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Noga Collins-Kreiner

University of Haifa, nogack@geo.haifa.ac.il

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Pilgrimage-Tourism: Common Themes in Different Religions

Noga Collins-Kreiner

University of Haifa, Israel

nogack@geo.haifa.ac.il

The paper discusses common themes in different religions regarding pilgrimage-tourism and has four main goals. First, it shows that the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism have become blurred. Second, it characterises the different changes that have taken place in pilgrimage research in recent years. Third, it re-examines three different pilgrimage case-studies in an effort to draw conclusions pertaining to the 'pilgrimage-tourism nexus'; and fourth, it highlights discrepancies between the 'old' paradigm, predicated on the assumption that religious elements lie at the core of pilgrimage, and the results of more recent research on secular models of travel, highlighting alternative and complementary approaches to explain the shifting boundaries between tourists and pilgrims.

The three case-studies discussed offer evidence that both the study and the phenomena of pilgrimage in the twenty-first century are changing. This comes along with the increasing blurring of pilgrimage, tourism, and secular tourism, and the fading differences between the desires of people to search for new meaning. These developments can be observed by doing away with distinctions that were accepted in the past, and a growing inability to distinguish between the different perceptions and research areas, which are becoming increasingly integrated.

Key Words: Pilgrimage, Tourism, Religious Tourism, Religion, Mobilities, Secular Pilgrimage

Introduction

Based on my previous studies, this paper has four main goals. First, it seeks to show that the boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism have become blurred. Second, it attempts to characterise the different changes that have taken place in pilgrimage research in recent years. Third, it re-examines three different pilgrimage case-studies in an effort to draw conclusions pertaining to the 'pilgrimage-tourism nexus'; and fourth, it aims to highlight discrepancies between the 'old' paradigm, predicated on the assumption that religious elements lie at the core of pilgrimage, and the results of more recent research on secular models of travel, highlighting alternative and complementary approaches to explaining the shifting boundaries between tourists and pilgrims.

Mobilities, Pilgrimage, and Tourism

Pilgrimage, a common religious and cultural phenomenon in human societies and an important feature of the world's major religions, has been defined as 'a journey resulting from religious causes, externally and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding' (Barber, 1993:1). Today, however, I

maintain that pilgrimage must be defined in a holistic way, in a manner that encompasses both traditional religious pilgrimage and modern secular journeys as will be argued in this paper.

Pilgrimage is currently experiencing resurgence around the world (Digance, 2003; 2006). Pilgrimage is a type of population mobility. 'Mobilities' constitute a growing interdisciplinary field of study (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007). Pilgrimages have powerful political, economic, social, and cultural implications, and can even affect global trade and health. Pilgrimage necessitates spatial movement and is also an important subject due to its scope and spatial influence. For some countries and cities, it has been a primary economic activity (Barber, 1993; Vukonić 1996; 2002), but pilgrimage also creates other mobilities such as trade, cultural exchanges, political movements, and the less desirable spread of illnesses and epidemics (Barber 1993).

The literature on pilgrimage, however, is still fragmented and lacks synthesis and holistic conceptualisation (Kong, 2001; Stausberg, 2011; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). The study of the relationships between religion, pilgrimage, and tourism

has frequently approached religion and tourism as two separate subjects, warranting little interrelated or comparative treatment. This is surprising, as

religion has played a key role in the development of leisure over the centuries and has influenced how people utilize their leisure time (Kelly 1982 in Olsen and Timothy 2006:2).

Generally, gaps exist in the perceptions of the differences between pilgrimage and tourism from the perspectives of religion, the pilgrims themselves, the tourism industry, and researchers (Olsen and Timothy 2006). The relationship between pilgrimage and tourism must be considered from two vantage points. The first is the vantage point of religious organisations and the travellers themselves. From this perspective, pilgrims are generally not considered to be tourists, or at least are regarded as being different from tourists, because they travel for spiritual reasons, whereas tourists travel (or visit sites) for secular reasons such as curiosity and pleasure. The second is the vantage point of the tourism industry and tourism studies in which pilgrims are regarded as tourists and should be treated as such. This perspective is relevant to the development of economic activities such as hotels, restaurants, shops, hospices, and religious centres.

The Pilgrimage-Tourism Nexus

Research has been dealing with the complex relationship between pilgrimage and tourism, with all its economic, political, social, psychological, and emotional aspects. While earlier theories focused on different typologies of tourists and pilgrims (Cohen, 1979; 1992; MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1992; 1989), since the early 1990s, scholars have recognised that the connection between the two phenomena is unclear: consider Eade's 1992 article on the interaction between pilgrims and tourists at Lourdes; Bowman's 1991 study on Jerusalem's role in Christianity; and Rinschede's 1992 description of tourist uses of pilgrimage sites.

Cohen (1992) maintained that pilgrimage and tourism differ with regard to the direction of the journey undertaken. The 'pilgrim' and the 'pilgrim-tourist' peregrinate toward their socio-cultural centre, whereas the 'traveller' and the 'traveller-tourist' move in the opposite direction. This distinction applies particularly to journeys where the destination is a formal pilgrimage centre. However, mixtures of features that are characteristic of both pilgrimage and tourism often mark journeys to popular pilgrimage centres.

Stausberg (2011) provided in his book *Religion and Tourism* an overview of the crossover between religion and tourism from a religious studies perspective. It seems that although in its current usage the term 'pilgrimage' connotes the religious journey of a [pilgrim](#) - particularly to a shrine or a sacred place - its derivation from the Latin *peregrinus* allows broader interpretations, including the journey of a foreigner, a wanderer, an exile, or a traveller, as well as that of a newcomer or stranger. The term 'tourist' also has Latin origins and is derived from *tornus* – one who makes a circular journey, usually for pleasure, and returns to his or her starting point (Smith, 1992). Smith (1992) argued that the modern usage of the terms, which identifies the 'pilgrim' as a religious traveller and the 'tourist' as a secular vacationer, creates a culturally constructed polarity that blurs travellers' motives.

Since the 1990s, there has been a large body of literature on the similarities and the differences between tourists and pilgrims (Cohen, 1992; 1998; Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2000; Digance, 2003, 2006; MacCannell, 1973; Timothy and Olsen, 2006; Turner and Turner, 1978, Smith, 1992; Vukonić, 1996). This division is misguided, as the religious and the secular spheres of tourism are rapidly merging. Use of the concepts 'sacred' and 'secular' has become problematic in relation to the traditional definitions of Eliade (1969), particularly in reference to sharply contrasting polarisations (Markus, 2006).

Pilgrims and tourists are two distinct actors situated at opposite ends of Smith's continuum of travel (Smith, 1992). The polarities on the pilgrimage-tourism axis are labelled sacred vs. secular, and between them lies an almost endless range of possible sacred-secular combinations, with the central area on her scheme now generally referred to as 'religious tourism.' These positions reflect the multiple and changing motivations of travellers, whose interests and activities may shift from tourism to pilgrimage, and vice versa, without them even being aware of the change (Jackowski and Smith, 1992). Nolan and Nolan (1989) identify 'religious tourism' with the individual's quest for shrines and locales where, in lieu of piety, visitors seek to experience a sense of identification.

A new interest in pilgrimage emerged in the 2000s via scholars concerned with the field of tourism and religion (Stausberg, 2011). These researchers proposed a number of theoretical and applied political, cultural, behavioural, economic, and geographical subjects of research (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Pilgrimage has stimulated much interest and writing throughout history in parallel to the practice itself.

The 'old' paradigm was predicated on the assumption that religious elements were at the core of the journey but, in recent years, there has been a growth in the number of researchers dealing with various other aspects of pilgrimage. The significant number of books and articles published on the combination of a spiritual search and a physical journey is one indication of the current popularity and importance of this field of study (Eade and Dionigi, 2015; Digance, 2003; Stausberg, 2011; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Scholars have also noted a narrowing in the differences between tourism, pilgrimage, and even secular pilgrimage (Bilu, 1998; Kong, 2001).

Secular Pilgrimage

International debates on the definition of pilgrimage and other terms have intensified over the years. In addition to the debate on religion, pilgrimage, and tourism, since the early 1990s scholars began to pay attention to secular sites and the non-religious factors involved in pilgrimage (Badone and Roseman, 2004; Badone, 2014; Coleman and Eade, 2004; Eade, 1992; Margry, 2008). The subjects explored and the kinds of sites analysed in contemporary pilgrimage studies have transcended the 'officially' sacred. This development shows the influence of the perspective advanced by Eade and Sallnow (1991), which highlighted the heterogeneity of pilgrimage and introduced a new basis for comparing pilgrimages throughout the world, anchored in an understanding of pilgrimage as an arena for competing religious and secular discourses.

Thus, the discussion of what is 'tourism' and what is 'pilgrimage' has expanded over the years (along with other definitions). Since the 1990s, various researchers, including Reader and Walter (1993), Digance (2003; 2006), and Seaton (1999, 2002) contributed new perspectives on secular sites and secular aspects of pilgrimage research. Sites, experiences, and terms such as 'dark tourism', 'thanatourism' (Seaton, 1999; 2002; Stone 2006), 'popular culture', 'nature pilgrimage' and 'New Age pilgrimage' (Attix 2002) have helped push forward the transition in research. In recent years researchers have begun to assert that places other than traditional pilgrimage destinations are also worthy of full investigation with spiritual festivals and sites, war memorials and graves, secular shrines, sporting activities, and other experiences in mind (Collins-Kreiner, 2015).

The word 'pilgrimage' has come to be widely used in broad secular contexts both in scholarly literature and directly by the involved actors themselves. One

prominent example is Elvis Presley's mansion and tomb in Memphis, Tennessee (Alderman, 2002; Reader and Walter, 1993). Other examples include visits to war graves and the graves and residences of celebrities, and visits to churchyards and funerary sites. Studies show that both religious and secular pilgrims often share the trait of searching for meaningful and spiritual experiences, which can be described in various terms, including transformation, enlightenment, and life-changing and consciousness-changing events (Digance, 2006).

The process of pilgrimage occupies a unique space in both religious and secular tourism – what American geographer Edward Soja (1996) calls a 'third space.' By perceiving religious sites as a 'third space' that exists beyond and between the lived and the planned world, researchers should be able to understand the social practices of tourists at religious sites. The concept of 'third space' enables them to avoid the simplified dichotomy between 'religious traveller' and 'vacationer', or pilgrim and tourist (Cohen, 1992; Smith, 1992), insofar as these two groups are linked in one shared space. Indeed, a revised religious tourism approach based, in part, on the notion of a 'third space' acknowledges - in implicit and explicit terms - the interdependent nature of the two actors, pilgrims and tourists, and the social construction of a site as simultaneously sacred and secular (Gatrell and Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

Today, tourists, pilgrims, and locals compete for the use of available resources such as transportation, infrastructure, and parking around shrines and cathedrals. Timothy and Olsen (2006) rightly state that while it might be impossible to resolve the tourist-pilgrim debate, 'perhaps a solution is not as important as understanding the roots of contention' (2006:272).

Visitors, Pilgrims and Tourists: Theories and Approaches

We can also observe a change from viewing pilgrimage as a general, all-encompassing phenomenon to its analysis as an individual, specific experience. Until the 1980s, most pilgrimage research concerned the location, characteristics, and meaning of the sites themselves (Nolan and Nolan, 1989), or the overall sociological features of the community undergoing a liminal process (Turner and Turner, 1969).

Turner and Turner (1969) introduced several fundamental ideas into the study of pilgrimage. They argued that pilgrimages typically involve a stage of

'liminality' in which novices find themselves in the transitory stage between two established social statuses and as a 'ritual process'.

To understand the dynamics of the visitor experience, Cohen (1979:180) maintained that the tourist cannot be described as a 'general type' and proposed five main modes of tourist experience based on the place and significance of the given experience in the tourists' total worldview: that is, their attitude to a perceived 'centre' and the location of that centre in relation to the society in which the tourist lives. The five modes represent a spectrum, ranging from the tourist's experience as a traveller in pursuit of mere pleasure to that of the modern pilgrim on a quest for meaning at someone else's centre. Cohen (1979:183) identified these modes as recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential, and claimed that tourists travelling in the 'existential mode' are comparable to pilgrims. Both are fully committed to an elective spiritual centre, external to the mainstream of their native society and culture because they feel that the only meaningful 'real' life is at the centre (Cohen, 1979:186).

Since the 1990s, one can see how the individual and his or her personal experience have become the focus of interest for the study of pilgrimage tourism. Researchers such as Smith (1989; 1992), Cohen (1992), Fleisher (2000), Collins-Kreiner and Gatrell (2006), Poria, Butler and Airey (2003; 2004) have started to look more specifically into these aspects. The literature has also focused a great deal of attention on the 'visitor experience' and the psychosocial dynamics that drive pilgrimage (e.g., Cohen, 1979; 1992; 1998; MacCannell, 1973; Turner and Turner, 1969; 1978).

This process of focusing on inner experiences rather than external dimension occurred in three stages. The first was analysing typologies, as exemplified in Cohen's typology of different visitor experiences. The second stage involved the classification of visitor experiences into sub-types (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot 2002). The next stage involved the understanding that a visitor may undergo diverse, shifting experiences that depend not only on the pilgrimage in question but also on the traveller and how he or she perceives his or her visit and experience.

Current research on pilgrimage emphasises the aspect of subjectivity. Poria, Butler, and Airey (2003; 2004) call for examining the visitor experience at the site, as well as his or her individual impressions, and argue that the experience and mental state of the visitor can

fluctuate in intensity and change over time, according to his or her own personal characteristics. This approach makes it abundantly clear that each person may interpret his or her own experience differently.

Empirical Studies of Pilgrimage-Tourism

To illustrate the changes discussed above, this paper examines three studies concerning different kinds of pilgrimage. These cases were selected in order to achieve diversification of the investigated phenomena.

The first case study examines Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land between 2000 and 2004 (Collins-Kreiner *et al.*, 2006), the second investigates Jewish pilgrims at seven holy sites in Israel (Collins-Kreiner, 1999, 2006), and the third case study pertains to the fascinating phenomenon of Western travellers visiting the East - a trend that raises major questions regarding the overall nature of pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner and Sagie-Tueta, 2011).

Case Study 1: Christian Visitors to the Holy Land

This study (Collins-Kreiner *et al.*, 2006) evaluates the 'experience' of Christian visitors (Figure 1) who visited Israel during a time of crisis. It presents a qualitative portrait of 284 Christians (157 Catholics and 127 Protestants) who visited the Holy Land between 2000 and 2004 and evaluates the Christian experience through the eyes of these visitors, based on before and after interviews.

At the time, Israel was suffering from severe security problems as a result of the Second Palestinian Intifada, which resulted in a dramatic drop in the number of tourists, from 2.7 million in 2000 to 800,000 in 2002 and it was important to understand the motivations of the visitors who continued to come to the country during the security crisis in order to attract these market segments.

According to the findings, most of the visitors who visited the Holy Land were motivated primarily by religious beliefs, which led them to their sacred journey. They were motivated by the strength of their faith and religio-spiritual world of images and perceptions of the Holy Land, which also formed their expectations of the tour. On this basis, their itineraries amounted essentially to 'walking in the footsteps of Jesus', but were also influenced by the varying dogmas of Catholicism and different Protestant churches.

Figure 1: Christian Visitors in the Jordan River, the Holy Land

(Photo by Author, 2015)

There are many indications of the less influential role played by touristic components in their journey, though those roles varied from one visitor to the next. According to their own testimony, their motivations and expectations in the tourism realm were minor, albeit highly fulfilled. Still, the visitors' comments and responses reveal a number of other touristic aspects of the trip. Like all tourists, they visited well-known Israeli sites and spent time shopping. As 'tourists', they also enjoyed the fact that the sacred sites were not crowded and complained about the tight schedule and lack of free time. Yet, as stated before, these elements were minor in comparison to the most important aspect of the tour: the religious aspect, which thus positions them close to the religious edge of the scale. One of the main findings was that travellers exhibit multiple motivations that can also change their outlook and attitudes, over the course of a journey from each of the five modes claimed by Cohen (1979): recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential and *vice versa*.

Case-study 2: Jewish Pilgrimage

The second case study (Collins-Kreiner, 2006) deals with the phenomenon of Jewish pilgrimage in Israel (Figure 2). Its aim was to analyse the characteristics of Jewish pilgrims to saintly graves between 2004 and 2005, including the motives for pilgrimage, activities during the pilgrimage, and the pilgrim-tourism intersection. The data-collection methods employed included 703 interviews with pilgrims *in situ*, observations *in situ*, and the recording of participant observations (Collins-Kreiner, 2006).

The study's main finding relates to the existence of a continuum, as proposed by Smith (1992), along which the different categories of visitors can be represented. At one end of the continuum are the pilgrims - very orthodox (19%) and religious Jews (27%) who visit the sites based on religious belief and whose main activity at the site is prayer. At the other end of the scale are so-called 'spiritual tourists' and 'heritage tourists' (15%)

Figure 2: Jewish Pilgrimage

(Photo by Guy Shachar, 2003)

whose motivations include curiosity, cultural interest, and the quest for new meaning in life. Between these two extremes fall the ‘traditional’ (*masorati*) Jews visiting the site (36%), who are closer to the Orthodox Jews in their belief in the power of the *tsaddik* (the deceased saintly figure) and his helpful advice, though their belief stems not from religious faith but from their personal outlook. This finds expression in the fact that traditional visitors tend to make specific requests rather than offer formal Jewish prayers.

Differences were observed in the customs and behaviours of the different groups. Whereas those closer to the pilgrimage pole prayed and those closer to the tourist pole did not, the mid-scale group takes part in a variety of activities such as lighting candles, placing supplications and notes, and purchasing souvenirs such as holy water, pictures of the *tsaddik*, candles, greetings, pamphlets, and amulets against the ‘evil eye.’ The differences noted in visitors’ attitudes toward the sites were found to depend mainly on religious affiliation, and not on age, ethnic origin, socio-economic status, self-perception, gender, or other such factors. The location of each pilgrim on the scale is personal and subjective, and between the two extremes there are an almost infinite number of combinations.

Case-study 3: Westerners Traveling to Dharamsala, India

The third study (Collins-Kreiner and Sagie-Tueta, 2011) examines the cultural, educational, and religious experiences of Western visitors to Dharamsala, India (Figure 3) in an effort to provide insight into the growing phenomenon of Westerners visiting the East for purposes of self-fulfilment, study, and belief. The methods used were both qualitative and quantitative and included a structured questionnaire administered to 127 visitors at seven different sites in Dharamsala, twenty in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

This case-study considers the degree of ‘quest in guest’ (Smith, 1992), i.e., the extent to which visitors to a specific spiritual destination are motivated by a quest for spiritual fulfilment. Respondents were selected from the broader stream of tourists to Dharamsala, and included visitors who depicted themselves as different from regular tourists and who stayed longer than one month. According to the findings, these visitors did not define themselves as tourists or pilgrims, although they differentiated themselves from the locals. Rather, they defined

Figure 3: Western visitors to Dharamsala, India

(Photo by Tenzin Choejor / Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, 2015)

themselves as ‘students,’ locating them in the special interest tourism niche.

These findings reveal two layers of identity. The first is the richer educational and spiritual layer, which encompasses these visitors’ beliefs and their wish to study meditation or Tibetan Buddhism. This layer guided them in their plans before embarking on the journey and plays a decisive role in determining when to take the trip; their handling of economic, family, and health problems; and their spiritual preparation.

The second layer is a thinner tourist layer. Although the visitors depicted themselves not as tourists but as students, and although their motivations and expectations in the tourism realm such as accommodation, shopping, food, entertainment, etc. were minor, touristic aspects of the trip emerged in some of the visitors’ comments and responses. As tourists, they met locals and experienced many facets of India. Still, as already stated, these aspects were much less important than the tour’s primary goal - education, as most of the visitors classified themselves as belonging to the specific category of ‘students’ and as participating in an edu-tourism visit. Their trip was based on specific educational and spiritual motivations, in order to return home feeling stronger and more fulfilled.

These ‘students’ viewed their visit as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Although they felt that their trip had mental and spiritual restorative effects, the trips seldom had any recreational or diversionary elements. For these travellers, the ‘quest in guest’ was fulfilled as they discovered their spiritual home or ‘centre’ (Cohen, 1979; Eliade, 1969) in Dharamsala, and the fulfilment of their spiritual needs marked the end of their journey.

Although this case study identifies a variety of motives, ranging from education to a more purposeful need for fulfilment, it is evident that, albeit unintentionally, visitors to Dharamsala experienced different intensities of spiritual fulfilment. In this way, it is apparent that, within particular destination contexts, tourism can begin to take on the characteristics of a sacred journey as a sacred journey can take on touristic characteristics. While such tourism may not be intentionally spiritual and its participants might not even describe it as such, its eventual outcome may be regarded in such terms according to the current definitions of pilgrimage.

Common Themes in Different Religions

The three studies presented above demonstrate the difficulties of drawing clear boundaries around categories of travel and of differentiating pilgrims from tourists. For example, in two case studies, Christian and Jewish visitors could not be clearly distinguished from tourists or pilgrims in space or in activities but rather are located on a continuum. Between the polarities of this continuum labelled sacred vs. secular, lies an almost endless range of possible sacred-secular combinations, which reflect the multiple and changing motivations of travellers, whose interests and activities may shift from tourism to pilgrimage, and vice versa, without them even being aware of the change, as suggested by Jackowski and Smith in 1992.

The ability to differentiate becomes even harder when considering Western visitors to Dharamsala, due to the extent to which their experiences incorporate numerous different aspects of the educational, the touristic and the spiritual. For some, the journey has strong meaning while for others it does not, as multiple activities can exist simultaneously at the same space, and the attitudes of the different visitors can vary markedly, even within the same religious grouping.

This paper suggests that the differences between pilgrims and tourists are fading as both pilgrimage and tourism involve an emotional desire on the part of individuals to visit sites that are meaningful to them. Overall, however, a visitor's experience, be it termed pilgrimage or tourism, is, in fact, not homogeneous, but rather comprises different experiential types. Visitors' motivations are also highly diverse, ranging from curiosity to a quest for meaning. They all visit various sites and coexist, even though their reasons for visiting and their activities at the site vary significantly.

Thus, one key issue addressed in this paper is the need for a continuum of visitors rather than a dichotomy of secular / sacred classification. This continuum reinforces the emerging connection between the two mobilities of tourism and pilgrimage discussed previously in this paper. A clear distinction between the pilgrimages of the past and the tourism of today is difficult to discern, as both kinds of travelers may be motivated by the desire to experience something that will add meaning to their lives.

All three case-studies considered above deal with the inner experience of visitors, reflecting a shift in the research, from an examination of external elements to exploration of inner experiences. This change can also

be observed in the shift from a view of pilgrimage as a general and comprehensive phenomenon to its analysis as an individual event. This shift includes the classification of visitor experiences into sub-types, as observed in the Christian and Jewish case-studies, by which visitors were situated along a scale of experience. This scale reflects the understanding that visitors may have a variety of kinds of experience that may shift over time. The visitors to Dharamsala confirmed this shift, as many claimed having undergone various internal experiences that varied in accordance with their length of stay.

The final shift finds expression in the expansion of areas of research and analysed sites further afield than those considered 'officially sacred'. This is reflected in the third case-study: the study of Western visitors travelling to Dharamsala, India. In recent years, numerous scholars have started to assert that other places in addition to sacred constructions and locations also warrant attention (Margry, 2008; Reader and Walter, 1993), referring to spiritual festivals, war memorials and graves, sporting activities and secular shrines.

Summary

Along with the increasing blurring of pilgrimage, tourism, and secular tourism, and the fading differences between the desires of people to search for new meaning, the three case-studies discussed above offer evidence that both the study and the phenomena of pilgrimage in the twenty-first century are changing. This can be observed in doing away with distinctions that were accepted in the past and a growing inability to distinguish between the different perceptions and research areas, which are becoming increasingly integrated.

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