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Malta: a differentiated approach to the pilgrim-tourist dichotomy

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Tourism is today considered to be a main player in most countries of the world. A particular sector of tourism, pilgrimage and faith-based tourism, has proven to be crises-resistant. The synergy of this sector is a mixture of religious sentiments, demands and motivations and on the other hand there is the rationality of the tourism infrastructure. This paper argues that the islands of the present republic of Malta have been a pilgrims' destination from Neolithic times to the present. The islands' rich cultural, religious and historic fabric offers Roman Catholics, Protestants and participants of the New Religious Movements an opportunity to experience religious or spiritual fulfilment within the spaces and sites. The discussion about the tourist-pilgrim dichotomy in the context of Malta provides room for extended value and range of this dichotomy in view of the register and diversity of the participants and the intensity and range of their experiences and fulfilment.

Key Words: faith-based tourism, pilgrimage, new religious movements, Malta, pilgrim-tourist dichotomy

Introduction

Tourism is today considered a main player in most of the countries of the world. Many look at this industry as an indispensable source of funds and employment. The nine per cent of GDP deriving from tourism's impact (UNWTO, 2015) is a strong reason to consider the industry as the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs. Many operators in the sector will do all they possibly can to preserve, strengthen and diversify the tourism product to render it as profitable as possible. Tourism is a vibrant industry which is constantly vigilant for appropriate products and services that may yield profit and other benefits for the stakeholders and the destination countries. One such sector is faith-based tourism, which includes pilgrimage. The synergy of this sector is not only stimulated by religious sentiments, demands and motivations, but also by the actions and practices of tourism. The continuous interaction of these elements prompted Vandemoortele to coin the term 'tourism as modern pilgrimage'. She reflects:

Instead of only justifying pilgrimage within a religious context, we must begin to use our new cultural and sociological landscape in order to define what pilgrimage is today (2009:4).

It is widely recognised that faith-based tourism is a lucrative and economic crisis-resistant product, which countries and travel organisations cannot ignore. According to Tarlow:

The reality is that religion and faith are major businesses and have long impacted the tourism industry (2010:n.p.).

This paper will look at Malta, an island which has been firmly linked to religion and religious practices since prehistoric times. Arguably it can be claimed that there is an abundance of evidence that ties the Maltese islands to religious or spiritual cults and / or rituals during the period when the first permanent Neolithic inhabitants settled on these islands. At times, matters that were presented as facts were considered by others as the fruit of over-enthusiastic interpretation (Sister, 2013). However, no one can disregard the numerous Neolithic structures interpreted by the vast majority of archaeologists to be temples associated with rituals and forms of religious practices, along with the abundant artefacts and structures that are strongly related to spiritual or religious use (see for example, Zammit, 1930; Evans, 1971; Lewis, 1977; Trump, 2002). This wealth of religious artefacts has brought about a particular niche of incoming tourism, such as adherents of the New Religious Movements (NRM), ranging from Neo-Pagans to druids, the Mother Goddess Movement to Gaia, and Earth and Nature groups. Other visitors belong to the Atlantean energy-related beliefs, who hold that the Maltese Neolithic temples are a result of the trauma people experienced when Atlantis was destroyed (Sant, 2012). Indeed, some who fantasised that Malta formed part of the lost legendary Atlantis have tried to convince others of this (Grognet de Vassé, 1854; Galea, 2002).

Photo 1: The Neolithic Temples of Haġar Qim

This is a UNESCO world heritage site and a regular destination for members of NRM.

(Photo: courtesy of Malta Tourism Authority)

Malta's Neolithic Period - the start of religious pilgrimage?

Many people have, from distant times, considered Malta - the collective name of a minute archipelago situated at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea and whose two main islands are Malta and Gozo - as a 'Sacred Island' or something analogous (James, 1966), and the home of a succession of divinities; what may be arguably defined as a palimpsest of divinities traceable through its roughly 7,000 years of habitation. A long sequence of famous deities (including those from the Neolithic and Classical periods) and saints (from Malta's long Christian tradition) has become an integral part of a much sought after tangible and intangible cultural and religious heritage, admired by cultural tourists and discerning visitors.

Archaeologists in Malta are engaged in constant and intensive efforts to uncover more of the islands' material past. Independently of this specialised activity, throughout the ages, the inhabitants of these small islands have been expressing their religious sentiment through the many extensive and imposing structures

which can be seen in numerous locations in both Malta and Gozo. Around 6,400 years ago these early settlers started to build refined structures, which are today recognised to be among 'the oldest freestanding megalithic monuments in the world' (Daniel, 1980; Flynn, 2005). Renfrew (2004) is of the opinion that the temples of Malta are 'primary, pristine developments' since 'nothing remotely comparable' is found elsewhere.

The islands have acquired a rather unique multiplicity of impressive superimposed layers of civilisations accompanied by their associated divinities. Archaeologists seem to agree that Malta was not an isolated place. The Maltese Themistocles Zammit (1930) considered his birthplace 'the holy island of Neolithic Faith', while German-born Zuntz (1971:4) called it *isola sacra* [sacred island]. In mitigation of these enthusiastic descriptions, Evans (1963) and Trump (2002) have cautioned against mere fantasy, but then continue to suggest that, although they consider Malta's Neolithic culture to be a local, independent matter, there is much material proof for overseas contacts.

Photo 2: The Statuette Called the ‘Sleeping Lady’

This statue was found in the prehistoric hypogeum of Hal Saflieni. It is one of the figures associated with the Mother Earth beliefs related to fertility.

(Photo: courtesy of Malta Tourism Authority)

In the absence of any written evidence, but with the occurrence of archaeological ‘foreign’ material proof and anthropological support, it may be plausibly proposed that Malta played the role of a significant, albeit distant, shrine for pilgrimage, isolated in the Mediterranean. It may also be argued that, possibly due to distance, the Maltese Islands never developed on a grand scale in the vein of ancient Delphi or Eleusis.

Zuntz (1971) regards Malta to be a place where there was devotion to the earth and vegetation, and this made the island a pilgrimage destination since Neolithic times. He further points out the ‘vital importance of sowing, growing and harvesting’, which in Malta was externalised in a number of stylised religious images, some representing what are interpreted to be Mother Goddess figures, while other aspects of the divine were rendered through the means of related religious buildings and cyclical art. Zuntz argues that there was in Malta a cult of godhead which was worshipped ‘far and wide, and particularly also by the inhabitants of Sicily’ (1971:13).

Rountree (2003), an anthropologist of religion, surmises that from Neolithic data, arriving from disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology and architecture, it transpires that the early inhabitants of Malta possessed a religion which was centred on the indigenous Neolithic divinity of vegetation, healing, fertility, prediction of the future and celebration of the cycles of life and death. The Neolithic goddess of Malta is, according to Zuntz, connected to the ‘*Mater Magna*’, the mother goddess of Asia Minor from

previous times and connects to later goddesses in the Greek and Roman world. Participants from the New Religious Movements (NRM) visit Malta in order to engage in spiritual exercises at the Maltese Neolithic temples, thus, bringing past and present together.

Malta as a Sacred Island and a Palimpsest of Divinities

The Maltese Neolithic era is followed, possibly after a population vacuum, by the Bronze Age. The religious practices at this latter period are shrouded in mystery due to the dearth of evidence other than that related to the sepulchral practices. These were radically different from those of the earlier Neolithic age - cremation instead of interment in underground hypogea for example (Trump, 2002). The existing lacunae have resulted in stunted information related to our understanding of the religion of the people, their rituals and other ceremonial practices. What remains prominent in Malta is agriculture, healing and the connection with the sea (Calleja, Gambin and Magro Conti, 2008:22).

Following the prehistoric period, Malta was ushered into history with its occupation by the Phoenicians, those assiduous merchant-travellers from the eastern coast of the Mediterranean who plied the Mediterranean Sea and beyond. Malta experienced a succession of rulers who brought to the island their cultures, religions, values, laws and daily life practices. The Phoenicians were thus succeeded by the Carthaginians, and then the Romans, while some Greek influence filtered in from the neighbouring *Magna Grecia*. All these civilisations brought to the island female deities which were venerated along with the many male gods. The Phoenicians regarded the harbour in Malta’s south-east corner, now known as Marsaxlokk, as a very convenient haven for their ships transiting on their eastern and western Mediterranean trade routes (Calleja, Gambin and Magro Conti, 2008). Astarte and the Egyptian Isis were very popular, as well as the latter’s Egyptian co-deities Toueris and Nephthys. The cults of the Greek goddesses Artemis, Hera and Persephone were also celebrated, probably as much as their Roman counterparts Proserpina and Juno. All these goddesses share characteristics of fertility, childbirth and healing, and all had temples and shrines built for their veneration. Bonanno (2005) is of the opinion that visitors or pilgrims came to Malta to visit these shrines - Romans travelling to Leptis Magnae in Libya for a holiday or on other business, could have stopped in Malta for a few days and visited the shrine erected in the area of Tas-Silg to offer

prayers of supplication or as an expression of gratitude.

During Malta's stint under the Romans, it enjoyed the benefits of the *Pax Romana* within *Mare Nostrum*. Highly regarded Maltese products such as olive oil and thyme honey contributed to making Roman Malta - or Melite as it was known at the time - a very convenient hub in the Empire's pan-Mediterranean trading network (Cassar, 2015a). Some mythological figures, such as the nymph Calypso, probably only dwelled in Malta in the wishful imagination of some, since Classical scholars do not consider Gozo to be the island of Ogygia, although Callimachus, a Hellenistic writer, did identify the island of Gozo with the Homeric Ogygia (Bonanno, 2005:7). Male gods were commonly found in Malta. Among those who obtained an abode on the island, were the Phoenician supreme god Baal Hammon, Melqart and Eshmun (a god of healing). Evidence was also acquired pointing to the worship of the Egyptian gods Osiris and Bes, the Greek Herakles, the Roman Hercules and the Graeco-Egyptian god Serapis. Many of these male gods were in one way or another also connected to fertility (Cagiano de Azevedo, 1975; Bonanno, 2005; Ventura, 2004).

Countless aspects of celebration of female divinities have been unearthed, especially at the site of Tas-Silġ. This site has yielded proof of a continuum of worship of female divinities, from the Neolithic through to the Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, and early Christian periods (Cardona, 2013) - from the *Mater Magna* to the Virgin Mary. Early Christendom in Malta included the

Byzantine cult of Christ and Mary as sources of life. Mary's veneration started in the early fifth century during Western Roman times, but in view of the excavations at Tas-Silġ of a paleo-Christian basilica (Cagiano de Azevedo, 1975:89), it is thought that the Marian devotion was carried over into early medieval times when Malta became part of the Byzantine Empire in AD 535 (Cagiano de Azevedo, 1975:93; Brown, 1975:73). At the present time, Malta enjoys a deeply rooted Marian devotion, especially focussed on aspects of healing and fertility.

The manifestation as well as the presence of the Christian faith was reduced during the period of Arab rule in Malta (from 870 AD) and remained rather weak, if not outright absent, for many years into the Norman takeover (Luttrell, 1975; Wettinger, 1986). Alternatively, following the arguments of Busuttil, Fiorini and Vella (2010), it may have remained in a subdued state in Gozo where the adherents probably paid a *jizya* (religious tax) to survive as second-class citizens under Muslim rule. Over time, Christianity revived and its presence was reinforced through the work of the local Church within the Aragonese Empire, later on becoming yet more visible, tangible and active, during the rule of the Order of St John (Bezzina, 2002).

St Paul's providential shipwreck

The missionary zeal of St Paul, Apostle of the Gentiles, introduced Christianity far beyond its Judaic birthplace and boundaries. It is held by the people of

Photo 3: St Paul's Grotto in the Maltese Town of Rabat



This cave is held to be the place where the Apostle Paul lived while in Malta after his shipwreck – the site became a place of pilgrimage many centuries ago.

(Photo: courtesy of Malta Tourism Authority)

Photo 4: St Paul - One of the Patron Saints of the Maltese Islands



Paul is also the patron saint of a number of parishes in Malta. The photo shows the statue of the Apostle of the Gentiles exhibited in the parish church of the village of Safi (dedicated to him), during the week of the village feast.

Malta that the advent of Christianity in their country coincides with the providential shipwreck of St Paul in AD 60, as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles 27 and 28. This prompted the establishment of an early Christian community, and brought about a cult of healing and celebration of life in a Christian context. Guillaumier's (2006) view is that St Paul, during his stay in Malta, convinced people by healing rather than by conversion. In the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles state that St Paul healed the father of Publius, the Roman *protos* or chief, who was suffering from fever and dysentery. St Paul is one of the major patron saints of Malta; the others being St Publius, St Agatha and the Virgin Mary. The cult of the Apostle Paul is quite strong and dates back at least to the Middle Ages. A grotto in Rabat, which in the past was just *extra muros* of the ancient principal city of Melite, has always been considered as the place where St Paul resided while he was on the island. This site has created an unbroken pilgrimage destination from medieval times to the present. Visitors believed that the limestone of St Paul's Grotto had miraculous properties. During the time of the Order of St John, many noble tourists on their Grand Tour, visited this shrine of St Paul for spiritual enrichment and at the

Photo 5: The cult of the Virgin Mary is widespread in Malta and Gozo



The feast of the Mother of God under various titles is celebrated in numerous parishes where her statue is taken around the town in procession on the feast day. This photo shows the statue of the Assumption of Our Lady in the town of Mosta, with its famous Rotunda as a backdrop.

same time provided the locals with some monetary gains (Azzopardi and Freller, 2010). The Pauline cult has continued and devotion is still strong, not only in the Rabat area but also among the Maltese in general. A good number of visitors, Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, arrive at Malta to follow in the footsteps of St Paul.

The Virgin Mary, an Omnipresent Saint and Patron

The devotion of a '*Mater Magna*' is carried forward to modern times in the figure of the Virgin Mary in Christianity, and of Fatima in the Muslim faith, in view of their exemplary lives (Zuntz, 1971:17). Many followers of the NRM regard the Virgin Mary as a

Fig. 1: The Pilgrim-Tourist Path

PILGRIMAGE	RELIGIOUS TOURISM			TOURISM
a	b	c	d	e
sacred	faith / profane knowledge-based			secular
<i>pious pilgrim</i>	<i>pilgrim > tourist</i>	<i>pilgrim = tourist</i>	<i>pilgrim < tourist</i>	<i>secular tourist</i>
<i>(source: Smith, 1992)</i>				

manifestation of the old Mother Goddess. This carrying forward of characteristics from one divine persona to another is not based on rationality or scientific findings, but is rather symbolically construed on the basis of perennial human needs, as has been described by Rountree (2002). From another perspective, McGuckin (2008) explains that there is a pattern as to how gods and goddesses are absorbed and appropriated by succeeding civilisations. Certain values and iconography of the cults of Isis and Artemis, and the assonance between them, were absorbed and appropriated by the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This came about, not as a result of syncretism as usually happened within pagan cults, but due to ‘dramatic missionary strategy’ of dislocation, replacement and appeasement to those newly converted to Christianity (McGuckin, 2008:1-22). Within the pagan context, the values and iconography of the cult of the *Mater Magna*, which is also perceived to have existed in Malta as a syncretised cult of a divinity present in Sicily and Asia Minor, were then absorbed by later goddesses, such as Isis.

The Virgin Mary is a major patron saint of the Islands and her cult of healing, fertility and safe birth are still highly regarded in Malta. The small chapel of Our Lady of *Tal-Ħlas* (transl. of Childbirth), which lies in the limits of Qormi, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, in the context of Our Lady as the guardian of mothers in child labour. Every month on the third Sunday, parents present their new-borns and other children to Our Lady during a thanksgiving Mass in gratitude for pregnancy and safe delivery (Busuttill, n.d.; Grima, 2001). Another instance would be the chapel dedicated to Our Lady of *Tal-Ħniena* (transl. of Mercy) in rural Qrendi, which had for centuries been a very important venue of pilgrimage and devotion. The pilgrims went to Our Lady in this shrine to ask for her mercy and to beseech her to intercede on their behalf with her Son, Jesus. A well, dug for relieving the thirst of the pilgrims and their animals, together with the roofed portico, provided the devout with shelter from the elements and a place to rest after their long journey. Such amenities at this highly decorated chapel enhanced its appeal with pilgrims (Cassar, 2014).

Another very important Marian site of pilgrimage which continues to receive an uninterrupted flow of devotees to this day, is the shrine situated in the hilltop town of Mellieħa, dedicated to Our Lady *tal-Vitorja* (transl. of Victory). The original troglodytic chapel has been extended by incorporating it within a church so that the many thousands of pilgrims who visit this sanctuary every year could be accommodated. The numerous ex-votos that cover the walls of this pilgrims’ destination are testimony to the devotion and the healing attributes credited to Our Lady. The chapel is adorned with a medieval fresco by an unknown artist, but tradition assigns it to St Luke, the evangelist who accompanied St Paul on the ship that struck the island of Malta during a violent storm. Originally the sanctuary had been dedicated to the maternity of Our Lady, under the title of the Annunciation, but it was rededicated after the success which Malta achieved over the Ottoman Turks in the siege of 1565 and hence became Our Lady of Victory (Bonnici, 2002). Of interest is the traditional belief that preceding Christian times, the nearby caves in the Ġnien Ingraw area were devoted to the nymph Calypso (Vella, 2002).

The Tourism Dimension – Smith’s Continuum and Faith-tourism

The most obvious and often researched continuum in faith-based tourism is that which was first proposed by Valene Smith in 1992. Smith’s Continuum, as it is known, looks at the interrelationship between the various visitors (see Fig. 1).

Alecu (2010) presented a variation (see Fig. 2) which elaborated the basic structure proposed by Smith.

Smith (1992) claims that the social construct of the ‘pilgrim’ as a religious traveller and the ‘tourist’ as a holidaymaker, in effect, blurs the motives of both types of travellers. Essentially, this social construct is infinitely variable, as persons from different backgrounds consume the tourism product differently for different reasons.

In addition to Smith’s continuum of travel (Smith, 1992), one may argue that, travelling with the goal of

Fig. 2: Motivation continuum for pilgrimage–tourism

Fig. 2: Motivation continuum for pilgrimage–tourism				
PILGRIMAGE	RELIGIOUS TOURISM			TOURISM
I	II	III	IV	V
Belief is the fundamental motivation and we are dealing with a pious pilgrim	Belief motivation is stronger than the tourism motivation and thus we are dealing with the majority of pilgrims	Travelling has multiple motivations either equally powerful or complementary; tourists show the need for culture and also for accumulating new experiences	Cultural needs are interweaved with the needs for entertainment, and visiting religious sites is but a source of knowledge and active relaxation	We are dealing with the usual tourism, where the motivation for relaxation and entertainment is predominant
Belief	Culture			Entertainment

(source: Alecu, 2010)

combining a spiritual search with a physical journey may also indicate the level of importance or popularity of faith-based tourism (Digance, 2003; Timothy and Olsen, 2006). De-differentiation is developing into a keyword in related literature as researchers are concluding that the differences among the classical continuum of pilgrimage, religious tourism and secular tourism are steadily becoming less and less distinguishable (Bilu, 1998; Kong, 2001 Rountree, 2010).

The distinctions made between sacred and secular are also infinitely variable. Davie (2010) refers to this as the blurring of the culturally constructed boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism. Although it is possible to identify and to distinguish one from the other, the regular and irregular worshippers, pilgrims, (cultural) visitors and tourists, it has to be acknowledged that the demarcation lines between these types of visitors are often unclear and vague. Not all categories seek, or even desire, a spiritual experience, but if they do, it will be in different registers of seeking fulfilment and in different intensities. Many of the religious and sacred sites of Malta are tourist attractions in their own right. Hence, a faith-based traveller to Malta is as much a tourism consumer as any other visitor (Rountree, 2010; Zammit, 2015).

In this respect, MacCannell (1999:49) refers to Simmel's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* - the difference between everyday life impressions and the impression of a tourist - adding to the emic / etic dichotomy. The relationship between the emic and etic perceptions is a complicated one in the sense that the researcher sees much dissimilarity between those visitors, while those visitors have their own perception of matters; as also do the stakeholders and service providers, who do not know about these differences, and probably do not care either. Faith and spirituality are, however, linked to tourism in terms of

the relationship between the consumer behaviour of faith-based tourists and the service providers / locals, the functioning of the tourist infrastructure, and the consequences of faith-based tourism for the destination (Cohen, 1984:376).

Faith-based Tourism and Malta

The differentiation or similarity between the abovementioned diverse groups of visitors needs to be established. One may ask: What are the motivations for the followers of NRMs, the Marian cult and the Pauline cult to come to Malta? It is useful to note that in 2014 incoming religious tourism stood at 0.4 per cent, which indicates that it is still a virtually untapped niche within the island's tourism industry. Minister for Tourism Edward Zammit Lewis has argued that:

This is a niche market that can be further expanded, especially when over 365 churches exist on the islands (Schembri Orland, 2015, n.p.).

Given the present situation, if the product is to be made more visible, prominent and beneficial, operators need to focus on the various religious themes present in Malta and which may attract more visitors to come for a pilgrimage / spiritual experience.

In Malta, on-going research (by the present authors) is showing that it is quite possible to extend the range of visitor categories who would potentially be open to experience religious-themed events and sites, were these to come their way. The faith-based visitors who visit Malta include categories such as Catholic pilgrims, participants of the New Religious Movements, Protestant religious tourists, and religious tourists from other religions or denominations. The dichotomy is set off by the cultural visitor, the entertainment seeker and general tourist. Figs 3 and 4 present a breakdown of such visitor types in the Maltese context, based on the envisaged fulfilment that

Fig. 3: Fulfilment Continuum for Pilgrimage-tourism

(Munro’s variation on Smith’s Pilgrim-Tourist continuum - centred on fulfilment)

RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE	FAITH-BASED TOURISM		CULTURAL TOURISM	SECULAR PILGRIMAGE	CONVENTIONAL TOURISM	HEDONISTIC TOURISM
I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VI
The pious, ascetic and pure pilgrim. Faith is central. Self-centred in fulfilment (but possibly for the benefit of others as the ultimate goal).	The fulfilment for main-stream Roman Catholic pilgrims / Protestant sacred traveller, lies in the engagement with their set of beliefs. Culture and leisure are important too.	The fulfilment for NRM faith-based visitors lies in the experiences of spirituality encountered in the Neolithic structures. The open-minded pursuit of new experiences is crucial, including interest in the Virgin Mary. Culture and leisure are important too.	Fulfilment of cultural needs is the principal motive. Visits to religious sites may lead to a ‘religious moment’. Leisure and recreation are valued too.	Fulfilment of emotional needs is the main priority, ranging from war monuments and battlefields to artistic performances. The level of fulfilment can be regarded as intense as in faith-based experiences.	General fulfilment in tourism with priorities in leisure and entertainment, with a small dose of interest in the holiday destination.	The extreme form of tourism. Self-centred fulfilment for own benefit, such as found in the niche of well-being services, dance parties, etc. Faith is not important and possibly rejected.

(Munro, [in preparation])

Fig. 4: Faith-based Travellers to Malta

(Munro’s variation on Smith’s Pilgrim-Tourist continuum - Diversification in Faith-Based Tourism to Malta)

I	The pious, ascetic and pure pilgrim, in groups or individual.
Ila	Roman Catholic group pilgrimage with accompanying parish priest / spiritual director. These visit Malta also for cultural and touristic purposes, but have Holy Mass in Roman Catholic churches, sometime every day.
Iib	Roman Catholic group or individual pilgrimage with a particular goal, Marian or Pauline. These visit Malta also for cultural and touristic purposes, but have Holy Mass in Roman Catholic churches, sometime every day. They are guided by Scripture and tradition.
Iic	Protestant religious groups are not called pilgrimage, but are ‘engaged’ travels from the Protestant perspective. Catholic churches are visited for their cultural and not for their religious value. They would have a religious function in the evening in the hotel, a closure of the day, a Bible reading with prayer and singing. The Scriptures are their literal guideline.
Iid	Protestant religious groups or individuals who are less literal but more allegorical in their Scriptural interpretation. These would possibly have a careful or exploratory interest in the Virgin Mary.
Iie	Protestant religious groups who are in Malta to follow the Pauline trail.
Iif	Oecumenical groups are generally more open to the local Roman Catholic approach.
III	Sacred travel of the adherents of the New Religious and Spiritual Movements to Malta, for spiritual experiences and sessions in the Maltese Neolithic temples. Very diverse participants and groups of participants. Some visit churches to venerate Our Lady in their own manner.

(Munro, [in preparation])

travel to Malta may bring. It does not exclude that the visitors in cultural tourism, secular pilgrimage and conventional tourism do not have a religion, but it assumes that their religion is not the reason for travelling to Malta. Their religion could easily be one which has no connection to Malta.

The present authors have acknowledged, considering the arguments of Rountree (2010) and MacCannell (1999), that all visitors to Malta, pilgrims and tourists, must make use of the existing tourism infrastructure. This diminishes the dichotomy between pilgrims and tourists, as they are all *de facto* tourists. The importance then is given to the register and intensity of their envisaged fulfilment during their stay in Malta. The greatest contrast in register is found between the ‘Pure Pilgrim’ and the ‘Hedonistic Tourist’. Although their fulfilment might be equally intensive, it may at the same time not be as equally long-lasting.

The typology ‘Catholic Pilgrim’ in Malta is definitely different from that in certain other more religiously focussed destinations. Thus, the incoming Catholic pilgrim hosted in Malta would form part of the tourism infrastructure and act within it and through it. This means that in the Maltese case the pilgrim is generally different. In many cases, the road towards the pilgrims’ destination is a large part of the experience. One cannot go on foot to Malta, which is an island, as one would navigate the route to Santiago de Compostela. This age-old route was, in 1987, proclaimed as the first

Photo 6: Colour, Ritual and Pageantry

Colour, ritual and pageantry are the religious, cultural and touristic ingredients that accompany the religious life of the Maltese, where the spiritual and the secular mix together in a manifestation of devotion, celebration and enjoyment.

European Cultural itinerary by the Council of Europe (UNESCO, n.d.).

It must be underlined that the register of a pure pilgrim is very narrow, but the intensity of the experience is quite deep. As MacCannell (quoted in Urry) has underlined:

unlike the religious pilgrim who pays homage to a single sacred centre, the tourist pays homage to an enormous array of centres or attractions (2002: 10).

Among Catholic pilgrims there would be the 'normal' or 'conventional' Catholic pilgrim, within or without a parish group, who would score moderate religious intensity on the devotional intensity scale and likewise on the tourism scale. When it comes to the knights of the Order of St John (officially the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) who visit the island regularly, these would generally register high religious intensity. This also applies to knights from other Roman Catholic Orders and those belonging to other religious chivalric Orders set up in imitation of the original organisations. To these must be added the tourists who appear to have a religious propensity but whose intensity register is unpredictable. For example, according to Hughes *et al.* (2012) only four per cent of the visitors to Canterbury cathedral were actually pilgrims. The rest were there because of a multiplicity of other reasons.

In the 'Cultural Visitor' category there are those who have an interest in religious affairs, items and sites, Cultural tourists may accidentally enjoy a spiritual / religious experience. This sector also incorporates the secular discerning tourist who shares an interest in culture and religion. This is in line with what is happening around the world, for:

As a result of marketing and a growing general interest in cultural tourism, religious sites are being frequented more by curious tourists than by spiritual pilgrims (Olsen and Timothy, 2006:2).

Another group comprises the entertainment seekers. These are straightforward pursuers of sun, sea and fun, with no religious interest or the intention to be open to such an experience. These would generally not consider visiting religious sites for any devotional or cultural urge. The purely hedonistic visitors might even have a dislike or suspicion of anything to do with religion and find their fulfilment in ways not lightly considered by pilgrims.

There are then a proportion of visitors who belong to New Religious Movements. These would come with an intense religious/spiritual urge, have a cultural and environmental conscience, but would also seek entertainment while at the destination. A number of such visitors would also have an interest in the Virgin Mary. NRM is a term for a complex collection of

Photo 7: The Statue Representing the Nativity of the Virgin Mary in the Town of Naxxar

This scene shows the decorated parish church, the statue in the procession, the participation of tourists and locals, in addition to a stall selling nougat, the sweet especially associated with Malta's religious village *festas*.

groups embracing a wide and varied assortment of belief systems sourced from many religions and other beliefs, proposing a mix of conventional and non-traditional teachings and values (Saliba, 2003). This combination of propensities makes such visitors receptive to a spectrum of spiritual experiences and they would thus want to come in touch with a mix of events, sites and objects from which they gain the spiritual energies they are seeking.

The Protestant religious tourists, who form part of another group of religiously-engaged visitors, bring with them their own idiosyncrasies. They can be subdivided into three factions. Firstly, there are the general type, who combine tourism with aspects of their religion. Then there are a second group with a conservative disposition, visiting Malta mainly for the Pauline cult. These are interested in cultural attractions, though they are more moderately interested in the entertainment on offer at the destination. One is reminded of the travels of the Protestant author Charles Dickens in Italy and his book *Pictures from Italy* in which he relates his experiences as a tourist in that Catholic land. As a convinced Protestant, he felt a sense of discomfort, bafflement and indignation when visiting the churches and witnessing the ceremonials, yet also betrayed an underlying ambivalence as he secretly felt a sense of attraction to the Catholic

religion (Eslick, 2012). The third group are those Protestants who, being more progressive in their religious outlook, try to understand how the Maltese look at Our Lady. With the Marian cult still very prominent and central in the religious beliefs and devotions of the locals, the figure of the Virgin Mary cannot go unnoticed and is ever-present in the streets (niches, statues, door names, and more), the churches, the feasts (in the parish churches and the wayside chapels), the people's names (Mario, Mary, Marija, Marion, Marie, and other variants), the place names (Santa Marija Estate, Il-Kuncizzjoni, Qala Santa Marija), and more.

Conclusion

Religious tourism to Malta, whether in the form of pilgrimage or in its more conventional touristic package, is arguably quite diverse. Its motivational aspects beg a clear-cut definition, as the visitors who are pulled to these islands are attracted or inspired by a wide-ranging array of wishes, needs and expectations which make it challenging for the researcher to synthesise and categorise. In short, there seem to be more than fifty shades of faith or spirituality that attract tourists to come to Malta (Cohen, 1984; Smith, 1992; MacCannell, 1992; Collins-Kreiner, 2009; Cohen and Cohen, 2012). The tourism offer is wide,

attractive, challenging, and diverse. The religious / spiritual realities intertwined with the islands' cultural legacy and intangible heritage entice many to engage with them. Yet, one never really knows or sufficiently understands why visitors go to Malta's Neolithic or Christian temples, why they assist in the ceremonial processions with statues of saints, and mingle with the people in their town or village religious *festas* (Cassar, 2015b). This offer of sharing is not always staged; often it is genuine and relatively authentic because it forms part of the islands' quintessential cultural vernacular. This rich and enticing reality brings together pilgrims and tourists, as these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each visitor may neither be wholly pilgrim nor utterly tourist. The defining line is, as often will be the case, too fine to distinguish.

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