



Ramadan: The month of fasting for Muslims, and tourism studies – Mapping the unexplored connection



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ABSTRACT

This study supplies the Islamic worldview to the tourism literature in order to expand the current denotations associated to key words such as 'travel', 'traveler' and 'pilgrimage'. It explores the month of fasting for Muslims: Ramadan, and its association to pilgrimage. The findings of the study indicate that Ramadan being the month of interior pilgrimage offers a strong link to the deep rooted connection between pilgrimage and tourism studies and is a promising area of exploration in conjunction with the unmapped link of interior pilgrimage and tourism studies. The study unearths Ramadan seasonality and Ramadan events in the settings of United Arab Emirates where currently during the Ramadan seasonality the interior pilgrims are facilitated by community events that are largely organized by the relevant tourism authorities. The study proposes further areas of research with reference to: interior pilgrimage, Ramadan seasonality and community events.

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1. Introduction – Islamic viewpoint on pilgrimage in tourism literature

Religion is said to be a key motivator to travel, accentuating tourism related activities. Researchers assert that the exponential growth of modern tourism is linked to the traditional religious experience of pilgrimage (Cohen, 1992a, 1992b; Lloyd, 1998; Wickens, 2002). By virtue of pilgrimage being the oldest form of tourism (Turner & Turner, 1978 p.20), tourism studies have always boasted its connection with religiosity and this has been extensively addressed in the tourism literature (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; deSousa, 1993; Eid, 2015; El-Gohary & Eid, 2014; Henderson, 2011; Olsen & Timothy, 2006).

The conceptual and empirical studies of pilgrimage and tourism cover various areas, for example some center around pilgrimage as a general phenomenon (Nolan & Nolan, 1989; Vukonic, 1996) and pilgrimage in different religions, depicting for example, their destinations of travel: Haj (Ahmed, 1992; Henderson, 2011), Sikh pilgrimage (Buzinde, Kalavar, Kohli, & Manuel-Navarrete, 2014; Jutla, 2002). Others look at pilgrimage-related tourism among members of Mormon Church (Hudman & Jackson, 1992), pilgrimage to the graves of saintly Jews in Israel (Collins-Kreiner, 2007) and studies that have compared the experience of the ancient pilgrim to that of the modern tourist (Cohen, 1992a, 1992b).

Despite, tourism literature presenting religious travel as its central themes and covering numerous areas, Vukonić (1998) argues that the theory of tourism has been a slave to conventional and traditional, resting its analysis on definite standpoints which were established many years ago. He then continues his argument, noting that the present

concepts are not all-inclusive and do not represent what travel and tourism means to different cultures. Decades after Vukonic's argument Jafari and Scott (2014), accentuate that there is an implicit assumption that the study of spirituality or pilgrimage does not require a detailed understanding of the religion in which they are embedded and which gives them meaning. Clearly implying that the conventional phenomenon for pilgrimage related tourism, in mainstream tourism studies is: 'one size fits all'. Evidently this proves that negligible work has been done to both broaden, and emancipate the theoretical aspects of religious tourism and the long-standing concern of concepts rooted in conventional ground, remains.

It's safe to infer that most of what we currently read and research is clutched under the mainstream school that is much representing the western worldview. Thus strangely, a concept like pilgrimage that is derived from the baseline of cultural and religious understanding is comfortably studied under the dominant, generic and prevalent understanding offered by the mainstream literature.

To explain the point further, the inherent supposition following from Jafari and Scott's particular mention on the independence of different kinds of pilgrimage from respective religions, holds true up until 'travel', 'journey', 'pilgrimage' and 'tourism' as keywords are understood in the current western worldview. Nevertheless, supplementing the relevant worldview, in actuality enhances the study and many a times provides enriched outcomes, if not entirely unlike.

The providence of worldview on travel, pilgrimage and tourism is quite very applicable to the Islamic call on these keywords. Supplying the Islamic worldview, when one scratches the surface it is conspicuous that the keywords mentioned above (travel, journey, tourism and pilgrimage) has a larger connotation in an Islamic perspective. And hence there is a clear scope to develop the tourism studies literature

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beyond the current denotation offered by the premise of the mainstream tourism literature. This paper expands religious insight into tourism by expanding meaning of tourism from Islamic perspective where the implication of tourism has a larger inference. Exploring the Islamic perspective by analyzing the keywords would also advance the domain of the 'intellectualism' in tourism studies, as presently, the conceptual knowledge bank building the Islamic perspectives is limited to finding the Islamic equivalent of any given mainstream concept. For example: the concept of 'migration' in tourism is looked for an equivalent in Islam via the Islamic literature, the comparable of Islamic pilgrimage is equated to 'hajj', 'umrah' and 'ziyarah' and so forth. Certainly, this can be one of the ways to develop Islamic perspective on tourism studies; nonetheless, limiting the academic and empirical exploration to 'equivalency consideration' approach delimits the potential that Islamic theoretical bank can offer to the development of the field. This paper aims to emancipate the field of tourism studies by bringing in religious insights.

Eid and El-Gohary (2015) whilst contributing to the theoretical foundations of Islamic tourism add that although Muslims make up one of the largest tourist markets in the world, knowledge related to the Islamic perspective on tourism is still less represented in the related literature. Currently, tourism study of the Islamic world has featured topics such as state religion and tourism development (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Henderson, 2002), The annual (hajj) and other pilgrimage (Henderson, 2011), Islamic hospitality (Ahmed, 1992; Stephenson, 2014; Stephenson, Russell, & Edgar, 2010) Those further studying the Islamic tourism have opened up discussion on 'halal tourism' (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010; Henderson, 2010; O'Gorman, 2007). Commenting on the current status and stance of Islamic tourism studies, Jafari and Scott (2014) indicate that the study of tourism in the Muslim world can be about religious topics such as hajj and pilgrimage, but it actually means and involves much more and the study of its tourism is also partly about its worldview. The paper casts a fresh eye on Islam's perspective on travel, journey and tourism as reflected in its worldview. Widening the scope through the worldview would allow an opportunity to develop upon the "critical mass" and such an approach has been embraced by other social sciences such as business ethics (Kim, Fisher, & McCalman, 2009; Rice, 1999), corporate social responsibility (Dusuki, 2008) and marketing and advertising (Arham, 2010; Rice & Al-Mossawi, 2002) among array for other disciplines.

This paper expounds upon the holy month of Ramadan – the month of fasting for Muslims and unveils the Islamic viewpoint of inner travel during the month. It is the month of 'interior pilgrimage' which is observed during the ninth month of the Muslim (Hijri) calendar and dates from 638 CE (Esposito, 1999).

In conjunction with the Islamic viewpoint of 'interior pilgrimage' in the month of Ramadan, the paper explores the existing baseline typologies offered for pilgrims within mainstream tourism studies that have not been reconnoitered in its full spectrum either. For example Stoddard (1997) whilst classifying the various definitions of pilgrimage includes 'interior pilgrimage' (Crim, 1981, p. 569) as the "journey of the soul" in a lifetime of growth from spiritual infancy to maturity. Barber's (1993) definition of pilgrimage, also accentuates pilgrimage as journey resulting from religious causes, to be of two types: externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding. The classification of pilgrimage by Stoddard, Barber and others with similar concepts is explored in concurrence with the wider connotation of travel, journey and pilgrimage in Islam.

Captivatingly, conventional pilgrimage is well represented in and connected to the tourism literature, whilst on the other hand 'interior pilgrimage' and 'internal journey' is although equally meticulously linked to tourism studies, remains, uncharted. The reasons for the virginity of 'inner journey' are unknown; there is sweeping silence, however, the immediate presumption could be its divergence from the 'physical mobility' in its travel experience. This severance is seen as a stumbling block that seemingly stands to disconnect 'inner journey'

from tourism studies. The reigning understanding in the tourism literature encompasses the presence of physical mobility as part of pilgrimage. And therefore by virtue of the physical mobility component attached to the other pilgrimage categories, their connection to tourism literature is seamless. Physical mobility forms an important basis of developing the tourism related concepts of pilgrims and incorporates popular themes such as travel experience (Mustonen, 2006; Belhassen, Caton, & Stewart, 2008; Kreiner, 2010; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Hyde & Harman, 2011). Whilst studying the travel experience of pilgrims, it is worth noting that interior pilgrimage is an imperative discernment and its simultaneous presence is termed as the inner experience (Andriotis, 2011; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Galani-Moutafi, 2000) however, strangely, its discrete influence on tourism literature is not studied and hence not significantly evident. Nonetheless, it is capable of being treated as a standalone area of pilgrimage study with distinct impact on tourism literature. The hitch remains to unearth the experience of an interior pilgrim and realize its potential for tourism studies, as has been done for the remaining categories of pilgrimage.

The strands in thinking summarized above represent a foundation for this study; this paper shall connect interior pilgrimage to tourism studies exercising the Islamic worldview that via its wider connotation of travel offers the foundation to explore the link between the unmapped category of interior pilgrimage and tourism. The paper shall achieve this by expounding upon 'Ramadan'. Month of Ramadan through its unique connection to 'human journey towards righteousness' i.e. inner journey' offers a profound, yet again, unexplored connection to tourism studies.

Mainstream tourism that is actively seeking to understand Islamic aspects of travel and tourism can benefit from this study as it broadens the definition of travel, pilgrimage and related concepts in Islam. This is in line with the Islamic scholarship side, wherein researchers assert that in response to globalization, a process of "Islamic intellectualism" is expected to develop within the Islamic world (Tan, 2011), thereby encouraging greater research regarding the Muslim market segment. The conceptual enhancement shall emancipate the current focus on tourism related work from the Islamic viewpoint and provide a reference point for the emergent scholarly work examining this potent research theme.

From the tourism perspective, critical questions emerge: Do the current definitions suffice the Islamic viewpoint on tourism? How can these be developed? How does the mainstream tourism market connect to the Islamic worldview on travel, journey, pilgrimage and tourism? What is the future of developing such knowledge?

In the following sections, the first section snapshots the Islamic worldview. Next the Islamic viewpoint on travel and traveler is explained. This is followed by deliberations on the seasonal observance of Ramadan and its associated value to interior pilgrimage in tourism studies. The later sections confer on Ramadan seasonality and community events in Ramadan, taking the case of United Arab Emirates. The final section wraps up the discussion and provides further areas of research and writing on interior pilgrimage, Ramadan and tourism studies from an Islamic perspective.

2. The Islamic worldview

Muslims account for approximately one and a half billion of the world's population making it one of the leading religions globally. Most Muslims reside in the Muslim-majority states that are the 57 member countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Clearly, the dominant and often formal or informal state religion in these countries is Islam (OIC, 2008). In addition to Muslims residing in their majority constituencies, a sizeable Muslim population also resides in the western world where its populace is continuously growing. As an example, by 2050, the Muslim population in UK is forecast to be 50% of the UK population (Ferguson, 2011).

The holy book, Quran and the Sunnah or Hadith directs a Muslim's life. Sunnah or Hadith contains the sayings and deeds of the Prophet

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