché égyptien du travail déjà saturés de diplômés au chômage et declasses" (Gamblin 2007: 243).

Gamblin's observations are in accordance with studies on the economic situation of Egyptian youths and young adults. High unemployment rates, few job opportunities and low wages in the formal labour market make it difficult for young people – of varying education levels alike – to earn a living and build a life (e.g. Müller-Mahn 2001: 229-233; Abdalla 2007: 31-34; Schielke 2008, 2009). And while they cannot fulfil even their more modest aspirations, global media fuels visions of a life replete with all kinds of personal freedoms and commodities. The magnitude of the ensuing discrepancy is illustrated in the 2010 documentary "Messages from Paradise".[10] Its producer, anthropologist Samuli Schielke, who worked with young men in rural areas of Lower Egypt, writes: "The increasing connectedness of the village with global media and migration flows offers imaginaries and prospects of a different, more exciting life, of material wealth and of self-realisation. Village life becomes measured against expectations that by far exceed anything the countryside or the nearby cities have to offer" (Schielke 2008: 258). A sense of "emptiness", the "lack of prospects" and the "desperate urge to migrate" are topics discussed daily among the young men (Schielke 2008: 260, 2009: 173). Migration, Schielke (2009: 173) concludes, is seen as "the grand paradigmatic strategy of escape and success". While the young men in the Delta village of Nazlat al-Rayyis derive their hopes, fantasies and aspirations from TV[11] and the internet, as well as from the tales of those who have migrated, people in Luxor live with the physical manifestations of these imageries on a daily basis. A small stream of the "global flows of mediated images, styles, goods" (Schielke 2009: 172) constantly passes through their lives and leaves its marks on the cultural space in which they grow up, live and work. The resort hotels, the cruise ships, the coaches, the tourists themselves with their conspicuous dress styles, their equipment and their habitus – all this is omnipresent and as much part of the everyday experience of Luxor's inhabitants as distinctly set apart from it. The perception of these 'snippets' of 'Western' life converges with more general conjectures about 'Western' culture, economic affluence and moral constitution – forming the basis of knowledge upon which the residents of Luxor and Qurna interact with tourists and other visitors.

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[10] "Messages from Paradise #1. Egypt : Austria. About the Permanent Longing for Elsewhere", Samuli Schielke and Daniela Swarowsky, Austria and the Netherlands, 2010.

[11] For an analysis of the lifestyles transported in/by Egyptian TV see Abu-Lughod 2005: 193-226.

Tourist-local sexual encounters in Luxor

The material for the present study was collected from a variety of sources.[12] Non-participant and participant observation in Luxor, i.e. watching locals and tourists interact and interacting with them myself, were basic constituents of the research.[13] Initially I had expected that communicative situations might arise from this in which I could either conduct interviews or arrange for later meetings. But it showed that tourist routines would not easily allow for this. Thus, in order to identify potential interview partners, I talked to people of my acquaintance who had recently visited Luxor and to those to which they in turn referred me on to.[14] This proved to be an effective method. Unexpectedly, all persons I approached were happy to discuss the subject, whether or not they had had any sexual encounters in Luxor. They wanted to relate their experiences and were keen to learn how a scientific analysis of tourist-local sexual encounters might look. It was clear from the beginning that connecting with local guides and vendors would be difficult in the limited time available and that intruding into their workplaces and business activities – both, when they approached me or other tourists – was delicate (cf. Schmid 2008: 109-110, 118-119; van der Spek 2011: 356-359). Interestingly, whenever a relaxed conversational situation developed, my Egyptian interview partners also talked to me freely. They wanted to trade knowledge and asked for information and my opinion on things they thought might make their interactions with tourists more successful (cf. Schmid 2008: 113). Another important data source was the internet, where, in particular, the involved 'Western' women exchange experiences and consult and console each other. Finally, I used novels and autobiographical writings in which fantasies and perceptions of sexual encounters in the environs of the World Heritage site of Thebes are produced and reproduced. Although the resulting picture is very much a pastiche, it offers insights into the issue of how tourist-local sexual relationships reside in the wider social contexts of Luxor and the World Heritage site of Thebes, how the worlds of the participating partners converge – or not – and what repercussions this has on the production, appropriation and consumption of the heritage space itself.

What soon became apparent during my fieldwork in Luxor was that despite the openness with which the subject was discussed by involved parties and the wider public, it is still a sensitive topic. It transgresses dominant social practice and officially propagated concepts of morality in several respects. Of prime concern in this regard is the questionable status of extramarital relationships in Egyptian society. Though not actually prohibited by law – unless one of the partners is married, in which case it would come down to adultery – sexual encounters prior to, or outside of, wedlock are still considered as irregular and undesirable. Whenever they occur in an Egyptian-only context they would be kept secret and transformed into a socially and legally sanctioned status, i.e. matrimony at the earliest possible moment (cf. El Feki 2013). The ensuing moral climate has direct repercussions on how tourist-local relationships are conducted and how the involved partners make use of and shape public and private spaces. Firstly, such relationships are hardly ever expressed openly, e.g., mixed couples rarely go sightseeing together. It is almost only shopping areas and privately-run restaurants and discos outside the resort hotels that provide 'informal' public spaces which are accessible for and used by mixed couples. Moreover, unmarried Egyptian-non-Egyptian couples cannot usually book a

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[12] Fieldwork in Luxor was carried out in February 2010 and February 2012, with one week spent there each time. Interviews were conducted in Luxor, London and Berlin between 2010 and 2013.

[13] Non-participant observation has been defined as a "relatively unobtrusive qualitative research strategy", suitable when interest lies "less in the subjectively experienced dimensions of social action and more in reified patterns that emerge from such action"; it is thus particularly suitable when studying how people use public space (Williams 2008: 561).

[14] For an evaluation of this recruiting strategy see Liamputtong 2007: 48-49.

hotel room together. Even renting a holiday flat from private owners is problematic. As one homepage states: "Only guests registered at the flats can stay or use the facilities and because of police restrictions we are unable to offer accommodation to mixed Egyptian/non-Egyptian couples"[15] – a restriction which is clearly directed at tourist-local relationships (cf. Abdalla 2007: 41). Thus, partners in such relationships constantly face the problem of arranging a private space. Thus, the proverbial "sex in the felucca" (see below p. XXX) may not always be a display of promiscuity, but can also be put down to a lack of alternatives.

The attempt to circumnavigate these difficulties has contributed to the rise of a practice which has been making headlines in recent years: the so-called *urfi* marriages. *Urfi* is a form of informal common-law marriage, the administrative proceedings of which consist of the two partners signing a document in front of a lawyer or a cleric, sometimes in the presence of two witnesses. *Urfi* marriages are not legally binding and can be as easily concluded as they can be dissolved by one or both partners at any stage. In recent years, they have become increasingly popular among young Egyptian couples who cannot afford an official marriage (El Feki 2013: 44-46). But they are also common in foreigner-Egyptian relationships (Abdalla 2007: 40-42). Indeed, a search for the keywords '*urfi*'/'*orfi*' and 'Egypt'/'Luxor' on the internet gives numerous hits on websites and online fora which deal with the questions 'Western' women have regarding this kind of marriage, its legal status and its potential consequences.[16] A study quoted in this context states that over 17,000 marriages between young Egyptian men and older foreign women were registered in 2010 compared to just 551 in 2005.[17] I have not been able to procure a copy of this study, which was undertaken by the Research Department on Human Trafficking in the Ministry of Family and Population in Cairo. Thus, I could not ascertain whether it pertains to 'official' civil marriages only, which have to be contracted at the *Shahr' al Aqari* in Cairo or Alexandria when they involve a foreign partner, or whether it also includes *urfi* marriages. Either way, the figures quoted indicate a dramatic increase in foreigner-local marriages and show that such partnerships have become a widespread phenomenon over the past decade.

A survey of relevant internet fora provides an insight into the personal stories behind these figures. Some contributions capture the bliss[18], others discuss the practicalities and the challenges of living with an Egyptian partner[19], while again others express the doubts, frustrations and disenchantment of the women involved[20]. One of the most frequently visited sites is www.1001geschichte.de with 3000 users daily according its operators, who claim it to be Europe's largest platform to fight '*bezness*'. The site features a forum on Egypt and a blacklist where disillusioned women can report the name and the workplace of their (former) lovers and, vice versa, seek information about individual men. Similar services are also offered by several other websites.[21]

The majority of the 'Western' women involved in relationships with Egyptian men perceive these encounters in a discourse of romance and the exotic (cf. Jacobs 2010, 2012). Their segregation from

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[15] See http://www.flatsinluxor.co.uk/about-flats-in-luxor/terms-and-conditions/.

[16] See e.g. http://orfi-wives-egypt.blogspot.de/2011/09/what-is-orfi-marriage.html, http://www.egyptsearch.com/forums/Forum2/HTML/004660.html and http://forum.1001geschichte.de/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=3504.

[17] See http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/01/21/134435.html.

[18] See e.g. http://oneheartinegypt.blogspot.de/2011/08/falling-for-love.html and http://arabiclove.aktivforum.org/.

[19] See e.g. http://www.luxor4u.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=6 and http://www.zickes-aegypten.com/wbb2/board255-liebe-beziehungen-und-familie-in-%C3%A4gypten-mit-%C3%A4gyptern/.

[20] See e.g. http://www.againstbezness.ch/ and http://www.egyptsearch.com/forums/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=forum;f=3.

[21] See e.g. http://www.dezy-house.ru/ and http://kunstkamera.net/.

both the tourist and the Egyptian everyday social cosmos (see discussion above and below p. XXX) encourages a freely selectable anchoring in space and time. As Jacobs (2010, 2012) in her study on Sinai has argued, the male subjects are 'othered' and constructed under reference to the holiday attractions chosen by the women – in the case of Sinai the wilderness of the desert and the Bedouin culture of its inhabitants. In part, the same can be argued for Luxor. Here, the Pharaonic heritage comes into play: temples, tombs and the 'exotic' men – may they wear *galabiya* or jeans – can converge into a single image of the 'Other'. American travel writer Jeannette Belliveau (2006: 2, 291) speaks of "a man of color, who looked as exotic as a pharaoh" and "this ancient region", when referring to the Middle East and North Africa. Such fantasies use the material inventory and the narratives of the archaeological heritage sites in a way which perpetuates "the binary stereotypes first explored by nineteenth and twentieth century women travellers that construct the 'local' man as anti-modern other" (Jacobs 2012: 148). In general, such imageries are still strong and employed by all parties, when they conform to the expectations of the involved actors. For example, local guards at the major sights of Luxor and Thebes all wear traditional *galabiya*. I could not ascertain whether this is done by command or if it follows a tacit rule among this occupational group, but either way the flaring robes add a picturesque note to many tourist photographs (fig. 3). This earns their wearers additional *bakshish* (fig. 4) and at the same time feeds a vision of the exotic 'Other' which weaves the Pharaonic past and Islamic tradition into an image in which "culture and place lock together in a timeless communion" (Beezer 1993: 127).

Another – seemingly opposite – way in which 'Western' women make sense of their relationships with Egyptian men is illustrated in several autobiographical writings (e.g. Ismail [ed.] 2012) and works of fiction such as "Love in Luxor" by Gill Harvey. The latter tells the story of a teenage romance between Jen and Ali. The physical setting of Luxor figures only marginally in the narrative, coming up mainly in connection with Jen's dutifully undertaken excursions to the major heritage sites and the couple's unsuccessful search for a private space allowing them to advance their intimacy. What the story highlights instead is Ali's role as a 'cultural broker' who grants Jen access to what she perceives as the 'real' Egypt, complete with tea, *galabiya* and a visit to a wedding in one of the villages on the west bank. How well this image goes down with the target audience becomes clear from one of the comments on a rating website: "The first book that made me want to travel somewhere exotic. I loved this book so much when I was 13."[22] In this context, the topic of the 'Other' does not only include the male subject – looks, language and clothing – but also the cultural experience he offers. This role of the local partner as a 'cultural broker' has been cited by several researchers as a typical element of relationships between foreign women and local men also in other destinations of the global south (e.g. Pruitt and LaFont 1995; Dahles and Bras 1999). In the case of Luxor, the involved women usually define the world of 'modern' Egypt to which the local partner gives privileged access in a pronounced juxtaposition with the Pharaonic past manifest in the attractions of the World Heritage site. As a rule, they name their fascination with ancient Egypt as the original reason for visiting Luxor and describe their interest in 'modern' Egypt as a later addition which developed through their involvement with an Egyptian partner or was advanced by it. The intimacy of the sexual relationship is coupled with an intimacy with the culture, which could otherwise not be obtained so quickly and easily. While ancient Egypt is accessible to every visitor, the acquaintance with 'modern' Egypt is something not usually achieved by package tourists. This view transposes the master narrative of the World Heritage site, with its focus on the Pharaonic past, into the realm of personal experience in a very peculiar way: countering the exclusion of 'modern' Egypt, and all its pasts except the Pharaonic, from the heritage rhetoric, the involved women make the conquest of the missing component their private endeavour.

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[22] http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8050657-love-in-luxor.

Paradoxically, they thereby take up the dominant heritage discourse in one seminal aspect, namely in opposing the two worlds, 'ancient' and 'modern', thus tacitly contributing to the on-going reproduction and naturalisation of this categorical differentiation.

It will depend on the individual disposition and perspective of the involved women as to how much of what they discern as the 'real' modern Egypt are idealisations which also reside in the realm of the exotic and the 'Other' (cf. Jacobs 2010, 2012). Many narratives reiterate orientalist fantasies: They are about tea, traditional clothing and intact patriarchically organised family life, and not about social tensions and the existential problems discussed by the youths who appear in Samuli Schielke's interviews (see above p. XXX). Again, these images are used and reproduced by all involved parties, and new ones can be added which play on relevant themes and conform to the overall expectations of the partners. As Pruitt and LaFont (1995: 422) stated regarding Jamaica, "by elaborating on features of their gender repertoire, men articulate the women's tourists' idealizations of local culture and masculinity, transforming their identity in order to appeal to the women and capitalize on the tourism trade". One such image, or role, is that of the *felucca* captain – a character who appears in Gill Harvey's "Love in Luxor" as well as in many narratives of 'Western' visitors to Luxor.[23] The place which this particular role takes in the public perception of tourist-local sexual encounters is aptly illustrated by the bar menu sign in the King's Head Pub, a privately run pub in Luxor. It offers "Sex in a Felucca" as cocktail of the week, while the drinks menu adds "Sunburnt Russian"[24], "Bloody Hassle" and "Egyptian Husband".[25] Ironically, the latter drink is known as "Gale Warning" elsewhere.

While many, though certainly not all, 'Western' women involved in foreigner-local sexual encounters make sense of their relationships through the discourses of 'romance' and 'otherness', the Egyptian men construct them in a framework of social and economic aspirations (cf. Abdalla 2007; Jacobs 2010). Their interests centre around the improvement of their socio-economic situation, their sex life and their cultural capital (see above p. XXX). To which end a sexual encounter may lead is often not foreseeable in its incipient phases. Thus, the attitude of the men can best be described as 'generalised' or 'open-ended' (cf. Oppermann 1998: 13-15; Dahles and Bras 1999: 286-287). They take their chances as they come, thus creating the constant flow of propositions, offers and advances which accompany the tourists when they walk in the streets of Luxor and through the hills of the Theban Necropolis.

One central question in the wider discussions of tourist-local sexual encounters is to which degree they are economic, i.e. which financial or otherwise commodified benefits the involved men derive from them. In Egypt, as in other destinations of the global south, the spectrum is wide and most women would not understand their contributions as a 'payment' for sexual services (cf. e.g. Sánchez Taylor 2001: 754, 757). Should these encounters still be subsumed under the heading of sex tourism or regarded as 'sexual-economic exchanges' as Sanchez Taylor (2006; see above p. XXX) has proposed? What about those relationships in which no financial transactions have (yet) taken place? Several observations may aid us come to terms with these questions. First and foremost, one must be clear about the fact that socio-economic inequalities are the prerequisite for many of these relationships to develop – if it was not for these imbalances and the restrictive moral climate concerning intra-societal

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[23] Cf. e.g. https://de-de.facebook.com/pages/The-Felucca-Captains/135812526475990, http://patryantravels.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/the-felucca-fantasy-ride/ and http://pyramidqueen.wordpress.com/2013/04/23/island-3some/.

[24] The percentage of tourists from Eastern Europe has gone up exponentially in/over the last years; cf. http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pepo/364_e.pdf. Scantily clad female Russian visitors sporting a heavy sunburn have become a frequent sight in the major attractions of Luxor and Thebes.

[25] See http://kingsheadluxor.com/main/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/n42503390632_1488199_53923.jpg and http://kingsheadluxor.com/main/?page_id=7. Cf. Gamblin 2006a: passim, esp. 87 on the pub and its founder.

sexual encounters, most Egyptian men would not be attracted to enter into them. It is the socio-economic asymmetries and the wildly diverging capacities to render accessible further economic resources which are at the heart of trajectories where "increasing numbers of young men routinely view a relationship with a foreign woman as a meaningful opportunity for them to capture (the love and) money they desire" (Pruitt and LaFont 1995: 428). There are two points which need to be considered in this arrangement: the first is that these encounters have become a regular economic strategy for one group of actors, i.e. the involved men, the second is that the other group of actors, i.e. the 'Western' women systematically take "advantage of an imbalance of power to obtain a sexual advantage that would otherwise have been denied them" (Sanchez Taylor 2006: 52). When these conditions are met, MMD relationships constitute sexual-economic exchanges, even if they are not perceived in this light on an individual level.

One of the reasons why most involved women will not view their commitment within these parameters is that the scope and the timing of the exchanged services differ widely. This allows the women to label their economic contributions as negligible, as lending a helping hand, or as building a basis which is needed to conduct their relationship, for example by establishing a business to support both of them in Egypt or by bringing her partner to Europe. Such 'romantic' readings are balanced by a view from the other side. In 2012, expat interview partners in Luxor reported on rumours about an MMD training school, where young men are taught how to best extract the aspired benefits from their 'Western' partners, learning for example how to build trust, issue the right compliments and successfully time their financial requests. Whether or not such a 'school' exists, it is conspicuous that the economic trajectories of MMD relationships display a pattern of repetition which hints at the recurrent use of a specific tactic on the part of the involved men. In what I would call a 'delayed return' strategy, the Egyptian partners will not issue straight requests for money at the outset of the relationship. Instead, they will pay their own expenses and only after a relationship is established talk about a sick relative or another social hardship. At this point they will refuse to take financial support, or, if they accept it, duly pay it back. By and by bigger problems calling for larger sums will be needed, which the men will again return. This continues until one day they receive a really substantial amount – to purchase a car, a house or land – and this will not be paid back; a climax which also often signals the end of the relationship. In the absence of quantitative data it is hard to estimate the ubiquity and the magnitude of such transactions and the impact they have on the local economy and the livelihoods of individual men. Nonetheless such stories abound and they are clearly attractive enough to make many members of Luxor's male population attempt a similar career.

My encounter with Ahmed

During my stay in 2010, I paid a visit to one of the minor tourist attractions at Western Thebes.[26] Of course I was approached by the *ghafir*, i.e. the guard who offered to explain things to me. I rejected and told him that I was a professional, familiar with the site and acquainted with some archaeologists who had worked there. Thereupon, the *ghafir* let me explore, but returned after several minutes with the offer of tea. As I had constructed a social connection between us through my reference to common acquaintances, I felt obliged to accept. As we sat down and talked, it took Ahmed only a few minutes to ask me if I wanted to have sex with him. I turned this suggestion down, but continued the conversation despite the awkwardness I felt for a moment or two. I told Ahmed that I was working on the phenomenon of tourist-local sexual encounters in Thebes and that I was interested to learn how

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[26] The location of the incident has been obscured and the name of the man has been changed in order to retain his anonymity.

he had come to approach me that bluntly. Upon that he told me that his wife was pregnant and in bad health, thus not able to have sex, and that he was looking for another partner to relieve his abstinence. I asked him how he had formed the opinion that I might consent, as I had – prior to his offer – made it clear that I was in Luxor as a professional and not on vacation with the potential objective to acquire a lover. I also enquired as to whether he thought that approaching me might be bad for his career, as I might complain to his superiors. To this he replied that 'his' site did not attract many visitors and that he did not judge himself to have the optimum disposition for success due to his age and his looks. Thus, he had to take every chance he could get. Continuing along this line of thought, he told me that according to his experience, 'Western' women preferred younger men and particularly cared for good teeth and a generally good state of health and hygiene – an observation which he wanted to have confirmed and explained by me.[27] Our conversation then developed into him trying to acquire knowledge which would allow him to better classify 'Western' women according to their nationality, which he thought determined whether they would generally be willing to enter into a relationship with an Egyptian and what kind of men they preferred. After the end of our talk we parted amiably.

Apart from initial disgust, which dissolved during our progressively friendly conversation, my main reaction to this encounter was utter amazement. Ahmed had named sexual desire as his prime motive for seeking out 'Western' women and to satisfy this he even risked his employment. Working as a guard provided him with a stable income, of which many Qurnawis could only dream. Economic need was not the driving force behind his proposition, though he may have kept an open mind on possible developments in this regard. My encounter with Ahmed shows that while there is certainly the recurring constellation of elder women taking on younger lovers who enter such relationships for economic benefit, alternative agendas and projections must not be dismissed. Simultaneously, Ahmed's aspirations were shaped by the manifestations of tourist-local sexual encounters in his social environment – from witnessing them he had formed his own conclusions and expectations. In order to make sense of these diverging dimensions, it may be useful to differentiate between the individual encounter and tourist-local sexual relationships as a social institution. As argued above, as a social institution such relationships are rooted in the economic imbalances between 'Western' tourists and most members of the local populations in destinations of the global south. As individual practices they incorporate many other influences, such as the moral concepts held by both partners, individual aspirations, ideas about love, sex and consumption, and many other things. Thereby, individual practices are constructed within the framework of the social institution – to paraphrase Ahmed: he does it, because everyone does it. The straightforward proposition of sex to an unknown woman is only possible because tourist-local sexual relationships are an omnipresent phenomenon in the social world of the Theban Necropolis; they have become 'normalised' and from a certain perspective constitute 'regular' social behaviour. Vice versa, individual practices and perceptions reproduce and reshape tourist-local sexual encounters as a social institution. This aspect has been highlighted by one 'Western' repeat visitor, who suggested that rapidly growing media consumption and increased access to pornography on the internet shapes personal visions, which lead many men to believe that they could experience freer and more exiting sex with 'Western' women than with Egyptian partners (cf. El Feki 2013: 31, 68-69). This development may have added to the trend for increasingly blunt requests for sexual contact, of which the interviewee reported several instances which were similar to my experience with Ahmed. Indeed, pornographic internet sites featured prominently among the one hundred most frequently visited websites in Egypt in 2012.[28]

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[27] For a similar 'trading of knowledge' see Schmid 2008: 114.

[28] See http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/11/13/249405.html. The quoted statistics had been taken prior to the renewed request for a ban on pornographic websites in Egypt, which had first been issued in 2009; see

Moving through the World Heritage site of Thebes

The encounter with Ahmed left a deep impression on me and lastingly determined my memories of the site in question. It also influenced my attitude towards further encounters with Egyptian men at the peripheries of tourist sights. I became more aloof and adverse – like many other visitors to Luxor and the World Heritage site of Thebes.[29] When tourists' minds are set on visiting archaeological attractions, commercial and sexual propositions from local entrepreneurs can easily be regarded as distracting and disturbing. Still, there is a constant flow of such offers. They form an integral part of tourists' experiences in Luxor and as such become incorporated into visitation routines. Quickly tourists learn that moving through the public space of Luxor, particularly at the peripheries of tourist sights, means being approached – irrespective of whether one is in a group or single, a man or a woman, clearly set on one's target or walking leisurely. The strategies visitors employ to deal with these approaches are as stereotypical as the tactics of the guides themselves. Taking advice from their guide books, from fellow travellers or their official guides, generally tourists will give stereotyped answers or will not respond at all, hurrying past the vendors. Only when they are genuinely interested in one of the offers, or when the guide is particularly skilled, they will pause and talk. Still, in most encounters there is an element of uneasiness on the side of the tourists, which arises from their uncertainty as to how the interaction should be rated and whether they are 'pulled over the barrel' (cf. Schmid 2008: 115). The informal setting, the fleeting nature of the transactions and the strategy of ambivalence employed by the guides all add to the discomfort inherent in these situations.

Tourists also learn quickly which spaces are free from these strenuous encounters: the hotels and the heritage sights, to which the informal guides and vendors have no access. From the perspective of tourism studies, these spaces are called 'enclaves' (e.g. Schmid 2008). They provide the tourists with an environment which is constructed specifically for their needs and removed from the everyday social reality of the host country. In these 'enclaves', contacts between local residents and tourists are narrowed down and limited to specific constellations, in which locals most frequently appear as service personnel (for Luxor cf. Gamblin 2007: 203-208). Timothy Mitchell (2002: 197) described this kind of 'enclaving' as the typical pattern of tourist development in regions outside Europe and North America since the 1980s and as "required by the increasing disparity between the wealth of the tourists and the poverty of those whose countries they visited". At the World Heritage site of Luxor, the consequences of this process manifest in several dimensions. They have left their marks on the physical landscape of the heritage site, and they have divided its social space into two spheres: a public one, to which everybody has access and which constitutes the arena of unregulated tourist-local interactions, and a 'semi-public', 'enclaved' one into which tourists can withdraw in order to avoid contact with local residents. While the public sphere is connected to the social reality of today's Egypt in that it is part of this reality and presents certain facets of 'real life' to tourists, the 'enclaved' spaces are very much secluded and removed from this reality. In recent years, the separation of these two spaces has been increasingly reinforced by physical interventions, which have resulted in purpose-built access zones, walls, fences and the 'cleansing' of the hamlets of Qurna (van der Spek 2011: 333; Tully and Hanna, this volume).

The growing tensions arising from this situation were made clear in a 2012 news item which reported that "a number of travel agencies [were] threatening to suspend their daily flights to […] Luxor due to

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http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentPrint/1/0/57471/Egypt/0/Egypts-prosecutorgeneral-orders-ban-on-porn-websit.aspx.

[29] See note 5, above, for some voices in this regard.

what they say are recurring incidents of tourists being harassed".[30] Representatives of these travel agencies and tour operators spoke of "indecent insults" and aggressive undertones, and it was stated that "the complaints blame in particular street vendors at Luxor's temples and archaeological sites, specifically in the city's West Bank area". This example illustrates the vicious circle which characterises current tourism development in Egypt. Myriad affluent foreign visitors enter a host society which is riddled with severe economic and social problems. Over many years, participation in the riches of the tourists has developed into a key economic strategy for a specific social group, namely younger men seeking formal or informal employment in the tourism sector and at the peripheries of tourist flows. They see this engagement as the 'royal road' out of their structurally disadvantaged socio-economic position and as a chance to fulfil their personal aspirations to a degree otherwise unobtainable. As the 'enclaving' of tourism is pursued by tour operators and political decision makers alike, the interaction spaces for this 'professional' group become more and more confined. On top of this issue, declining tourism figures in the aftermath of the 25 January 2011 revolution have further lowered the number of potential customers.[31] As a result, competition gets fiercer and local entrepreneurs take their chances whenever they can and in whatever shape they make take. The more disadvantageous this mixture gets, the more frustration and aggression comes into play and may lead to interaction scenarios which one would judge as clearly counterproductive to striking a deal. Business propositions turn into hassle and frustrations about bad business – in combination with unsettling wider social conditions – find an outlet in plain harassment.[32] From the perspective of those stakeholders who benefit most from international tourism, i.e. the international tour operators and the Egyptian state and its various institutions, this forms a valid reason to further accelerate the segregation between visitors and local residents and speed up the processes of 'enclaving'.

In this context, the sexual encounters between tourists and local residents take on a curious position. They undermine the efforts of those stakeholders who want to construct a 'clean' site with an exclusive focus on heritage tourism. They also negate the emphatically issued condemnation of extramarital sex, which still permeates mainstream Egyptian society, cultivating strategies of avoidance and ambiguity, like the *urfi* marriages, which barely conceal the irreconcilability of these relationships with wider social norms (Abdalla 2007; El Feki 2013). At first glance, these contradictions and their seemingly individual solutions seem to remove these encounters from connotations of blatant 'sex tourism', instead easing their perception towards discourses of 'romance' and 'true love'. But these individuating tendencies only gloss over the fact that as a social institution these relationships are still firmly rooted in an economic context. The partners in these encounters usually possess "radically unequal access to resources, and it is the negotiation of these within the context of their erotic engagements", identified as "a feature of an emerging global sexscape" by Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan (2010: 111-112), that brings socio-political and economic issues to the fore. In this context, it must not be overlooked that encounters between 'Western' female tourists and Egyptian men are but one version of tourist-local sexual relationships in Luxor. The place is well known for its homosexual exchanges. On various occasions interview partners also hinted at more problematic forms of sex tourism, including the pursuit of unsafe sex by HIV-positive 'Western' gay men and organised child prostitution. As no

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[30] http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/citing-harassment-complaints-travel-agencies-threaten-suspend-luxor-flights.

[31] The number of international tourist arrivals to Egypt has dropped from 14.7 million to 11.5 million from 2010 to 2012; see http://www.capmas.gov.eg/pepo/364_e.pdf.

[32] This development can be linked to a general increase in sexual harassment also in intra-Egyptian contexts, which has been witnessed in recent years, especially since the 25 January 2011 revolution; see e.g. Schielke 2009, El Feki 2013: 125-128, http://harassmap.org or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjjqbP7adj8&list=PLOy47XMO3lTgPoqYgBPdLX22vf58CaqXZ.

data exist on these phenomena,[33] it is currently impossible to paint a representative picture of sexual-economic exchanges in Luxor.

I have stated from the outset that I do not deem it legitimate to parallel personal relationships and superordinate relations of power "in any simplistic or straightforward way" (Kulick 1995: 24, note 1). While the tourist-local sexual encounters explored in this paper could simply be dismissed as a facet of globalisation, one should acknowledge that they also have a very personal side. They can involve strong emotional, existential and economic interests and thus be of major concern to their participants. This does not only apply to the 'Western' women entering in these relationships, but also to the Egyptian men who try to make a living from them or pursue sexual fulfilment, while constantly juggling their aspirations and potential failure within dominant socio-religious value systems (Abdalla 2007). Simultaneously, I agree with Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan (2010: 116) in their point that there is a "dialectic between personal intimacy and the global flows and interconnections that both featured in the colonial past and pervade the increasingly mobile present". I would argue that the structural inequalities upon which these flows are based, and the tensions which arise from them, put human existence and experience in a precarious and ambivalent position. In this context, personal fulfilment can only be achieved at a high cost and remains itself precarious, unstable and ambivalent – a fact which holds equally true for all involved actors: the visitors pursuing the Pharaonic past on the path of cultural tourism, the 'Western' women who get involved in tourist-local sexual relationships, and the Egyptian men who chase after a different life through these encounters.

Acknowledgements

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[33] See only http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fe30cce2d.html for the "2012 Trafficking in Persons Report – Egypt" by the United States Department of State.

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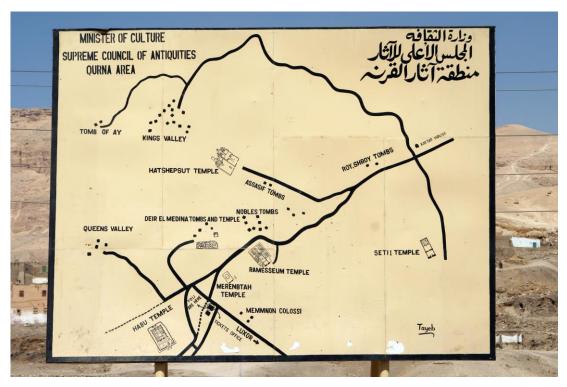
Figures

Fig. 1   Information board with map of the main tourist attractions of Western Thebes; in the background the partly destroyed village of Qurnet Murai (photo: Claudia Näser, 2010).

Fig. 2   Tourists moving between the partly destroyed houses of the village of Qurna on their way from the car park to the 'Tombs of the Nobles', with local guides and vendors pursuing them (photo: Claudia Näser, 2010).

Fig. 3   A female tourist posing for a photograph with two guards at the Temple of Hatshepsut, Western Thebes (photo: Claudia Näser, 2010).
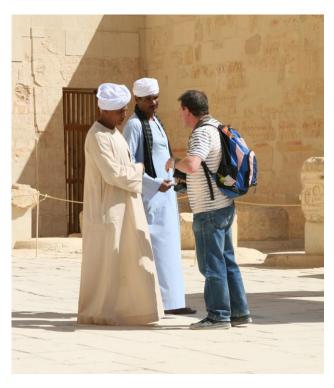

Fig. 4   The two guards in Fig. 3 requesting *bakshish* from the woman's companion after he took their picture (photo: Claudia Näser, 2010).