



As a leading Irish business school in a public university system, KBS is committed to excellence in teaching and to fostering knowledge and understanding of business and society within a diverse, research active and socially engaged environment.

Research at KBS serves this mission. Our goal is to cultivate excellence in research, underpinned by our core values including commitments to promote learning and discovery as well as social responsibility and ethical behaviour; to protect academic freedom and enhance knowledge; to maintain a future orientation and an international perspective; to promote inclusive and sustainable societies and facilitate the involvement of industry.

Our research finds a focus in the four academic departments of the School as well as in active research clusters and broad thematic descriptors. The current research clusters are: Accountability (ARC); Efficiency & Productivity Analysis; Emerging Risk Assessment & Underwriting; Human Rights & Development Practice; Interpretive Consumer Research; Psychological Science in Business; Privatisation & PPP; and Quality of Work. Research seminars are also regularly organised by the themes of Work, Knowledge & Employment and Public Policy, Enterprise, Governance & Sustainability.

See <http://www.ul.ie/business/research> for more information.

Pilgrimage, consumption and rituals: Spiritual authenticity in a Shia Muslim pilgrimage

Mona Moufahim and Maria Lichrou

Synopsis

The study aims to understand how authenticity is evoked in a religious pilgrimage. The research contributes ethnographic insights from a lesser known, yet significant, Muslim pilgrimage called Ziyara-t-Arba'een. Findings reveal the ways in which authenticity is realised through rituals and consumption. First, personal investment in the faith was found to lead to a transformed sense of self. Second, being physically present at the sacred sites enhanced the pilgrims' access and emotional connection to the events and the important persons involved. Third, pilgrims underwent intense emotional and somatic experiences during the ziyara. Finally, consumption of material objects enabled the materialisation of the experience and acted as a vector of various rituals. Authenticity is thus realised through reflexive engagement with faith and via the participation in rituals and the consumption of material objects. Pilgrimages are thus conceptualised as a quest for spiritual authenticity, a hybrid form of existential, ideological and objective authenticity.

Introduction and Background

Between 300 and 330 million tourists visit the world's main religious sites every year, with approximately 600 million national and international religious journeys taking

place annually in the world (UNWTO, 2014). Pilgrimages are sites where the sacred and the profane overlap and where exploration of the relationship between religion, spirituality and consumption can be undertaken. The study aims to expand understanding of this relationship by focusing on the Islamic context. Generalisations in some older pilgrimage research do not necessarily apply to non-Western contexts, where the political and religious domains are intricately connected (Cohen, 1992b). Hence, the focus of this research is on a particularly understudied type of pilgrimage in tourism studies: the ziyara (i.e. 'visitation'), a form of Islamic pilgrimage.

Issues and Questions Considered

A critical dimension of pilgrimages is arguably the authenticity of pilgrims' experience, expected to provoke religious 'rapture' or 'exaltation' (Cohen, 1992a). In fact, the religiosity experienced by pilgrims has served as a basis for understanding tourists' search for meaning more generally (MacCannell, 1999 [1976]), igniting an enduring debate on and fascination with authenticity. Tourism discourse has generally been preoccupied with defining the nature of authenticity and its utility. However, the links of the concept to other phenomena, such as ritual, tradition

AUTHORS



Dr Mona Moufahim
Stirling Management
School,
Stirling University (UK)



Dr Maria Lichrou
Kemmy Business School,
Limerick University,
Limerick

and aura, has been less explored. More recently, attention is drawn to the process through which an object, site or experience becomes authenticated (Cohen & Cohen, 2012). 'Cool' authentication is similar to the practice of certification by which something is declared to be "original, genuine or real, rather than a copy, fake or spurious" (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1298). 'Hot' authentication, defined as "an immanent, reiterative, informal performative process of creating, preserving and reinforcing an object's, site's or event's authenticity" is emotionally loaded and typically based on belief rather than proof (Cohen & Cohen, 2012, p. 1300).

Addressing the need for a better understanding of the relationship between authenticity, ritual and consumption, the research explores the pilgrims' experience of Ziyara-t-Arba'een. The context of this study is a religious journey to Iraq undertaken by a group of Belgian Muslim women in January 2012. The contribution of this paper is threefold: 1) it explores the different dimensions of authenticity in a pilgrimage experience; 2) it examines the role of material culture and ritual consumption in achieving forms of authenticity; and 3) it broadens the understanding of the pilgrimage as a context-bound and culturally specific phenomenon.

Methodology

Using an ethnographic approach, data were collected by the principal researcher via participation in a 3-week pilgrimage to holy sites in Syria and Iraq in January 2012. Full immersion was necessary to build rapport and relationships as well as to ensure a sustained stream of observations and conversations with group participants. The group consisted of 12 females, aged between 32 and 64. In addition to more informal conversations, in-depth interviews with the participants were conducted at the start of the travel, during the march and during the Arba'een commemorations. This enabled entry into the pilgrims' religious experience, their reflexive journey and self-introspection (thoughts, feelings and affect were probed). Data sources also include 298 photographs of the pilgrims performing religious rituals, shopping or posing next to historic-religious monuments. Analysis was driven primarily by the emic responses, that is, the situated knowledge of the participants. Prior conceptualisations of

authenticity also informed an etic side to the analysis, which involved the coding of interview texts that was guided by a protocol based in part on the literature.

Outcomes and Findings

This research shows that instead of being clearly delineated or mutually exclusive, different forms of authenticity - existential and objective (Wang, 1999) - can be identified in this pilgrimage experience. In addition, the ideological dimension of authenticity (Belhassen et al., 2008) articulated by historical and religious narratives contributed to a meaningful and 'religiously' authentic experience for the pilgrims. The findings also reveal that authenticity can be realised through both hot and cool authentication processes incorporated in the pilgrims' spiritual praxis. Spiritual praxis in this study involved personal investment on the journey of conversion to Shi'a Islam and engaging in a physically and emotionally taxing pilgrimage. Such authentication of their faith also took place when asserting and sharing their identity during the pilgrimage as well as sharing it at home. Pilgrims drew as much on religious drama and their (inter) personal experiences as on the sacred and the profane aspects of the experience, including ritualistic consumption practices (e.g. baraka blessing rituals). The outcome of these authentication processes is what we have called spiritual authenticity, which is a hybrid form of existential, ideological and objective authenticity.

Of particular interest in this study is the spiritual authentic self, which is validated - and is validating - beliefs and practices performed at the ziyara and back at home. In other words, participating in the pilgrimage 'activated' an enduring transformation of the self into an authentic spiritual self. The ziyara can of course be viewed as a liminal experience, allowing pilgrims to freely express and 'perform' a Shi'a identity. Importantly however, this identity is consistent with the one they have selected to work on at home. It is therefore more fruitful to conceptualise the pilgrimage as part of a 'work in progress' identity project rather than simply an 'in-the-moment' state of being. This identity project is given material to build on thanks to the 'stickiness' of the authentic self achieved during the pilgrimage, which lingers long after the experience.

**The Underlying study
was published in *Tourism
Management, and a copy may
be obtained at:*
[https://doi-org.proxy.lib.
ul.ie/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.08.023](https://doi-org.proxy.lib.ul.ie/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.08.023)**

Authors:
Mona Moufahim and Maria Lichrou

For further information and comments, please contact:

Prof Sheila Killian
Assistant Dean, Research
Kemmy Business School
University of Limerick, Ireland
T: +353 61 202237
E: sheila.killian@ul.ie

Forthcoming Research Bulletin

Title: Subnational location capital:
The role of subnational institutional
actors and socio-spatial factors on
firm location

Authors: Sinéad Monaghan, Patrick
Gunnigle & Jonathan Lavelle

About the KBS Research Bulletin

The purpose of the KBS Research
Bulletin series is to make our
research more readily accessible
to a wide range of interested
stakeholders, and so to allow our
work to have a useful impact on
the society in which we operate.
We regard this as an important part
of our stakeholder engagement.
The dissemination of these
bulletins aligns with both the UL
focus on excellence and impact in
research, and on the KBS strategic
goals of cultivating excellence
in research while contributing to
our community of stakeholders
in a responsible and sustainable
manner.