TOURISM IN CONFLICT AREAS: COMPLEX ENTANGLEMENTS IN JORDAN

Journal:	*Journal of Travel Research*
Manuscript ID:	JTR-14-07-09.R3
Manuscript Type:	Empirical Research Articles
Keywords:	danger, conflict, safety, Jordan
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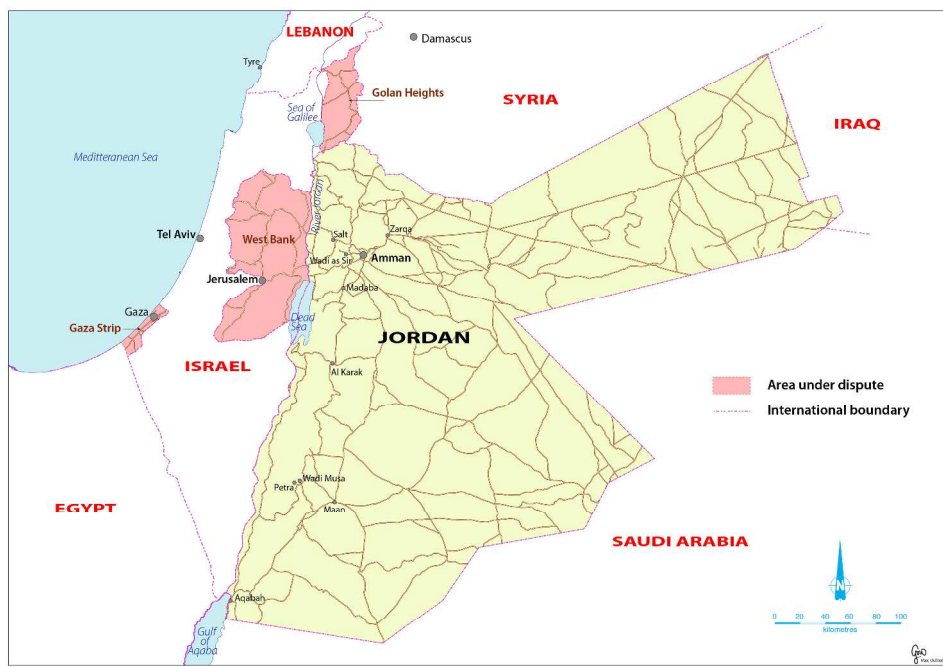
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Abstract

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Keywords: danger; conflict; risk-taking; safety; tourism politics; Jordan.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper the workings of tourism in areas of socio-political turmoil are critically explored
as I unravel interconnections between conflict, safety and security in tourism. I draw on
Lisle's (2000, 2004, 2007, 2013) research to examine the ways in which tourism, tourists and
ongoing socio-political conflicts are connected in powerful ways. Lisle (2000, 93) argues that
entanglements between conflict and tourism "disrupt and resist the prevailing images of safety
and danger that attempt to hold them apart". Scrutinizing these complex interconnections
"prevents the hegemonic discourse of global security from completing itself, stabilizing its
boundaries, and securing a totalized presence" (Lisle 2000, 93). This hegemonic discourse
generates a separation between socio-political conflicts and tourism through frequent
reminders of the necessity of safety and security in tourism (Hall et al. 2003; Pizam and
Mansfeld, 1996). In this paper I draw on empirical ethnographical data gathered in Jordan to
deconstruct entanglements between conflict, security, safety and tourism. Overlaps between
seemingly unrelated, even antithetical, phenomena – tourism and the Israeli-Palestinian
conflict in its different manifestations – are, thus, rendered visible.

Taking up Lisle's work and reimagining the conflict/tourism divide, the aim is to understand
the workings of tourism in areas of (ongoing) conflict as I move beyond the simplistic idea
that conflict and tourism are unrelated or even in opposition (Butler and Suntikul, 2013). To a
certain degree, tourism exists during war and violent hostilities, and while "it may seem
highly inappropriate to argue that there is a positive side for tourism as a result of war [this] is
clearly the case" (Butler and Suntikul, 2013, 5). It is maintained that these two phenomena of
war or ongoing conflict and tourism "were actually forged together in the aftermath of World
War II" (Lisle 2000, 93). In this vein of interconnectedness between war, conflict, security
and safety in Jordanian tourism, I argue the following.

First, representatives of the Jordanian tourism sector engage in a process of 'sanitizing'

Jordan from the conflicts in the region, be they in Iraq, at the Israeli-Lebanon border, or along

the Palestinian-Israeli demarcations. This sanitization process refers to efforts to clear and

erase (perceived and/or imagined) danger and conflict in Jordan. My claim is that this process

confirms the powerful connections between tourism, danger and conflict. If anything, the

sanitization process produces an *illusion* of safety through efforts of ridding the country of

conflict and danger. Second, tourists in the region assert and disrupt discourses of safety and

danger as they engage with conflicts in Jordan. Some tourists, I argue, are not deterred by the

danger and conflict in these places, since they travel to Jordan in spite of the ongoing regional

conflict. They cross the safety/danger boundaries 'back and forth' as they engage with

manifestations of the ongoing regional conflict.

This study on tourist experiences in a place of socio-political turmoil also contributes to

existing debates on risk perceptions and uncertainties in tourism (Mansfeld, Jonas, and

Cahaner, 2014; Williams and Baláž 2014), as well as perceived crime and violence (Simpson,

Cruz-Milán, and Gressel 2014). More specifically, it supports the argument that in the current

securitization of tourism, some people are not necessarily deterred by perceptions of risk or

violence and that "destinations potentially embrace the full tourism experience" (Williams

and Baláž 2014, 8). With respect to the geographical context of Jordan and the wider region, I

agree that insufficient research has been conducted regarding several tourism related issues,

including tourist experiences and destination image in the Middle East (Stylidis, Belhassen,

and Shani 2014).

Understandings generated by this study have the potential to contribute to planning and

development of Jordanian tourism in more socially and politically sustainable ways. Conflict,

safety and security in tourism, arguably, represent important issues for those who aim to

understand the connection between tourism and sustainable development (Hall et al. 2003).

The concept of sustainability, however, should be considered "an ever-moving concept …

which has to adapt to time and place, not just in terms of the setting of the natural

environment but also with respect to human culture and expectations" (Simpson and Simpson

2011, 8). This is even more apt in Jordan, a country where people have lived in the proximity

of ongoing conflicts for well over six decades. Whether in times of peace and stability, or

during intensifications of conflicts, local residents should be able to participate in decision

making processes, and be empowered to mould social, economic and political initiatives in

tourism despite the ongoing conflict in the region. This empowerment can come from

understanding the workings of tourism in a sensitive and contested place where conflict,

danger, safety and security are intricately entangled. In this complex entanglement, danger

and conflict are not always deterrents for tourism, however paradoxically this may seem at

first blush.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: CONFLICTS, SAFETY & SECURITY IN TOURISM POLITICS

It is maintained that in spite of the numerous political dimensions of tourism, interconnections

between politics and tourism are still insufficiently explored (Hall 1994, 2010; Suntikul and

Butler, 2010). Matthews (1978) and Richter (1983) are the first to mark the importance of the

relationship between politics and tourism. Some dimensions of the tourism-politics

relationship have been tackled mostly from economic, business and managerial perspectives,

for example: political risk analysis in tourism development (Poirier 1997), political crises

management (Elliott 1997), politics and the public sector's management of tourism (Sönmez

1998; Sönmez and Graefe 1998), tourism planning and development in political borderland

areas (Timothy 2001), political marketing of destinations (Beirman 2002), the impacts of

terrorism on tourist motivation and demand (Bhattarai et al. 2005; Henderson 2007).

Examining security and safety aspects, at the interface of the tourism-politics connections,

four concepts connected to international security are identified (Hall et al 2004). These are:

first – collective security, whereby states work together to ensure international law; second –

collective defense pointing to traditional alliances and based on national interests; third –

common security derived from the 1982 Palme Commission and centers on individual safety;

and fourth – cooperative security focusing on reciprocal reassurances between states. Security

discourses in tourism are also examined by Lisle (2013 129) who argues that these "operate in

pernicious ways and unforeseen registers, which sets the context for how we might begin to

understand … even the trivial life-worlds of leisure, travel and relaxation".

Within an increasingly complex socio-political environment, further explorations of the

connections between conflicts and danger in tourism can lead to understanding the "greater

politicization of tourism" (Suntikul and Butler 2010, 1). Socio-political conflicts, violence

and danger manifest in different contexts such as bombings, civil or international wars, coups,

terrorism attacks, assassinations, acts of guerilla warfare, purges, riots and revolutions (Hall

and O'Sullivan 1996; Neumayer 2004; Seddighi et al. 2000). These forms of social and

political instabilities are considered to be antithetical with planning, development and

management of viable and prosperous tourism (Araña and León, 2008; Causevic and Lynch,

2013; Paraskevas and Arendell, 2007; Sönmez 1998; Wahab 1996).

A series of case studies illustrate the impacts, mostly negative, of conflicts, danger and

political instabilities on tourism, such as: 1987 coups in Fiji; 1989 Tian-An-Men incident in

Beijing; 1990 political turmoil in Kashmir; 1992 coup in Thailand (Hall 1994); several

terrorist attacks in 1992 and 1993 in Egypt (Wahab 1996); the 1994 uprising in Chiapas,

Mexico (Pitts 1996); the 1992-1995 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Causevic and Lynch,

2013); the conflict in Northern Ireland (Simone-Charteris and Boyd, 2010); and the terrorist

bombings in Bali in October 2002 and 2005 (Smyth et al. 2009). The dominant academic

discourse is that tourists need to feel safe while traveling abroad, they want to spend their

money in a place that can offer them peace and tranquility. Safety, security and stability are,

therefore, considered vital prerequisites for tourists choosing a destination, and for the

development of the much needed tourism infrastructure (Hall 1994; Pizam and Mansfeld,

1996; Hall et al. 2003; Henderson 2007). It is high time this discourse was scrutinized.

In her remarks on the relationship between tourism, conflict and terrorism, Lisle (2013 217)

maintains that these seemingly antithetical practices are in fact intimately entangled. The

2002 Bali bombings represent "inaugural moments in the post-9/11 securitization of the

tourism industry". This becomes evident in the counter-terrorism responses, which have

"brought the everyday lives of tourists and tourism workers, as well as the material

infrastructure of the tourism industry, within the orbit of a global security apparatus waging a

'war on terror'" (Lisle 2013 217). Indeed, political instabilities and (imagined) danger, can be

a double-edged sword. On the one hand it can deter mass tourists from visiting 'dangerous'

places, on the other hand it can attract some tourists. As a result of the terrorist attacks in

Egypt in 1992-1993 tourism in the country was reduced, yet other countries in the region like

Israel, Cyprus, Turkey and Jordan experienced an increase in tourist arrivals (Wahab 1996).

More recently, Uriely et al. (2007) investigated the process of voluntary risk-taking of 58

Israeli tourists who visited resorts in the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula, one to seven weeks after

the October 2004 terrorist attacks. In another study, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is

considered an enticing factor to visit Jerusalem (Brin 2006). Three types of politically-

oriented tourists in Jerusalem are discussed: first, solidarity tourists, who show their support

for one of the sides involved in the conflict; second, activist tourists who join organizations

that actively promote peace; and third, the intrigued tourists for whom the conflict is an

attraction (Brin 2006).

Politically-oriented tourists (Brin 2006), conflict tourists (Warner 1999), danger-zoners (Adams 2001), and war tourists (Pitts 1996; Smith 1996) are considered types of dark tourists who travel "to places made interesting for reasons of political dispute" (Warner 1999, 137). War tourists, as noted by Pitts (1996 224), are the ones for whom political conflicts represent the principal factor for travelling in a region and their main motivation is to "experience the thrill of political violence". Pitts (1996 221 quotation in original) in a study on tourism in Chiapas, Mexico, immediately after the Zapatista uprising in 1994, found that besides journalists who rushed to the scene, a considerable number of war tourists flocked to the place: "just like drivers on the interstate stretching their necks trying to get a glimpse of 'what happened' at a wreck scene, these individuals wanted to be part of the action". Pitts's choice of terminology could be confusing. War tourism was initially used by Smith (1996) and referred to visiting places of past wars such as cemeteries, battlefields, and military zones connected to World War II. These tourists pay reverence to the dead, satisfy their curiosities and learn more about an ended war or conflict. War tourists in Pitts's research share more similarities with conflict tourists and danger-zoners defined by Adams (2001).

Danger-zoners travel to areas of danger 'for' and 'during' the conflict, show interest in the ongoing political clashes of a region and experience ongoing conflicts first hand. Danger-zone tourism is defined as "tourism that thrives in tumultuous times" (Adams 2001, 266). The author draws on the fiction literature of Alex Garland to explain the mindset of danger-zone tourists: "being in a riot was something I pursued with a truly obsessive zeal, along with being tear-gassed and hearing gunshots fired in anger" (Garland cited in Adams 2001, 266). This is not to glorify such tourist endeavors, which in effect show many of the structural inequalities entrenched in 'doing' tourism. I also do not advocate for the 'innocence' and 'victimhood' of such 'courageous' danger-zone tourists, since they may be "guilty participants, even agents, of global exploitation and corruption" (Phipps 2004, 83). My aim is rather to explore, in more

depth, the workings of tourism in countries, like Jordan, located in an area of ongoing socio-political conflicts and to critically understand tourist experiences in such places.

2.1   LOCATING JORDAN

Jordan has often found itself in the middle of regional conflict and crisis in the modern Middle East. It has been an important protagonist in the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars (Robins 2004). Since the turn of the third millennium, Jordan has witnessed: one Palestinian uprising in 2000; three wars (2001 in Afghanistan, 2003 in Iraq, 2006 in Lebanon); and several terrorist attacks (2005 suicide bombings in Amman; gunfire exchanges between Lebanon and Israel in October 2009 and August 2010; more minor rocket attacks in April and August 2010 in Jordan). In 2011 and 2012, Jordan and other countries in the region such as Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen were rattled by violent and non-violent protests known as the Arab Spring. In early 2011 Jordanians protested on the streets of the capital, Amman, and other large cities and demanded that the Prime Minister Samir Rifai step down and a new prime minister be elected rather than appointed by the King (BBC 2011). The King accepted the resignation of Samir Rifai and named another Prime Minister. This is to point out that Jordan's turbulent socio-political environment provides opportunities to scrutinize the interconnections between tourism, conflict, safety and even peace.

In spite of the instabilities and conflicts in the region, United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2006, 9) describes the Middle East as exhibiting "very strong performance over the past couple of years … with the increase for 2005 estimated at 8%". Jordan itself registered a growth of 5% in international tourism arrivals. Regarding tourist arrivals in 2007 "the Middle East continues to be one of the tourism success stories of the decade so far and leads the growth ranking of arrivals … with an estimated 16% rise to almost 48 million

tourists" (UNWTO 2008, 8). During 2011 and 2012 "the region showed some very mixed

results by destination" (UNWTO 2013, 12) with Egypt rebounding with an increase of 18%

and Jordan 5% in 2012. Jordan's economy is dependent on tourism income (Neveu 2010) and

to capitalize on this, the country has to be presented safe, stable and sanitized of the conflicts

in the region, thus perpetuating that hegemonic discourse on safety and security.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fieldwork for this project was conducted in April 2009 and from July to October 2010. In

2009 I travelled to Jordan and contacted tourism industry representatives and governmental

officials. This had implications on two levels. First, I became more familiar with my research

setting and the tourist sites in Jordan (see figure 1). Second, it helped me set up a network to

recruit more participants in the following year. This represents an important step in

ethnographic fieldwork. Through snowballing technique, arguably the most widely employed

recruitment tool in tourism studies (Noy 2008), I managed to interview a total of 43 local

Jordanian tourism stakeholders including guides, owners, managers and directors of travel

companies, as well as governmental officials. Interviews were conducted with six Jordanian

governmental officials: a spokesperson from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, both

the director and assistant director of Bethany Beyond Jordan – the Baptismal Site, the director

of Tourist Police Department, the director of Jordan Tourism Board, and a commissioner for

the Petra Archeological Park. Further interviews were undertaken with directors, managers

and owners of private tourism companies in Petra and Amman. In addition, I interviewed tour

guides working at five tourist locations across Jordan: Petra, Aqaba, the Baptismal Site and

Wadi Rum, and organized one group interview with tour guides in Petra (see figure 1 for

locations).

[insert figure 1]

I also interviewed 26 tourists in Jordan. Some of them were recruited through online

advertising using purposeful sampling. Thus, I posted a short blurb about my research in

June 2010 on forums Trip Advisor and Thorn Tree (affiliated with the Lonely Planet Travel

Guides). International tourists planning to be in Jordan during my fieldwork responded to the

online post. Another sampling tool used was 'recruiting on site', that is approaching tourists

without any prior contact and inquiring after their willingness to be interviewed (Longhurst

2009). Using these techniques, the profile of international tourists became diverse, regarding

country of origin. Thus, tourists in this project originate from Australia, China, France, India,

Japan, New Zealand, Saudia Arabia, South Korea, Switzerland, United States of America,

amogst other countries. All of them are aged between mid-20s to mid-40s, with the exception

of two couples from Australia in their early 60s. Most of them were independent tourists, out

of which twenty men and six women.

Interviewes were conducted in English, as tourists and local Jordanian respondents were able

and willing to converse in English. Before turning on the digital recorder I would first hand in

the project information sheet and agreement to participate form. Interviewees were assured

that anonymity would be preserved if they wished so, or a pseudonym will be employed. The

interviewees had ample space to share their views on tourism, conflict and danger in Jordan

within the space of around one hour for individual interviews, and two hours for group

discussions. This was followed up by a second round of interviews in some instances, and

continued electronic mail communications in other instances. As I wanted to explore and

understand the socio-political workings of tourism in areas of (ongoing) conflict, questions

were asked to prompt discussions about: the political situation in the region and its impacts on

Jordanian tourism; curiosity, enticement and/or detering factors to visit Jordan in spite of

regional instabilities; thoughts and feelings about the conflict and its possible dangerous

manifestations.

Individual in-depth and semi-structured interviews are considered excellent qualitative

methods to delve into sensitive topics that may not be discussed during group interviews

(Longhurst 2009). To prompt wider debates, group interviews are favoured. These generate

interactions between group members, and researchers can take note of different statements

and positions as well as attending to "the ways in which they are deployed in relation to one

another" (Secor 2009, 200). Group interviews organized for this project comprised three to

four participants and were held in a hotel restaurant, in a tourist camp in the Wadi Rum desert

and in a meeting room in Petra Visitors Center. Given the sensitivity of the topic, I organized

smaller and thus more manageable group interviews. Rather than seeking 'insider'

knowledge, the individual and group interviews are considered as co-constructions and co-

perfomances of knowledges (Crang 2003). Within research encounters between myself as the

interviewer/researcher and the interviewees, attention was paid to feelings and sensitivities

circulating during interviews. During the fieldwork I reflected on the discussions with

participants in order to assess the extent to which my initial research questions could be

addressed.

3.2 REFLECTIVELY POSITIONING, ANALYZING & WRITING DATA

The data analysis process commenced during fieldwork while I made reflective notes

listening back to the interviews. After the fieldwork, interviews were formally transcribed,

coded thematically and then interpreted. While interpreting the data, interconnections between

tourism, safety, danger and the ongoing conflicts in the region emerged. To interpret the data I

followed three steps. First, familiarization with the data; second, coding, conceptualization

and ordering; and third, enfolding the literature.

Familiarization with the data refers to initial transcription of the material and making detailed

annotations. Interviews were transcribed, followed by a process of data reduction, that is

selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the information (Miles and

Huberman, 1994). I listened to the interviews over and over again, read the notes jotted down

during and immediately after each interview. Data reduction in my case was a necessary

process of filtering the information to 'get to' the keywords and aspects I wanted to tackle,

such as regional conflicts and their socio-political implications in tourism.

During the second step, through coding, keywords were identified and data was divided into

concepts and categories. I engaged with the data by listening to each interview several times

as I was holding a printed copy of the transcript and highlighting key words such as 'conflict',

'danger', 'risk', 'peace', 'war', 'politics' 'tour guides'. I also highlighted different tourist

locations such as Petra, Aqaba, Amman, Baptism Site. This initial process of open and then

axial coding allowed me to identify, and make connections between and among keywords,

concepts and categories. Topics, categories and sub-categories 'piled up' and were organized

in two clusters: tourist, danger, risks and warning; and tourism industry representatives,

conflict, war and peace. Emergent concepts, themes and relationships were compared and

contrasted with the extant literature during the third step of enfolding the literature. This

allowed me to identify and tie together similarities and differences that emerged from the

material (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

This article is written from an outsider/insider's standpoint, that of a tourism researcher

conducting fieldwork in Jordan and an intrepid tourist intrigued by places of political

conflicts. Like Crang (2003 496), I am weary of "work that divides positionality formulaically

into being insiders (good but impossible) and outsiders (bad but inevitable)". In this project I

attempted to 'write my self in' the research process, as one avenue of encouraging reflexivity

is "writing-IN of qualitative research … by the use of personal pronouns (for example, I, we,

my, our)" (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005, 257 emphasis in original). My own positionality in the

field as a white, Christian Orthodox, eastern, single, young and able-bodied woman in a

moderate Muslim country, somewhat destabilizes the powerful researcher/researched

dichotomy in the research process (Mansvelt and Berg, 2005).

The power relations between 'first world' researchers and 'third world' 'researched subjects'

(Longhurst, 2009) have been discussed within tourism studies and the wider social sciences. I

feel my position destabilizes this dichotomy. I carry out my research within an economically

developed 'first' country, but I was born and raised in a developing, eastern European

country. Further, I blur the boundaries of the dichotomy as "[i]t cannot be assumed that

interviewers will always be in a position of power over their interviewees" (Longhurst 2009,

583). The example Longhurst (2009) mentions of a relatively young graduate female,

interviewing a wealthy middle-age businessman, fits my context and position very well. In the

field, I was a young woman who had to negotiate her position as a 'serious researcher'. More

than dressing myself appropriately and presenting myself as such, I also had to pay attention

to gender issues that sometimes ensued within a male-dominated public life in a

predominantly Muslim country.

4. DANGER AND SAFETY IN 'SWITZERLAND OF THE MIDDLE EAST'

> Jordan is, I call it, Switzerland of Europe, because we are friends with everybody and
>
> we don't have any enemies. It's a very safe country. Jordan is the same [as
>
> Switzerland] in the Middle East. We are surrounded by crazies, you know the east is
>
> Iraq, west is Palestine, Israel is south, north is Lebanon. See, they are all crazy and
>
> they are all trouble makers, but if you think about Jordan and the relationship between
>
> Jordan and the west it can't be any better, it just cannot be any better. (Arfan,
>
> interview, October 3, 2010)

This strategic position of Jordan, being 'Switzerland of the Middle East', 'friends with

everybody' and 'having no enemies' in a region 'of crazies' allows for an interesting interplay

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between tourism, danger, safety and conflict. I scrutinize the "Switzerland of the Middle East"

or "oasis of peace" images of Jordan employed in the process of sanitizing this country of the

conflicts in the region. My intention is to challenge the readiness with which some tourism

industry representatives consider that 'selling' an idyllic Jordan, untouched by the ongoing

conflicts in the region would entice more tourists and therefore generate more economic

benefits. The sanitization of conflicts in Jordan is partly operated by workers in tourism and

partly through mass media accounts. *The Lonely Planet Guide* (2009) reassures tourists that:

> Despite being squeezed between the hotspots of Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel and the
>
> Palestinian Territories, Jordan is probably the safest and most stable country in the
>
> region. Regardless of your nationality, you'll be greeted with nothing but courtesy and
>
> hospitality in this gem of a country. (Lonely Planet, para. 3, 2009)

In an interview with *Condé Nast Traveler* the King of Jordan states: "to have Arabs - whether

Iraqis, Lebanese, or others - flooding toward Jordan to escape violence shows that Jordan is

secure" (Hack 2007, 2). According to these accounts danger and conflict are erased from

Jordan as the present is being sanitized. Hospitality, safety and friendliness are, supposedly,

all one will find in Jordan, irrespective of one's nationality one is welcome with warmth and

courtesy. Safety and stability are underlined by the fact that people in neighboring countries

flee into Jordan when conflict and violence in the region intensify. Anwar, for example,

director of a Jordanian tourism company, explains that "safety and security are the main

selling points for Jordan. People come here and they can stroll at midnight in the streets and

they are safe" (Anwar, interview, July 28, 2010). This tourism director explains that while

problems still exist in Palestine and Israel, Jordan's main attractive points are its safety and

security. This stance solidifies the temporal and spatial displacement of conflict from tourist

spaces. Danger and conflict are seemingly ousted; safety, security and stability take center

stage in Jordanian tourism. The country is portrayed as a passive and safe space of spillovers

from the conflicts in the region. Jordan is, however, also an active place where the conflicts

manifest, according to some other Jordanian tourism industry representatives interviewed for

this project. In this area of socio-political turmoil, emphasizing safety and security as the

'main selling points for Jordan' actually reveals a perpetual condition of living with danger,

conflict and war.

Insisting on safety and security in Jordan presents itself as a conundrum. There is still a

longing for (real) peace in the region, "everybody's wish is for peace ... it's a dream of the

people living in this part of the world", melancholically explains Anwar. Mohib, another

manager of a tourism company explains the need to emphasize peace in Jordan:

> In a sense it's [peace] still our ... dream. Now for people who are still in the U.S. or in
>
> the U.K. or in Australia even, when you tell them to travel to the Middle East they
>
> think of the Middle East as a troubled area. So that's why I think, we want to stress the
>
> point that we are a peaceful country. …We want to have them [tourists] thinking
>
> "Now, this is a peaceful country, it is peaceful." You have to understand, okay Jordan
>
> as a country is peaceful, but the problem is that we had separate wars in the past; so
>
> we were involved in wars in the past. So this means that we have to keep on stressing
>
> that we are a peaceful country [now]. (Mohib, interview, July 29, 2010)

The temporal distancing of the 'separate wars in the past' from the peaceful present reveals

itself as a powerful sanitization practice attempted in Jordanian tourism. Jordan is now

peaceful, temporally secure from the dangers of past wars. The country is safe for the

'western tourist gaze' ('U.S., U.K. or even Australia'), which seems to treat the Middle East

as a unified, troublesome region. This gaze, in Mohib's opinion, needs to be corrected by

stressing the peacefulness, safety and stability of Jordan. In the excerpt above, Mohib

explains that (the wish for) peace has to be made visible by 'stressing that Jordan is a peaceful

country.' The 'western tourist gaze' should not be a gaze upon an unsafe country, but a gaze

informed by feelings of peace. Tourism and tourists can play an important role in promoting

peace and bringing about "'dialogue' for peace" to unmask the dialectical and reciprocal

negotiations involved in intercultural communication" (Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles,

2013, 4). Following Blanchard and Higgins-Desbiolles (2013), tourism in relation to peace is

envisioned in the context of human rights, justice and international citizenship. In this

context, through tourism, the personal or individual is connected to the cultural and

multicultural. In Jordan and neighboring areas, peace and tourism should relay the dynamics

of intercultural interactions with peace being understood beyond the absence of war and/or

ongoing violent conflict, as living in harmony and having harmonious relationships amongst

neighboring countries.

As part of the *conflict-peace-safety-tourism* entanglements, the 'western' tourist's quest for

something different and new seems to play an important role, according to Safi, owner of a

tourism company:

> Jordanians as people are very welcoming. But of course in the back of their [tourists']
>
> heads they are always, you know they think they are coming to somewhere that's not
>
> completely safe. … Most people travel a lot nowadays and most people have been to
>
> Europe, the States and so on. They want to see something different. We offer that, I
>
> mean as far as the countries [in the Middle East] involved, the quality of the sites are
>
> world class, so I think that the moment they feel that this area is safe they'll come here
>
> even more than they do now. It's more about them wanting to experience something
>
> different, something new. (Safi, interview, August 11, 2010)

Positioning Jordan as 'something different and new' seems to validate the us/them dichotomy

whereby the capacity of the tourist gaze to consume 'new and different otherness' normalizes

the dominant/subordinate relationship of power inequalities. This perpetuates post/colonial

legacies in the region. Such an example also shows that "tourism runs the risk of … silencing

the heritages of the host communities" (Whyte 2013, 49). Tourism, then, instead of promoting

safety, security and peace becomes a "mutually beneficial exploitation" (Whyte 2013, 49).

Jordanian tourism industry representatives feel that tourists, mostly 'westerners' from

economically developed countries with a sizeable disposable income, are enticed by

'authentic differences'. For them, the country has to be sanitized of danger, conflict and

presented as safe, secure and peaceful.

In our interview Safi continues: "it's a region that has problems, has issues but Jordan, I think,

that as a country we're looked upon favorably by the Europeans and the Americans" (Safi,

interview, August 11, 2010). He downplays danger saying that there's "nowhere in the world

that is completely safe, you know? Be it London or Madrid, whatever. Anywhere it is a bit

dangerous". Indeed, in a growing number of places, the orbits of danger, conflict, security and

tourism collide in explicit ways. Terrorists, tourists and soldiers occupy the same space (Lisle

2007). At tourist sites in Jordan, conflict, security and tourism orbits collide as tourist police

officers and soldiers roam around in plain sight. Anwar explains that:

> tourist police are well educated into the tourism hospitality business; meaning that it
>
> can help people. It's all there to support them [tourists] and make them feel secure. …
>
> they help in a way to complement the safety and security of our guests. (Anwar,
>
> interview, July 28, 2010)

This spatial collocation of tourists, police and soldiers orbiting the same space implies a

temporal collapse as well. It is argued that "tourism and its related mobilities are heavily

policed, controlled and regulated" in spite of an "apparent lack of 'law'" in relation to tourism

mobilities (Simpson and Simpson, 2011, 24). This is more obvious in Jordan where the

ongoing nature of the neighboring Palestinian-Israeli conflict has turned the region into an

enticing danger-zone. In this zone, the supervisory and surveilling force of the tourist police

gaze meets the self-policing gaze of tourists lured to Jordan by imageries of exotic difference.

The juxtaposition of tourists, tourist police officers and soldiers attest to the current ease of

travel and makes it possible for areas in (close proximity to) an ongoing conflict, a danger-

zone of sorts, "to immediately re-enter the orbit of the tourist gaze as the next hotspot" (Lisle

2007, 340).

5. INTREPID TOURISTS?

> The rocket that hit Aqaba yesterday [2 August 2010] morning does not stand to affect
>
> tourism in the Red Sea resort, officials and tourists stressed on Monday. A rocket
>
> "from outside Jordan" struck the coastal city on Monday, killing one Jordanian and
>
> injuring four others. … Although this is the third rocket that has struck Aqaba since
>
> 2005, tourism has not been affected, with figures indicating a growth in the number of
>
> tourists visiting the city. (Malkawi and Qatamin, 2010, 1-2)

On August 2nd 2010 several rockets were launched from the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt

supposedly aiming Eilat in Israel, one of those rockets accidentally fell near Hotel

InterContinental killing one local taxi driver. Immediately after this incident Jordan Tourism

Board posted on its website assurances that it was an isolated incident with no effect on

tourism. Daily newspaper *The Jordan Times* published an article in its August 3rd edition

"Rocket incident unlikely to affect Aqaba tourism" (Malkawi and Qatamin, 2010, 1). To

support this claim reporters cited the newly appointed tourism minister assuring "[w]e arrived

in Aqaba after the accident and tourists are still there going about their business.

Some of them are on the beach and others are in hotels as usual" (Afanah as cited in Malkawi

and Qatamin, 2010, 4). The Jordan Hotels Association also confirmed there were no

cancellations and two tourists were interviewed to express how safe they felt.

The illusion of safety in Jordan is produced to the extent that tourists often attest to the country's safety and stability even in the midst of "rockets raining on resorts" (Waikato Times, 2010, para. 1). *The New York Times* interviewed a Polish tourist about the incident, who said that he had been sleeping on the roof of a hotel in Aqaba when he was awakened by two explosions. The tourist then "looked out at the city and I saw the smoke and took two photographs. I went to have a look but I couldn't see anything because of all the soldiers and police" (Polish Tourist as cited in Farrell and Kershner, 2010, 11).

On the same incident, *The Jordan Times* quotes a Spanish tourist (as cited in Malkawi and Qatamin, 2010, 7) saying "I've visited Aqaba more than once and I will not let such accidental happenings spoil my enjoyment. I went shopping and spent good times and I will visit Aqaba again". A Russian tourist (as cited in Malkawi and Qatamin, 2010, 11) condemns the attack and names it an act of terrorism, "[t]his is a criminal attack, and terrorism incidents are everywhere. [It] will not prevent me from coming back to Aqaba, as I have lots of nice memories in this city".

Accounts of such tourists, danger-zoners in Adams' (2001) words, are capitalized on by the local mass media and tourism governmental bodies to prove that tourists still perceive Jordan as safe and stable even after the August 2nd rocket incident. They also attest to the complex connections between tourism, conflict and safety. These tourists are reportedly not deterred by the conflict and the danger in the region; they vouch not to be scared off and visit the place again. The boundaries that separate safety/danger are blurred by tourists who consider Aqaba - a city reportedly being targeted by rocket attacks in 2005, April and August 2010 - a "place with lots of nice memories" (Russian Tourist as cited in Malkawi and Qatamin, 2010, 11).

By positioning tourism alongside incidents illustrative of the ongoing conflict in the region these safety/danger blurrings are exposed. The rockets that hit Aqaba are representative of the

ongoing nature of the neighboring Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, tourism, tourists and

tourist activities in Aqaba are juxtaposed with the danger of the ongoing conflict in the

region. Tourism and conflict are placed side by side, safety and danger collocate as some

tourists report not to be deterred by such 'terrorist attacks'.

5.1 FLIRTING WITH DANGER – IGNORING TRAVEL WARNINGS

Travel warnings, those "ominous announcements" meant to alert tourists (Noy and Kohn,

2010, 206), have the function of regulating, sanitizing and securitizing travel and tourism in

most economically developed societies. If analyzed in detail, these warnings "construct

multilayered spatial–visual representations of tourist destinations" (Noy and Kohn, 2010,

206). In this article, I am not directly concerned with the semiotics of these warnings, but with

the ways tourists acknowledge, ignore and transgress them. Discourses of safety and security

reflected in travel warnings and advisories, are intended to shape tourist activities and

contribute to understanding how tourism, safety, conflicts and danger are entangled. The

focus here is on tourists who choose to defy them and travel to a place sanctioned by travel

warnings as a danger zone.

Hyun, a tourist in his late 20s from South Korea and interviewed for this project, decided to

go ahead with his plans of diving in the Red Sea six weeks after the rocket incident in Aqaba.

He did so despite a travel warning issued by the U.S. Embassy in Amman on the same day of

our interview, September 16th 2010. *The Jordan Times* newspaper quotes the official travel

warning: "[t]he U.S. embassy recommends that all non-official and personal travel to Aqaba

be deferred for at least the next 48 hours. For those citizens resident in Aqaba, the downtown

and port areas should be avoided if possible" (U.S. Embassy as cited in Omari, 2010, 4). After

reading about the rocket incident and the U.S. travel warning, Hyun opined that "I feel more

cautious" (Hyun, interview, September 16, 2010). He, however, chose not to cancel his plans

of travelling to Aqaba, because the adventure of diving in the Red Sea was one of the main

purposes of his trip in Jordan. He also informed me that he decided not to tell his family about

the August 2nd rocket incident "because I don't want them to worry about me [mild laugh]"

(Hyun, interview, September 16, 2010).

Monty, another tourist in his early 40s from the U.S. travelled to Jordan and the neighboring

Palestine/Israel from June 18th to July 2nd. That is one month before the August 2nd 2010

rocket incident, but seven weeks after the previous rocket incident on April 22nd 2010 when

no casualties were recorded. Monty was aware of the volatility of the region, but explained

that he did not "shy away from countries which my government (U.S.) advises one avoid

(e.g.: KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] ... and probably most of the Middle East, for that

matter)" (Monty, online interview, August 10, 2010).

Like Hyun and Monty, some Israeli tourists in a study conducted by Uriely, Maoz and

Reichel (2007) ignore official travel advisories issued by the Israeli government, specifically

those that concerned travel to the Sinai Peninsula within one to seven weeks after the multiple

terror attacks that occurred on October 7th 2004. For them, tourism represents "an adventurous

domain of life, in which risk taking is less threatening and … more appealing" (Uriely et al.

2007, 3). Israeli tourists, most of them in their early 20s, were not forthcoming to their parents

about their travel plans to Sinai (Uriely et al. 2007, 5). It is further argued that these young

tourists felt "relaxed and unafraid", but also reluctant to talk about their fears. This can be

interpreted as part of their desire to be perceived courageous and not "'weak' or cowardly

tourists" (Uriely et al. 2007, 5).

The same could be argued for a family from the U.S., David, Marge and their two teenage

daughters, who also travelled to Jordan two weeks after the rocker incident. When I asked

them about danger, possible terrorist attacks, safety and security Marge said:

sometimes it makes a place even more secure, because I know that when I went to

Bali, it was right after the bombings in Bali. And it occurred to me, yeah, that there

were bombings, but I felt that it was so random that, because it just happened, it

probably wouldn't happen again. (Marge from the Cheung family, small group

interview, August 14, 2010)

While Marge and her family did not plan to travel to Aqaba, she downplayed the chances of

another rocket incident in Aqaba or other parts of Jordan, thus disrupting the safety/danger

boundary. Likewise, her husband, David, emphasized the randomness of such an attack and

asserted that "it wouldn't necessarily deter me, because I've been to places before, I mean,

where there have been terrorist acts, but that's me. But the other thing I realize is, terrorist

acts can be very random" (David from the Cheung family, small group discussion, August 14,

2010). Both of them think terrorist attacks are random and cannot be predicted, and

maintained that they would travel to a region that had been bombed "because it just happened,

it probably wouldn't happen again" (Marge and David, small group discussion, August 14,

2010). This seems to be the gamblers fallacy that Wolff and Larsen (2014) explain in their

study on tourist risk perceptions and worries. The gamblers fallacy is explained as "a well-

known cognitive bias where people assume that chance is a self-correcting process in which

deviation in one direction makes deviations in the opposite direction more likely for the

equilibrium to be restored" (Wolff and Larsen, 2014, 206). The authors analyze tourist

perceptions before and after the July 22nd 2011 terrorist attacks in Oslo/Utøya in Norway.

They 'paradoxically' ask whether terrorism makes tourists feel safer. Indeed, their findings

maintain that tourists believe Norway to be a safe destination, probably slightly safer after the

attacks.

In a similar vein, of gamblers fallacy and coin tossing, Lakshimi and Reni from India said

about the rocket attack in Aqaba that "it does not make me concerned about my trip … it

sounded like a stray incident or at least in a limited location" (Lakshimi and Reni, interview, October 2, 2010). These two women travelled to Jordan at the end of September 2010. During our set of interviews, before and while on the trip, they insisted that the ongoing conflict in the region and the attack in Aqaba did not effect their decision to visit Jordan and Egypt. They think such attacks are stray, with limited spatial-temporal effects on tourism. In relation to the attacks in Bali in October 2002 and October 2005, researchers have maintained that these only have a transitory effect "on the growth path of tourist arrivals from major markets and … Bali's tourism sector is sustainable in the long run" (Smyth et al. 2009, 1367). Australian tourists are ready to return to Bali in spite of travel warnings. Indeed, the Australian government issues such travel advisories and warnings, but they tend to be ignored by Australians because they are overly cautious and conservative, "they play it safe", as mentioned by two senior couples who were interviewed for my study (Four Australian tourists, group interview, October 5, 2010). These tourists travelled to Jordan eight weeks after the August 2nd rocket attack in Aqaba and explained that the incident and the accompanying travel warning did not deter them from their travel plans.

All the above-mentioned tourists interviewed for this project travelled to Jordan and some of them to Aqaba one to eight weeks after the August 2nd rocket incident. They explained their intrepid attitude as willingness to take the risk. The incident felt less threatening either because it just happened, therefore the place tends to be 'even more secure', or because it seemed to be an isolated incident in a limited area, or because the risk was a calculated one.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper I argue that the workings of tourism in areas of ongoing socio-political turmoil can be better understood if the interconnections between tourism, conflict, safety and security are more fully scrutinized. Conflict proves not to be a unilateral deterrent for tourism; and

security discourses that "reproduce a liberal order" (Lisle 2013, 139) can be critically

contested. Through the spatial and temporal displacement of conflicts, a sanitization and

securitization process is attempted in Jordanian tourism that reproduces a hegemonic

discourse of global security for the maintenance of tourism-sector revenue.

Understanding the ways in which securitization and sanitization *in* and *of* tourism are

operated, can shed light on 'travel economies of desire' and their accompanying geopolitical

imageries. These shape tourism destinations in relation to safety and danger, and "the

affective mobilization of fear, anxiety and danger that circulate in particular destinations"

(Lisle 2013, 139). Lisle alludes to the affective and emotional 'turn' in critical social sciences.

This 'turn' can offer tremendous potential to explore and understand tourist experiences in

areas of turmoil, beyond judgmental considerations of morbid engagements with places of

conflict and/or violence (Buda & McIntosh, 2013; Buda, d'Hauteserre, and Johnston, 2014).

Lisle (2013, 135) argues that tourism industries are subordinated "to a security calculus"

whose function is to curtail tourist fantasies, direct and regulate their physical movement. My

findings show that this security calculus does *not* exert a curtailing influence on some

undeterred tourists. Tourists in areas of ongoing socio-political turmoil engage with the

conflict, they are not put off by it. This was evident in the above discussions about the rockets

incident in Aqaba in 2010. The process of sanitization and securitization operates not only on

an affective and discursive level, but also on the level of physical and material infrastructures

in tourism. These have been altered to incorporate security barriers, metal detectors, security

personnel and CCTV cameras. Future research on Jordanian tourism could engage with such

aspects to explore the biopolitical connections between humans and non-human materials.

Further avenues to better understand tourism in Jordan can focus on the peace aspect, on ways

tourism can contribute to peace building efforts in the region. As it was briefly evident in my

discussions with Jordanian tourism industry representatives, peace is not static and utopian,

but dynamic and permeable, with as many interpretations of peace as there are cultures

(Salazar, 2006). Taking this view, specific routes should be explored of how and in what

ways tourism can contribute to bringing about lasting and sustainable peace in the region. For

this, perhaps, tourism researchers ought to engage more critically with the concept of socio-

political in/stability. It is maintained that there is no agreed definition of political stability as

such (Poirier, 1997). The idea of change is important to stability whether political, social or

economic, and should be factored in tourism planning and management. In this respect

Wilson (2002, 203) argues: "a crucial and paradoxical element in stability: [is] change.

Although change is the logical opposite of stability, some change appears to be necessary for

political stability". An initial gesture towards tackling the connections between political

in/stability and tourism was undertaken by Butler and Suntikul (2013) via the concept of

political change.

In Jordan, and other countries of continuous turmoil, tourism is understood to exist, develop

and be managed only if conflict and danger are erased. But tourism coexists with conflict.

They are not mutually exclusive. Accepting this does not render all conflict ridden

destinations as unsafe and dangerous; just the contrary, tourism planning, development and

management can become more socially and politically sustainable, if it adopts a more

nuanced approach. In the context of more sustainable tourism planning in an area of

continuous turmoil, the concept of destination governance may be useful (Beritelli et al.

2007). A destination governance approach could offer ways to develop rules and mechanisms

for policies and business strategies by involving different governmental, non-governmental

and private institutions, as well as individuals. Such destination governance rules and

mechanisms should be adaptable to the volatile, often changing political environment, in

Jordan and the surrounding region.

Understandings of destinations put forth by Saraniemi and Kylanen (2011, 133) as units "of

action where different stakeholders, such as companies, public organizations, hosts, and

guests interact through cocreation of experiences" are helpful in exploring tourism

development avenues in Jordan and other politically unstable countries. Such explorations are

needed in settings, like Jordan for example, where ongoing, often violent conflict either inside

Jordan or spilling over from neighboring Palestine/Israel, Iraq and Syria, co-exists with

tourism. In terms of destination management, the geographical positioning of Jordan and its

neighboring conflict work to "stress the role of local factors, emphasize engagement with and

impact on residents, and highlight the way in which destinations are places transformed by

and for tourism" (Pearce 2014, 150). Taking a destination management approach to

understanding the complexities of tourism, conflict and politics in Jordan and other such

countries would mean to employ "a more holistic approach, reflect local particularities, and

be more dynamic and agile" (Pearce 2014, 150).

This paper has sought to deconstruct the complex entanglements between safety, security,

conflict and danger in tourism studies. It has also proposed another way to unpack seemingly

antithetical terms such as peace/war and safety/danger, for example. That is to recognize

binaries as social constructs of power relations and to question who has the resources to

construct taxonomies and name the world. The binary thinking often employed in tourism

studies obfuscates insights from critical social sciences on shared experiences and identities.

This project attempts to stimulate debates about productive hybrids that allow middle ground

for shared experiences and identities, that bridge either/or approaches and incorporate critical

perspectives.

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