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Pilgrimage and religious tourism in Islam

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ABSTRACT

In recent years scholars have engaged with explorations that tried to account for the pilgrimage vs. tourism conundrum. Among the ideas that emerged was defining an integrative category under the heading of religious tourism. This paper makes the argument that from a purely religious perspective pilgrimage in Islam is nothing but the one mentioned in the Quran; namely the *Hajj*. Therefore, it is argued, that all other religious Muslim motivated journeys constitute a different category which may be termed; religious tourism. By reframing and reconceptualizing Muslim pilgrimage which is 'beyond the officially sacred' as religious tourism the paper accounts for a plethora of religious voyages and the entire spectrum of Muslim religious voyages.

Introduction

An early Islamic tradition (*hadith*) narrated by a certain Ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (d. 724 CE) quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying: "You shall only set out for three mosques: The Sacred Mosque (in Mecca), my mosque (in Medina) and al-Aqsa Mosque (in Jerusalem)" (cited in Kister, 1969). This tradition is in fact a restricting one which seems to suggest the prohibition of pilgrimage only to those places indicated. Contemporary scholars interpret this *hadith* as part of a propaganda intended to support the magnanimous building project executed by the Umayyad Caliph, Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, in late 7th century, which aimed to divert the *Hajj* destination from Mecca to Jerusalem (Elad, 1995). Indeed, today it would be unfathomable that a Muslim ruler would ban his followers to perform the *Hajj* to Mecca, but such were the unique religious-political circumstances during a very early and a short period of early Islam. Hence, the plan was short lived and was not pursued ultimately. However, it brings to light a crucial matter which will be engaged with head on in this paper: what constitutes pilgrimage in Islam and further what types of religiously motivated travels exist within Islam as religion and surely a distinct civilization? The current endeavor aims to promote Islamic religious travels as a distinct category within pilgrimage and surely tourism studies and discern among different religiously motivated journeys among Muslim societies world over.

In recent years scholars from various disciplines have engaged with explorations that tried to account for the pilgrimage vs. tourism conundrum (Cohen, 1992; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Among the ideas that emerged was defining an integrative category under the heading of religious tourism (Irimás & Michalkõ, 2013). Banking on this rich and bourgeoning field the argument is made that from a purely religious perspective pilgrimage in Islam should be confined to the only one mentioned in the Quran and thus decreed by Allah; namely the *Hajj*. Indeed, this is taking a purely emic Islamic perspective which in the case at hand is conducive to overcome, among other things, the problematic use of pilgrimage as an umbrella term for Islamic religious voyages. Therefore, it is argued, that all other religious Muslim motivated journeys constitute a different category which may be termed; religious tourism. A not so gentle reminder to this juridical understanding may be found in contemporary Salafi groups which hold, − to use Din's definition; religiously inspired trips to shrines which are not part of the Quranic creed (i.e. Mecca and its sacred center) - as forbidden religious innovations, *bid'a* as it were in Islamic jurisprudence (1989). Hence, for example, the blunt and adamant iconoclastic policy of Isis regarding sacred and religious heritage sites under their purview (Singer, 2015). By reframing and reconceptualizing Muslim pilgrimage which is 'beyond the officially

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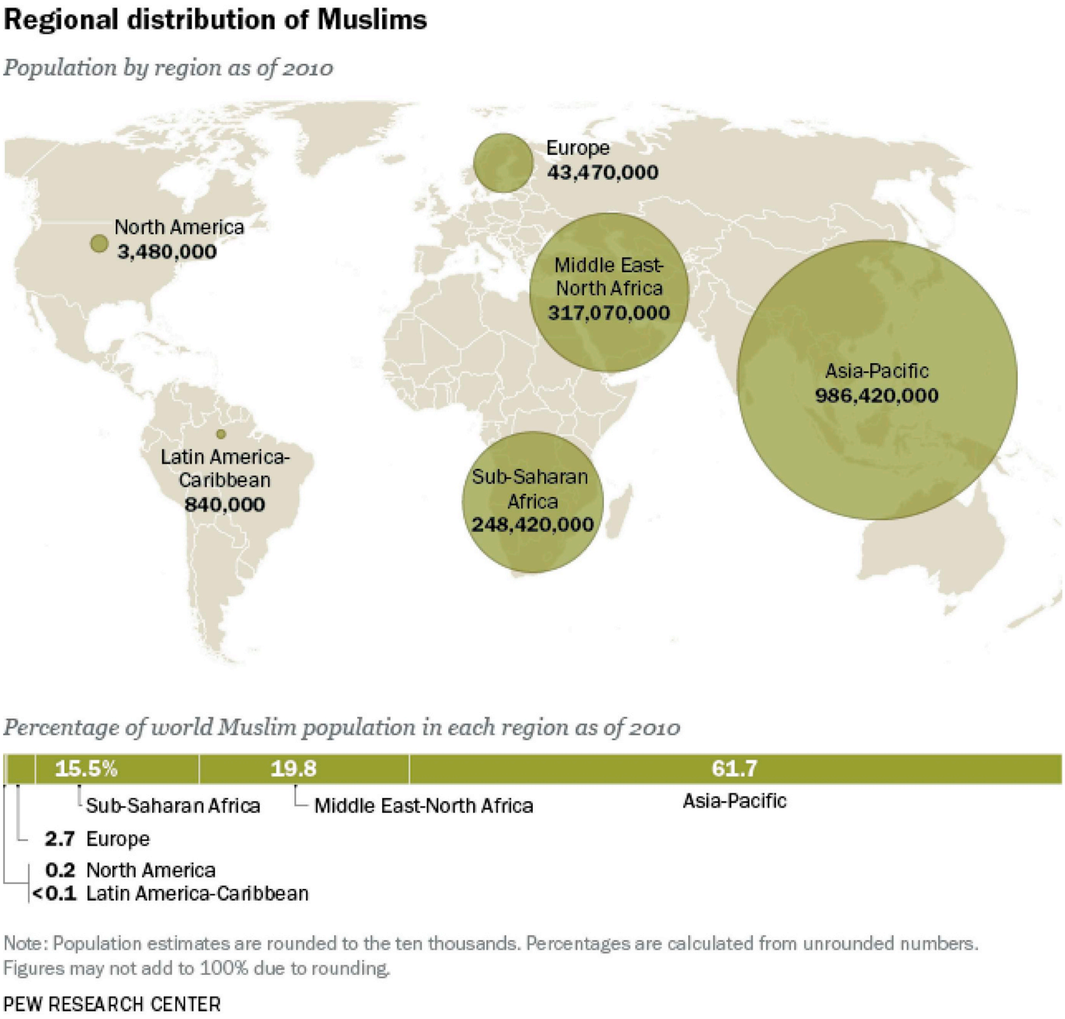
sacred' (Di Giovine & Choe, 2019) as religious tourism I will be able to account for a plethora of religious voyages and the entire spectrum of Muslim religious voyages. However, due to lingual limitations and there being a clear lack of one-to-one correspondence in vocabulary between English and Arabic, the use of English in this paper necessitates the use of "pilgrimage" where it may not be completely accurate.

To furnish my argument this paper follows the changes taking place in sacred journeys and religious tourism in Islam and among Muslim communities around the globe. It is my intention to contribute to current debates in the field by bringing together insights on the complex relations among Islam, pilgrimage, and religious tourism. To begin with, I explore Islamic religious voyages as a distinct category and indeed a field which is undergoing an emancipatory project within the heavily Anglophonic dominated pilgrimage studies. Then, I analyze pilgrimage and sainthood in Islam and the implications for understanding pilgrimage and religious motivated voyages in Islam. Thus, I discuss the main theological and historical developments within Islam as a religious tradition regarding pilgrimage (journeys towards a sacred center) and dwell on some aspects that distinguish it from other religious voyages. Following, I theorize Islamic pilgrimage against current understanding in the field and specifically the emerging understanding of 'dedifferentiation' between pilgrimage and tourism. The following section sketches briefly the many faces of contemporary Muslim religious motivated travels defining them also as religious tourism. In closing I highlight the central role of Muslim religious tourism and its importance within Islamic pilgrimage at large.

Religious travels and tourism: towards an Islamic perspective

With circa 1.8 billion adherents Islam is the second largest religion after Christianity (Lipka & Hackett, 2017). Islam dominates religious landscapes of the Middle East, North Africa, large parts of Asia and the South Pacific. While originally Islam sprang from the Middle East and the Arabs were its initial population, today they comprise only about 20% of the world's Muslims. This is highly pertinent to current Muslim religious voyages as it means that most of them are not taking place in Islam's historical heart. Currently over 60% of world's Muslims are to be found in Asia and the Pacific. The following chart taken from the Pew Research Center clearly attest to Islam globalized spread and the geographical, social and surely historical diversity of the communities which constitute it.



Regional distribution of Muslims

Population by region as of 2010

Europe
43,470,000
North America
3,480,000
Middle East-North Africa
317,070,000
Asia-Pacific
986,420,000
Latin America-Caribbean
840,000
Sub-Saharan Africa
248,420,000
Percentage of world Muslim population in each region as of 2010
15.5%
19.8
61.7
Sub-Saharan Africa
Middle East-North Africa
Asia-Pacific
2.7 Europe
0.2 North America
<0.1 Latin America-Caribbean

Note: Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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We should, also, consider the sectarian divisions within Islam which also shape the types and destinations of pilgrimage within it. By best estimates 87–90% of Muslims are Sunni, 10–13% belong to the Shi'a and there are also small numbers of other sects which may be considered part of this religion pending on one's positionality. Most Muslims are concentrated in the 57 countries belonging to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016). The somewhat traditional setting is becoming more complicated against the growing numbers of Muslims residing in European countries and North and South America (Esposito, 2004). In recent decades the numbers of migrant workers and other types of Muslim immigrants are rising. These immigrants (ex-pats of sorts) become more and more meaningful at times as mere tourists to their home-countries and more importantly as religious tourists both to traditional Muslim sites as well as emerging sacred destinations in their respective new countries (Xavier, 2018). This complex and highly nuanced geographical spread is also responsible for the significant growth of religious tourists to numerous religious destinations which far surpass the numbers of *Hajjis* to Mecca. Indeed, there exist thousands of other religiously motivated journeys which are taking place throughout the Muslim world which are certainly not connected to the *Hajj* (Arjana, 2017).

Muslims' religiously motivated voyages are, therefore, a highly nuanced and multifaceted category. They well may include local *ziyarat*, visits to far away shrines or as the case maybe Halal packages to Muslim countries (Akyol & Kılınç, 2014; Thimm, 2017). As religious life and secular life in Islam are closely intertwined, Islamic religious tourism and Islamic tourism are not always mutually exclusive categories and both may be explored as part of Islamic worldview and culture (Jafari and Scott, 2014). This needs to be pursued with caution and surely with an awareness to both similarities and differences, continuity and change in order to go beyond essentializing Islam and reiterate Orientalist biases and fixations on Islamic societies (McLoughlin, 2007). In order to avoid the slippery slope of re-reification of Islam as a cultural and social phenomenon we should rather adopt, following Albera (2006), a flexible approach which sees it as a context rather than an object of study. This allows for a new epistemological space to open which does not lead to simple return to previous false reifications. So, indeed tourism, religious tourism and pilgrimage in Islam are to be found in close connections but we need pursue this with caution and avoid oversimplifying matters or reduce the discussion to observing Islam as a concrete object and inert category of inquiry. So, while I advocate here Islamic religious tourism as a distinct category, I remain wary of the need to explore the local contexts in order to avoid false categorization and essentializing Islam(s). It is a way to subvert, even slightly, the power asymmetry in the field and current Anglophone emphasis. By allowing the categorizing of various forms of religious voyages as religious tourism I aim to expound on the fuzzy boundaries between official and beyond the official sacred journeys among Islamic societies.

Religious voyages in Islam: an historical perspective

This section was initially titled ‘the development of the cult of saints and pilgrimage in Islam’. I ultimately opted for the current one on account of the problematic of the concept of sainthood in Islam. Saints as indeed pilgrimage are accepted scholarly categories which are not only external to Islam but also represent the dominance of the Latin, as the precursor of English, and Christian theology and vocabulary in the field of pilgrimage studies. The very word pilgrimage to describe Islamic religious voyages is surely, as already suggested by Albera and Eade (2017: 9), a superimposed Anglophone term: “this critical awareness should lead us to consider the term ‘pilgrimage’ simply as a western cultural idiosyncrasy”. This distinction is crucial as it illuminates the power structure in the field and the hegemony of its Anglophone perspectives. But while pilgrimage might be easier to use in the Islamic context the use of holy or saint carries the risk of translating Islam into a Christian tradition (Arjana, 2017). Neither Muhammad nor other highly venerated persons which their grave/tomb, place of birth and such like attributes serve as a destination for pilgrimage/veneration were ever considered as saints or holy (Andrae, 1960). The category of revered people who are considered close to God, or at times his friends (Arabic: *wali*), as holy, simply does not exist as such in Islam. Bryn S. Turner has it very concisely:

> Arabic terms of *marabout*, *darvish*, *sufi*, *wali*, cannot be translated into the Christian term ‘saint’, because the history, institutions and cultural frameworks of these religions are distinctive. The centralized, complex and stringent process of canonization is crucial to the Christian understanding of saintship. Precisely because no such centralized, ecclesiastical machinery exists in Islam, there is no official or homogenous terminology of marboutism (saintship in Islam) when the western anthropologists talk about Islamic saints, the use the term as a shorthand for a diversity of roles.
>
> (Turner, 1975)

This is certainly true regarding the Arab/Middle Eastern heart of the Islamic world, but it needs be admitted that as this world kept expanding further and further away from its geographical origins these idiosyncratic variations are to be found as the Javanese case clearly demonstrates (Woodward, 1989). So, I will refrain from calling it a cult of saints as that which motivates pilgrimage but certainly since early on a cult of sacred places has emerged in Islam. This was in direct contradiction to the highly monotheistic creed the Prophet Muhammad promoted and certainly to the Quranic message.

Initially Islam ruled out the possibility of intermediate being between God and humanity. Muhammad presented himself as a ‘regular’ person void of any divine characteristics (Quran, 17, 95). Thus, the Quran embodies a pure monotheistic message to which the possibility of venerating humans and sacred sites poses a threat to the unity of God and the Islamic Umma (Goldziher, 1911). This was part of Muhammad campaign against *shirk*; literally inclusion which means deification or worship of anyone or anything besides Allah. Be that as it may, Muhammad did make one ideological concession and internalized the pre-Islamic pilgrimage center in Mecca, the Ka'ba, into Islam in the shape of the *Hajj*, the obligatory religious voyage to Mecca in the month of Dhu al-Hijja (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1981). The Quran is very clear about the exclusivity of this ritual and forbids all other sacred voyages:

> You shall observe the complete rites of *Hajj* and `*Umrah* for God. If you are prevented, you shall send an offering, and do not

> resume cutting your hair until your offering has reached its destination. If you are ill or suffering a head injury (and you must cut your hair), you shall expiate by fasting, or giving to charity, or some other form of worship. During the normal *Hajj*, if you break the state of Ihram (sanctity) between `*Umrah* and *Hajj*, you shall expiate by offering an animal sacrifice. If you cannot afford it, you shall fast three days during Hajj and seven when you return home - this completes ten -provided you do not live at the Sacred Masjid. You shall observe God, and know that God is strict in enforcing retribution (2: 196)

Muhammad advocated a highly intellectual and intangible approach to God and was adamant against the common practice of saints' veneration, visitation of graves as intermediaries between humans and God. The *Hadith* literature carries numerous indications: “On his death-bed Allah's Apostle put a sheet over his-face and when he felt hot, he would remove it from his face. When in that state (of putting and removing the sheet) he said,” May Allah's Curse be on the Jews and the Christians for they build places of worship at the graves of their prophets (al-Bukhari, 4, 56: 660). Be that as it may, Muhammad himself was accustomed to visit the graves of his deceased companions and to intercede with God on their behalf, but the ambiguity both of his practice and of the traditions that he left behind bequeathed succeeding generations a legacy of uncertainty (Berhanek & Tupek, 2009). In practice Muslim communities were quick to adopt and venerate people and places as mediators to God. Metaphorically speaking, the cult of God was challenged by the cult of saints. In order to overrule the Quranic understanding about *shirk* the use of the term *wali* (plural: *Awliya*) to saints began to emerge. This term suggests proximity, someone who is in close relations and later on was interpreted as closer to, or even a friend of, God (Goldziher, 1911). The emergence of a tradition of saints was deeply rooted in a culture of religious learning. Indeed, sainthood was dependent upon the attainment of an exemplary level of learning and pious devotion. The process of recognizing a living saint was both personal and informal (Meri, 1999). Among the ranks of living saints, one finds mystics, theologians, and other men of learning and of great piety but also local heroes, military personas and more. Already in the ninth century shrines to saints were abundant, notwithstanding the Prophet's stricture against building over tombs (Chodkiewicz, 1995). The common term in Arabo-Islamic communities of religious voyages to such shrines is *ziyara* i.e. visitation. As the doctrine of *walaya*, sainthood in its Islamic formation, was developing one may find a proliferation of pilgrimage sites and different types of rituals emerging and thus forsaking the Quranic purist understanding for a more plausible and earthly practicality (Andezian, 2001). The expansion of Islam into different regions where it encountered local traditions surely added more dimensions to the richness of Islamic pilgrimage types and locations. Contemporary Islam encompasses a huge variety of sects, traditions, languages, ethnicities, and numerous national states. The Hajj, its paramount importance notwithstanding, is but one of multiplicity of religious voyages. As most Muslims would never pilgrim to Mecca and would suffice themselves with much closer shrines to home the importance of beyond the officially sacred voyages is paramount. The focus on the obligatory *Hajj* to Mecca is still very much in vogue and yet in recent years the field is opening and is becoming more inclusive as scholars are transcending previous confining categories and begin to account for the multivocality of pilgrimage which fall under the purview of Islam (Arjana, 2017). This theological differentiation between *Hajj* and other forms of religiously motivated voyages is theorized in what follows against the often-discussed spectrum of pilgrimage-tourism (Collins-Kriener, 2016).

Theorizing Islamic pilgrimage and religious tourism

Pilgrimage, as a movement towards a sacred center aimed at being exposed to God's presence (Coleman & Elsner, 1995), has won greater scholarly attention since the late 1980s (Eade, 2019). We are witnessing an expansion of pilgrimage studies which is manifested in the numerous fields explored by pilgrimage scholars; religious tourism, materialities, race, gender, ethnicity, heritage, dark tourism, technologies and new media and so forth. This is also observed in the openness to the non-religious aspects of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage scholars often encounter the problematics of definitions and particularly the need to distinguish among different types of voyages and the people preforming them. To be clear, I am referring to the pilgrimage vs. tourism discussion that has been with us for several decades now and among different disciplines (Smith, 1992). And yet, the nature of these relationship and very definitions surely require further study (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). The issue of motivation and at times activities while at the sacred center was suggested as a way to distinguish between pilgrims and tourists placed on a continuum (Cohen, 2003; Collins-Kreiner, 2004). Cohen (1992) also proposed a differentiation based on the destination of the journey. While the pilgrim and the pilgrim-tourist types move towards an Eliadean sacred center, the traveller and the traveller-tourist, he claims, move in the opposite direction to centers which are out there. But while the quest for well-defined categories lingers on, a new paradigm has emerged advocating the impossibility of such an endeavor due to the lack of rigid boundaries and hence definitions among these different types. As succinctly posited by Badone and Roseman (2004, p. 2): “Rigid dichotomies between pilgrimage and tourism or pilgrims and tourists no longer seem tenable in the shifting world of postmodern travel”. And indeed, Collins-Kreiner (2010) recently advocated the futility of such distinctions and binaries against the collapsing boundaries and melting certainties brought forth by post-modernist scholarship. I, for one, embrace this understanding as it frees us from further pursuing this Sisyphean task which ultimately is not conducive, to my mind, for a better grasp of the developments at the sites explored. Bluntly put, it absolves us from engaging in a rather futile pursuit of questioning one's motivations and allows us to focus our attention on what is taking place in the field. However, I want to suggest at least one aspect which might merit such categorizations and a theoretical framework that harness the idea of religious tourism to Islamic pilgrimage. This would enable us to account for the many religious voyages by Muslims that are not to Mecca and certainly free us from well-known binary of treating such voyages as non-Hajj as will be explained hereinafter. Further, by entailing this category one would be able to discern different religiously motivated travels based on clear religious Islamic principles and not vague or uncertain personal motivations. This is explored in what follows.

The beginning of Islamic pilgrimage study was rather humble and shortsighted. Western travelers and scholars, orientalists as they were named at the time, were mostly focusing on the *Hajj*, as the only religious voyage in Islam. In the late 19th Sir Richard

Burton, the known British traveller and the Dutch scholar Christian Snouck Hurgronje were the forerunners of this European trend (Eickelman, 1981). Both have masqueraded as Muslim pilgrims, defying all current codes of conduct in the field, and survived the ordeal to publish their *Hajj* experience (Burton, 1964; Snouck Hurgronje, 1931). This scholarly endeavor was carried out in the context of impending imperial domination or, in some cases, of actual colonial rule. Islam was perceived as an inert religious tradition which is immune to changes. This essentializing understanding was also responsible for the general dichotomic treatment of *Hajj* as the official pilgrimage and *ziyarat*, graves' and saints' visitations, as the non-official pilgrimage within Muslim societies (Goldziher, 1911). Other forms of pilgrimage and surely other topics involved such as economy or politics were rarely discussed. Canaan survey of Islamic sanctuaries in Palestine during the early days of the British Mandate is a perfect example to this European-Western-Orientalist approach to Islamic pilgrimage (1927). By and large, the study of pilgrimage in Islam proved to be mostly a-theoretical long into the second half of the 20th century (Marranci, 2008). Gilsenan was one of the first to bring a more theoretically informed approach to the study of Muslims societies, Islam and certainly pilgrimage therein. In the preface to his influential book *Recognizing Islam* he makes his contribution abundantly clear:

> I did not consider Islam to be monolithic, an entity which could be treated as a theological or civilizational historical bloc, unchanging and essentially ‘other’ in some primordial way. Nor did I wish to put forward an account of belief, doctrine and history as systematized by Orientalists, theologians or jurists. … I was, and am, concerned with more sociological questions of social and cultural variation in very different societies subjected to the conflict of the colonial and post-colonial periods and of the very turbulent processes we label modernity (1982: 5)

Working in the context of colonial and post-colonial Morocco Eickelman presented us with one of the first nuanced and theoretically informed Islamic pilgrimage study. His oeuvre on a Moroccan pilgrimage center in Boujad is framed within a Weberian paradigm in order to study social, cultural and inevitably also political changes in Moroccan society through the changes in its approach to pilgrimage in its local version of Maraboutism (1976). The main stance of his study is to make sense of the changing forms in which elements of a religious tradition have been understood in a specific local over a century. In this respect he was able to break free from the field previous assumptions and offer an account and analysis of pilgrimage and Islam and surely Islamic pilgrimage as vibrant and susceptible to changes. However, the dominance of the Turnerian anti-structuralist model, which promotes an Eliadean understanding to the sacred center, was paramount to the general reluctance among scholars to engage in studies of non-Hajj pilgrimage (Boivin, 2017). The Turnerian model has certain merits and surely helped in theorizing the field but it is also highly unidimensional. The arguments advanced by Eade and Sallnow (1991) in their introduction to ‘Contesting the Sacred’ presented pilgrimage as a dynamic arena capable of accommodating many competing religious and secular discourses. Promoting a situational (Durkheimian) approach to place they manage to stir clear from essentializing pilgrimage and surely the sites involved. They argue that pilgrimage as an institution cannot be understood as a universal or homogenous phenomenon but should instead be deconstructed into historically and culturally specific case studies. Thus, enabling different perspectives and locations of pilgrimage to be heard outside the purview of Anglophone pilgrimage studies and interests.

This was certainly a milestone in the field of pilgrimage studies and its effects on Islamic pilgrimage studies were immense. Not only scholars began to pay greater attention to a variety of pilgrimage activities around the Muslim world but also an expanding range of themes and sites involved in pilgrimage within Muslim societies as well as the growing diasporic communities. My own work on pilgrimage among Palestinian-Islamic communities, deploying a neoGramscian approach, demonstrates the importance of local religious voyages against national cum sociopolitical processes (Luz, 2013, 2015). Surely, this is but one humble example to what recently constitutes today Islamic pilgrimage studies and how the field is charged with growing theoretical awareness. The list is long as Eade (2011) points out: “Against the failure of Western grand narratives to explain this changing world became evident. scholars spoke of hybridity, third spaces, scapes, spheres, new ethnicities, diasporas and a variety of “posts””. This is surely evident in Islamic pilgrimage studies not only in growing scholarly theoretically informed studies but also in increasing awareness to general debates in the field and to the variety of religious voyages which are beyond the *Hajj*. Indeed, Muslim practices of moving towards sacred centers are not only highly variegated and demonstrate, at times, flexibility and ingenuity. A case in point is surely sites in which the sacred is shared between Muslims and other religious groups. These sites are to be found in numerous locations in India, Balkans, along the Mediterranean shores, Indonesia and elsewhere (Albera, 2015; Albera & Couroucli, 2012; Gottowik, 2016). These sites have a dynamic history and often fluctuate between periods of peaceful sharing and conflicts and contestations. However, they surely represent the multifaceted and colorful nature of religious voyages and destinations in the Muslim world.

And indeed, the pilgrim vs. tourist debate lingers on as the pilgrim might easily become a tourist and vice a versa as might be seen in the following observation: “The difficulty of distinguishing between pilgrims and other tourists can be seen in the official statistics of many countries, where existing figures tend to combine pilgrimage and religious tourism with cultural or heritage tourism (Russell, 1999)”. However, by marrying, as suggested above, the concept of religious tourism to Islamic pilgrimage, we would be able acknowledge the plethora of Muslim religious travels which are indeed “beyond the officially sacred” but constitute a much more significant volume that the Hajj. To be clear, I invoke this classification solely based on Islamic religious principles and way to account for dichotomies already existing in the field. Under no circumstances this means to suggest that I embark again on the quest of exploring pilgrimage-tourism differentiation based on personal motivations.

The many faces of Islamic religious travels

Millions of Muslims are visiting a plethora of sacred places which as we have seen is a tradition that pre-dates Islam and was gradually accepted even by religious scholars. The sum total of pilgrims that venerate and preform rituals in these circumstances and places far exceeds those who perform the Quranic rite. Annemarrie Schimmel (1994) called them replacement *hajjs* but I rather think the local impetuous for sacred journeys and surely receiving blessing from holy or pious people throughout the Muslim World is not directly linked to the ‘official ritual’ nor do we need to see it as mirroring it. If anything, Islamic pilgrimage goes far beyond the Hajj and in many cases local traditions prevail in dictating the nature of the ritual. Therefore, an examination of Islamic pilgrimage surely needs to start with the *Hajj* but as we shall see, is a much larger canvas. While *Hajj* surely merit the definition of pilgrimage it is suggested to regard all other forms as part of a very expansive definition of religious tourism.

Mecca and other traditional sacred centers

While Mecca and its *Hajj* are of paramount importance Medina as the burial place of the prophet is usually added to the pilgrim's itinerary while on the *Hajj*. Jerusalem has won a special place in Islam as the first of the two qiblas (praying direction) and the third of the Harams (holy sites) (Reiter, 2017). As such Muslim pilgrims since the seventh century often visited the city on their way to perform the hajj in Mecca (Elad, 1995). For Muslim pilgrims the *Hajj* is the peak of religious life and it is the most powerful expression of the most important principle of the *umma*; unity and equality of all believers arriving in Mecca to perform this holy rite. However, the *hajj* since early on in Islamic history has always had far-reaching political implications and served as a bone of contention among rivalry groups both religiously (sunna-shi'a) and politically. Today, claims Bianchi, in one of the most exhaustive contemporary analysis of hajj, it is more political than ever. Around OIC countries politicians, bankers, entrepreneurs are trying to gain benefits through their support of pilgrims or through numerous economic enterprises. Bianchi's (2004) work sheds light also on the problematics of this huge gathering and the ways in which internal and external politics of Muslim communities are portrayed and played out through this pivotal and most important pilgrimage in Islam.

Karbala and beyond: Shi'i pilgrimage

Shi'a followers, which constitute the second largest group within Islam, fully accepts the centrality of Mecca and the Hajj while at the same time taking a different path to Sunni groups in rituals and places concerning pilgrimage. To understand contemporary developments among Shi'ites we need to go back to the formative battle in Karbala 680 during which one of Muhammad's grandsons and son of Ali, Hussayn, was killed by the hands of the Umayyads. This is a defining moment in the development of the Shi'a and its lingering sense of victimhood (Dabashi, 2012). This understanding shaped a unique Shi'a type of pilgrimage which in addition to the ‘official’ centers cherishes and frequents places related to Ahl al-Bayt, (the prophet's family). Accordingly, places like Karbala, Najaf, Mashad and others mostly in Iran and Iraq of today are considered almost as important as Mecca since they host the graves of Imams and their descendants (*Imamzadeh*). Pilgrims who perform these pilgrimages earn the title *zayir*, which equals to *hajji* among Shi'ites (Norton, 2011). This means to suggests that pilgrimage to central Shi'i sacred centers equals the formal Islamic pilgrimage rite. Accordingly, over the years Shi'i pilgrims have carved for themselves alternative routes and constructed at times different habits while on pilgrimage. For the sake of brevity, I will not pursue the nuances among different Shi'i groups save to mention that these groups indeed exit and at times differ in the pilgrimage routine as well as the importance assigned to different pilgrimage destinations (Szanto, 2013). What is rather typical to Shi'a pilgrimages is the emphasis on graves visitation which in the Sunni tradition is more cautiously followed. This is certainly true with the growing influence of the Salafiyya movement within Sunni Islam and its doctrine against sainthood in Islam (Weismann, 2001). Ibn Taymiyya, the 14th century iconoclastic jurist who is the main inspiration/ideologist for contemporary *Salafis*, was adamant against incorporation of sainthood practices (*walaya*) into Islam as he saw them as Bida'; an unwarranted religious innovation which is considered a heresy hence forbidden (Johansen, 2002). That said, surely not all Sunni pilgrims ban these places and there are plenty of examples to indicate Sunni visitations to Shi'a's sites. (Talmon-Heller, Kedar, & Reiter, 2016). And lastly, Shi'a pilgrimage is undergoing significant fluctuations along with current geo-political changes in the Middle East and specifically in pilgrimage centers in contemporary Iran and Iraq. Following the Iranian Revolution, the subsequent Iran–Iraq war which practically barred Iranians from visiting the shrines in Iraq and fall of Saddam Hussein, millions of Iranians frequent traditional Shi'ite centers in Iraq (Fotini, Dekeyser, & Knox, 2016). The visits, such as the pivotal one to Karbala during the holiday of Arba'een, are not only encouraged, but also subsidized and organized by the Iranian government. This practice is seen as a way to solidify support from their constituents and indirectly influence the workings of the shrines and the surrounding economies in Iraq. For the days associated with the Arba'een pilgrimage in late November–early December 2015, an approximate 22 million Shiite pilgrims, mostly Iraqi and Iranian, were estimated to have visited the shrine of Imam Hussein in Karbala. This pilgrimage is currently the largest religious gathering in the world, attracting a significantly larger number of people than the roughly 2–3 million pilgrims who perform the *Hajj* to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia each year. Along with the politization of the pilgrimage a reverse process is taking place of transforming national memorials into pilgrimage sites. Thus, the battle fields of Iran-Iraq wars and their memorials are becoming popular pilgrimage location among mostly Iranian Shi'ites (Arango & Barnard, 2015).

Islamic religious tourism

Against the obligatory *Hajj* ritual which follows a Quranic creed there exists a variety of voluntary religiously motivated voyages in all Muslim communities around the world. Surinder (1998) who suggested the concept of ‘voluntary voyages’ is also offering us a typology of these religious voyages in different regions and harness the common term which is acceptable among most scholars in the field, *ziyarat*. This practice has long been prominent on the global Islamic landscape (Werbner, 2003). I offer this term as interchangeable in the current paper with ‘religious tourism’. Surely, a full survey of all these thousands of religious tourism destinations and rituals is an unattainable task. However, my goal here is merely to hint on their multitudes and to suggest their importance and the need to find a proper understanding of them. The fact that this type of Islamic religious voyages which certainly consists the overwhelming majority of what Muslims do is often discussed as 'non-hajj pilgrimage' indicates that the superimposed Western categorization which focuses on the *Hajj* as the central Islamic manifestation of pilgrimage still dominates field:

> As a result, for an over-concentration on the *Hajj* rituals, many traditions of Muslim pilgrimage that embody such contentious dynamics have been marginalized in various major studies, although many anthropologists and sociologists have underscored the importance, vastness and diversity of non-*Hajj* pilgrimage traditions. In fact, there are no recent academic works that bring together the dynamics of Muslim pilgrimage rituals into a single volume
>
> (Rahimi & Eshagi, 2019)

This type of religious voyage is highly important, not only because it is what the majority of Muslims do, but also as it allows us to explore Islam in its full complexity and within its local/national/regional distinctiveness and influences. In a sense I am following here Gilsenan (1982) who advocated a break with the essentialist view of a monolithic understanding of Islam. The explorations beyond the Hajj are crucial to understand Islam as a vibrant, everchanging, inclusive and still harboring the possibility of entailing specific idiosyncratic case studies under one such umbrella term.

The richness, dynamics and at times surprising developments in *ziyarat* practices are emanating from the ever-changing circumstances, histories, politics and surely interactions with different cultures and religious adversaries Islamic communities have encountered world-wide. This is certainly the case of the countless *mazars* visited by Uighurs in Xinjiang. Among Muslim Uighurs in China *mazar* means "tomb" or "shrine." (Thum, 2014). It often refers to the burial place of a saint or a place where miracles are believed to have occurred. The numerous *mazars* in Xinjiang are constantly visited because they are believed to have the power to cure infertility and diseases and avert natural or other disasters. However, *mazar* worship of the Uighurs is not merely an Islamic religious activity. It is a blend of many different cultures and religions, the most important influence being that of shamanism which had always remained a part of Uighur life and customs (Dawut, 2009). Current events in the region and surely Chinese government's policy are bound to change this highly diverse and rich local pilgrimage practice. Changes in pilgrimage are surely not endemic to Muslim pilgrimage in China. Current Malaysian pilgrimage is undergoing a process of commercialization as part of the market driven tourism industry (Thimm, 2017). Additionally, the understanding of ziyarat as daily religious tourism, is also growingly influenced by local politics. The Malaysian government has marginalized local visits for *keramat* (blessings from saints, in Arabic *Karamat*) as the venerations are not only practiced by Muslims, but also by non-Muslims. The syncretic practices are not encouraged but follow 'pure Islamic' rites and places instead. Whereas *ziyara* as a form of pilgrimage has been strongly discouraged by the Malaysian government and it has been largely ceased by social actors. *ziyara* in Malaysia is currently increasingly commercialised and connected with consuming practices within the frame of religiosity. Based on the leisure activities, it is partly relieved from its religious context. In this sense, claims Thimm (2017), local pilgrimage has become a highly politicized anda 'de-religionised' concept and practice.

In the current global climate and possibilities voluntary pilgrimages can take many shape and forms. The Mustafawiyya sufi path founded in Senegal in 1966 and since then has expanded to other location in West and North Africa, Europe and to North America (Carter, 2018). In 1994 Shaykh Arona Rashid Faye al-Faqir, protégé of the Tariqa's founder, relocated to the United States to establish a satellite community in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. In this location a religious center was constructed, named Masjid al-Muhajjirun w-al Ansar, which over the years since then has become the annual pilgrimage center for all this path followers in North America. Surely this is but one of many sites and new types of pilgrimages which are taking place around the Muslim world. As noted above this fragmentary analysis sole purpose is to indicate the abundances and research potential of these rituals. Further, as the local pilgrimage to the Wali-Songo, the nine holy *walis* which are considered the founders of Islam, in Indonesia demonstrates most Muslims, much like Indonesian Muslims, would never go on a pilgrimage to Mecca but rather would suffice themselves with visits to local Islamic sites (Lucking, 2014; Quinn, 2019). By treating this vast activity throughout the Muslim world as religious tourism one is able to transcend the Islamic Quranic creed which forbids other types of pilgrimage save that to Mecca. More importantly, it allows us a discussion of these activities not through a negative binary approach as *non-Hajj* pilgrimage.

Concluding remarks

Islamic pilgrimage has changed considerably over time. In the beginning, like other monotheistic traditions, Islamic attitude towards pilgrimage and certainly veneration of saints (*walaya*) was cagy at best. The prophet is often quoted as having an unbending doctrinal approach to saints' venerations and visitations which he considered as heresy:

> Narrated by Aisha from Um Habiba and Um Salama who mentioned a church they have seen in Ethiopia in which there were pictures. They informed the Prophet about it on which he said: if any religious man dies among those people, they would build a place of worship at his grave and make these pictures in it. They will be the worst creatures in the sight of Allah on the Day or Resurrection
>
> (Sahih al-Bukahri, 8: 419)

Over time doctrinal changes have occurred to accommodate popular needs for concretization of the sacred and to allow for the development of a highly diverse, elaborate and dynamic voluntary Islamic pilgrimage scene. The numbers of pilgrims to various *ziyarat* throughout the Muslim world far exceed those who perform the obligatory and 'official' Quranic prescribed *Hajj* pilgrimage. Along with the expansion of the Muslim world a great variety of Islamic pilgrimage journeys emerged that often cross sectarian boundaries to incorporate non-Muslim rituals and at times involve numerous communities, languages and traditions. This paper suggests that the visitation of tombs, graveyards, shines, natural landmarks often called non-*Hajj* pilgrimage merit their own distinctive categorization and surely are not influenced by the official creed nor do they necessarily follow *Hajj* rituals as some scholars suggest. For the sake of clarity and to avoid false binaries I suggested to categorize them as religious tourism. This is also part of an emancipatory process which means that Islamic pilgrimage study do not automatically emerge against or in contact with the Anglophone hegemony of the field as indicated for example by the use of the term pilgrimage to frame all religiously motivated voyages around the world.

Pilgrimage in Islam goes far beyond the *Hajj* to Mecca and millions of Muslims are visiting sacred sites in order to receive blessings from holly persons daily throughout the Muslim world. As one moves away from the historical heart of the Muslim world local pilgrimages may take highly syncretic forms and involve adopting, sharing and surely at times contesting sacred sites with other religious traditions. Another change which is shaping current Islamic pilgrimage are encounters with Salafi forces in their struggle to return to ‘original and pure Islam’. *Sufi* brotherhood and certainly *sufi* shrines and pilgrimage centers, indeed what was framed here as religious tourism, are preferred targets of this movement. The confluence of the Salafiyya movement and the modernization of political and social structures in Muslim countries have already made an impact on specific locations and have lessened the practice of shrine visits therein. Against this trend, in different parts of the Muslim world governments promotes pilgrimage sites as heritage (heritagization of the sacred) to encourage tourism and surely as part of a nationalization project. This does not mean to suggest that people have stopped visiting sacred sites and refrain from taking journeys towards the sacred. Even against rapid changes, political, cultural and surely economic machinations this human need is still met daily around the Muslim world.

Pilgrimage research on various forms of pilgrimages in different Muslim societies has gradually moved from a strict and narrow interest in ritual practices and religious cosmogonies linked with colonial agendas or following Orientalist categorizations to a focus on pilgrimage studied against local conditions such as popular religion, political circumstances, and surely economic processes. There is a mounting awareness to the impacts of international travel and the complex changes linked to the politics and practices of tourism. The financial contribution made by tourists, visitors and pilgrims sometimes helps to renovate a shrine to reinstate and encourages its religious activities and some of the religious performances involved. Consequently, pilgrimage practices and religious tourism are becoming more central to the agenda of Islamic pilgrimage scholars.

As I arrive at the end of this journey, I am reminded of Coleman's observation which seems to be always relevant to study of pilgrimage regardless of our needs to theorize and compartmentalize these voyages: “Pilgrimage as religious activity still provides meaningful places for people to visit, while as (fuzzy) object of academic discourse it continues to offer significant room for anthropological theorizing” (2002). I find it delightfully helpful as it reminds me that at the end of the day it is humans who preform pilgrimage. I fully concur with Omid Safi's recent take on the matter while dealing with the diversity of pilgrimage practices and types around the contemporary Muslim world:

> Pilgrimage is deliciously complicated. It is beautifully subtle and complicated as human beings are. This complexity, ambiguity and even tension is fascinating to me. It reveals us as most human, not less so
>
> (Safi in Arjana, 2017: xiv)

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