University of Groningen

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Buda, Dorina

Published in:
Journal of Travel Research

DOI:
[10.1177/0047287515601253](https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515601253)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Buda, D. (2015). Tourism in Conflict Areas: Complex Entanglements in Jordan. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(7), 835–846. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515601253>

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Journal of Travel Research
2016, Vol. 55(7) 835–846
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DOI: 10.1177/0047287515601253
jtr.sagepub.com

Dorina Maria Buda¹

Abstract

In this article, the workings of tourism in areas of sociopolitical turmoil are critically examined. In so doing the aim is to scrutinize interconnections between tourism, safety, and conflict as I contend that tourism, tourists and the danger generated by ongoing sociopolitical conflicts are intimately connected. The empirical focus is on tourism in Jordan, a country in a region troubled by ongoing conflicts. Fieldwork for this project was carried out in 2009 and 2010. Data were collected from local tourism industry representatives and international tourists in Jordan. Findings indicate that a safety/danger binary is destabilized by industry representatives who operate a “sanitization” process in Jordan meant to erase danger and conflicts from tourism spaces. Tourists in the region also disrupt this binary as they travel to the region in spite of the conflict and downplay violent incidents.

Keywords

danger, conflict, risk-taking, safety, tourism politics, Jordan

Introduction

In this article, the workings of tourism in areas of sociopolitical 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 sociopolitical 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 sociopolitical conflicts and tourism through frequent reminders of the necessity of safety and security in tourism (Hall, Timothy, and Duval 2003; Pizam and Mansfeld 1996). In this article, 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 among 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

¹Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Department of Cultural Geography, University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands

Corresponding Author:

Dorina Maria Buda, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, Department of Cultural Geography, University of Groningen, Landlevan 1, Groningen, 9747 AD, the Netherlands.

Email: d.m.buda@rug.nl

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 sociopolitical turmoil also contributes to existing debates on risk perceptions and uncertainties in tourism (Mansfeld, Jonas, and Cahaner 2014; Williams and Baláz 2015), 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 Baláz 2015, 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, Timothy, and Duval 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 mold 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 paradoxical this may seem at first blush.

Theoretical Background: Conflicts, Safety, and 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; Butler and Suntikul 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), and the impacts of terrorism on tourist motivation and demand (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 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. 2003). 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 that 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 sociopolitical 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). Sociopolitical 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, Lawler, and Katos 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, Nielsen, and Mishra 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, Timothy, and Duval 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 such as Israel, Cyprus, Turkey, and Jordan experienced an increase in tourist arrivals (Wahab 1996).

More recently, Uriely, Maoz, and Reichel (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 traveling 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 firsthand. 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 1999, 83). My aim is rather to explore, in more depth, the workings of tourism in countries, like Jordan, located in an area of ongoing sociopolitical conflicts and to critically understand tourist experiences in such places.

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, and 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 nonviolent 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 sociopolitical 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 2012, 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

Figure 1. Map of Jordan with some tourist sites.

Source: Max Oulton.

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.

Research Methodology

Fieldwork for this project was conducted in April 2009 and from July to October 2010. In 2009, I traveled 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 (Amman, Petra, Aqaba, the Baptismal Site, and Wadi Rum) and organized one group interview with tour guides in Petra (see Figure 1 for locations).

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 the forums Trip Advisor and Thorn Tree (affiliated with 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, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Switzerland, and the United States, among other countries. All of them are aged between mid-20s and mid-40s, with the exception of two couples from Australia in their early 60s. Most of them were independent tourists, out of which 20 were men and 6, women.

Interviews 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 the agreement to participate form. Interviewees were assured that anonymity would be preserved if they wished so, or a pseudonym would 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 sociopolitical 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 deterring factors to visit Jordan in spite of regional instabilities; thoughts and feelings about the conflict; and its possible dangerous manifestations.

Individual in-depth and semistructured 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 favored. 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-performances 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.

Reflectively Positioning, Analyzing, and 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 sociopolitical implications in tourism.

During the second step, through coding, keywords were identified and data were 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, and 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 subcategories "piled up" and were organized into 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 "it 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-aged 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.

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 among 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, and 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 sociopolitical 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 UK 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., UK, 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 among 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 postcolonial 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 and 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 (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).

Intrepid Tourists?

The rocket that hit Aqaba yesterday [August 2, 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 2, 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 3 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 “we 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, “This 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’s (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 2 rocket incident. They also attest to the complex connections among 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 blurings 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.”

Flirting with Danger—Ignores 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 16, 2010. *The Jordan Times* newspaper quotes the official travel warning: “The 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 traveling 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 2 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 United States, traveled to Jordan and the neighboring Palestine/Israel from June 18 to July 2. That is, one month before the August 2, 2010, rocket incident, but seven weeks after the previous rocket incident on April 22, 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 7, 2004. For them, tourism represents “an adventurous domain of life, in which risk taking is less threatening and . . . more appealing” (Uriely, Maoz, and Reichel 2007, 3). Israeli tourists, most of them in their early 20s, were not forthcoming to their parents about their travel plans to Sinai (Uriely, Maoz, and Reichel 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, Maoz, and Reichel 2007, 5).

The same could be argued for a family from the United States, David, Marge, and their two teenage daughters, who also traveled to Jordan two weeks after the rocket 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 22, 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, Lakshmi 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” (Lakshmi and Reni, interview, October 2, 2010). These two women traveled 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 affect 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, Nielsen, and Mishra 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 traveled to Jordan eight weeks after the August 2 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 traveled to Jordan and some of them to Aqaba one to

eight weeks after the August 2 rocket incident. They explained their intrepid attitude as willingness to take the risk. The incident felt less threatening either because it just happened and 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.

Conclusion

In this article, I argue that the workings of tourism in areas of ongoing sociopolitical turmoil can be better understood if the interconnections among 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 and 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 and 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 sociopolitical 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 nonhuman 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 sociopolitical 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 toward 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. 2014). A destination governance approach could offer ways to develop rules and mechanisms for policies and business strategies by involving different governmental, nongovernmental, 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 Kyland (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 coexists 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 article 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.

Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank the participants in this research project. Their willingness to share their time, insights, and stories has made this study possible; because of them, I have formed strong emotional attachments to Jordan and the whole region. I am grateful to Dr Barbara Porter and all the staff at the American Centre for Oriental Research where I was hosted during my fieldwork in Amman. The staff at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem also deserve special thanks for their hospitality during my stay in Al Quds/Jerusalem. Max Oulton at the University of Waikato helped me with cartographic work, and I thank him deeply for the map used in this article. I am also indebted to my colleagues Anne-Marie d’Hauteserre, Lynda Johnston, Gareth Hoskins, Jelmer Jeuring, and Koen Salemink for having commented on initial versions of this article. I am also very grateful for the anonymous reviewers’ useful comments provided on an earlier drafts of this article. Sincere thanks go to the Editor for prompt handling of communication.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Author Biography

Dorina Maria Buda (d.m.buda@rug.nl) is Assistant Professor and Rosalind Franklin Fellow in the Department of Cultural Geography at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. She is the author of *Affective Tourism: Dark Routes in Conflict*, Routledge 2015. Dorina publishes in *Annals of Tourism Research*; *Current Issues in Tourism*; *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, amongst others. Her research interests revolve around interconnections between tourism, danger and socio-political conflicts; emotions, affects, feelings and senses; psychoanalysis; dark tourism, danger-zone tourism.