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Cultural heritage tourism in the MENA: introduction and background

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a large, complex, and diverse region and is viewed as a huge center of cultural and travel influence. Nevertheless, the region is plagued by geopolitical tensions, political turmoil, instability and conflict over the decades. The conflict-ridden and controversial image of the region in many tourism generating markets has negatively affected the flow of tourists to the region and hindered the development of tourism despite its wealth of cultural heritage endowments, a climate conducive to tourism and leisure resources. More recently, in the aftermath of the ‘Arab Spring’ and the advent of Islamic extremism and fundamentalism, cultural heritage in parts of the region have been placed at risk and have witnessed large-scale devastation, destruction and looting. The latter has stressed the urgency for post-conflict reconstruction in the Middle East context. The introductory chapter provides an introduction and background to the MENA region from a geographical and historical perspective in general and the cultural and heritage tourism in the region in particular and the challenges it faces. It will also outline the development of tourism in the MENA region and identify key issues in the region with links to the chapters in the book.

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Understanding the Middle East and North Africa

The concept of a ‘Middle East’ is one that often appears of considerable importance in contemporary geopolitics (Amanat, 2012; Bilgin, 2019). Indeed, as Bilgin (2019, p. 1) observes,

In the early twenty-first century, 30 years after the end of the Cold War, the Middle East comes across as an arena of incessant conflict attracting global attention. As evinced by accelerating South-to-North human mobility in the Mediterranean and the rise (and fall) of

ISIS in Syria and Iraq, it is difficult to exaggerate the centrality of Middle Eastern insecurities to world politics.

Yet, the notion of the Middle East developed from Eurocentric and imperial coinage of the international strategic diplomacy of the early twentieth century to demarcate a strategic middle ground between the “Near” and “Far” East, the “Middle East” (Koppes, 1976; Sidaway, 1994; Culcasi 2012) and is therefore a relatively new geographical and geopolitical category whose history, as Green (2014, p. 556) suggests, ‘has been far less stable than its hard rhetoric might suggest’. Bilgin even observes, that ‘Middle Eastern insecurities’ are even ‘portrayed as consequences of the “artificiality” of the “Middle East” as a region and/or the borders of Middle Eastern states’ (2019, p. 2). However, he goes on to argue that ‘inquiring into the relationship between (inventing) regions and (conceptions and practices of) security offers an appropriate starting point’ to understand the region (Bilgin, 2019, p. 2).

Despite its Eurocentric and often contested nature (Culcasi, 2010), the notion of a Middle East still plays an important role in the academic, geopolitical, social and environmental imaginings of the world (Amanat, 2012; Green, 2014; Evered, 2017), and continues to frame regional and policy considerations, including with respect to tourism (Hazbun, 2004, 2006; Daher, 2007; Steiner, 2010; Morakabati, 2013; Timothy, 2019a; Zandieh & Seifpour, 2020). Such a situation reflects that ‘models of geographical space are empowered by a hard rhetoric that, in suggesting the concrete stability of the *longue durée*, lends the aura of geological fixity. But while places might themselves be sheer facts, our conceptions of them both in themselves and in relation to other places are cultural constructions born in particular moments in time’ (Green, 2014, p. 556). Such socio-cultural and political considerations are central to understanding the heritage, and therefore heritage tourism in the region, given that ideas of heritage and place, as well as their commoditisation for tourism, are inherently connected to issues of identity (Daher, 2005; Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008; Samuels, 2009; Jacobs, 2010; Mills, 2012; Campos, 2014; Makhzoumi, 2016; Özkan, 2018; Hammond, 2019; Zandieh & Seifpour, 2020). Therefore, in this particular volume, we have sought to frame the region through the lens of MENA in part because it better reflects some of the geo-political framing that occurs from within the region and therefore connects to some of the common cultural heritage, and heritage tourism management problems, that exist (see also Timothy, 2019a).

The MENA region

MENA is an acronym which refers to the, and is a popular geographical term used by international institutions, media, and academic and economic organizations, including those in the region itself. However, there are a number of other terms that are also used including WANA (West Asia and North Africa) or the less common NAWA (North Africa-West Asia) or MENAT (Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey) which adds Turkey to the MENA countries. More recently, a new term was used by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its report, MENAP (Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) which adds Afghanistan and Pakistan to MENA countries (IMF, 2019). The MENA acronym is also often considered interchangeable with the term ‘greater middle east’ and in some cases the ‘Arab world’, with these classifications typically being based upon the mandates of each agency involved (Timothy, 2019b). In the case of the UNDP (2019) the Arab World statistical category includes the MENA countries discussed here along with the Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti and excludes, Iran, Israel and Turkey.

The MENA is a large, complex, and diverse region and given there is no standardized list of countries included in the MENA region, the region typically covers an extensive region stretching from Morocco to Iran, including all Mashriq and Maghreb countries and is a huge center of cultural and travel influence. The MENA region is the cradle of the world’s major monotheistic religions and encompassing 20 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (table 1.1). Moreover, the high ethnic diversity and large numbers of identity groups in the region also has substantial implications for cultural heritage tourism. Five of the largest ethnic groups in the region are included Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Persians and Turks. The majority of the population in the Middle East adheres to the two main variants of Islam: Sunni Islam, which has the greater following in most countries, and Shia Islam, centred on Iran and Iraq, although in some countries there are also a significant number of Muslims who identify as non-denominational while Oman is primarily Ibadi Islam. In addition, there are Christian and Jewish minorities in a number of countries, while Israel is obviously primarily Jewish.

Table 1.1: MENA country profiles

Countries	International economic and political associations	Area (km ²)	Population	UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) (2018)	HDI Rank (2018)	GDP per capita (USD) (2018) (IMF, 2018)	Largest ethnic groups	Main Language	Main Religion
Algeria	AL, OIC	2,381,741	43,053,054	0.759	81	15,440	Arab, Berber	Arabic (with Berber)	Islam (Sunni)

Bahrain	AL, GCC, OIC	760	1,641,172	0.838	45	50,057	Arab, Asian	Arabic	Islam (Shia, Sunni)
Egypt	AL, OIC	1,001,450	100,388,073	0.700	116	13,366	Arab, Copt	Arabic	Islam (Sunni)
Iran	OIC	1,648,195	82,913,906	0.797	63	19,557	Persian, Azeri, Kurds	Persian	Islam (Shia)
Iraq	AL, OIC	438,317	39,309,783	0.689	120	17,659	Arab, Kurds	Arabic (with Kurdish)	Islam (non-denominational)
Israel	OECD	20,770	8,519,377	0.906	22	37,972	Jewish, Arab	Hebrew (with Arabic)	Judaism (de-facto)
Jordan	AL, OIC	89,342	10,101,694	0.723	99	9,433	Arab, Circassian, Armenian	Arabic	Islam (Sunni)
Kuwait	AL, OIC	17,818	4,207,083	0.808	57	67,000	Arab, Asian	Arabic	Islam (Shia, Sunni)
Lebanon	AL, OIC	10,400	6,855,713	0.730	93	14,684	Arab, Armenian	Arabic	
Libya	AL, OIC	1,759,540	6,777,452	0.708	111	11,469	Arab, Berber	Arabic	Islam (Sunni)
Morocco	AL, OIC	446,550	36,471,769	0.676	121	8,933	Arab, Berber	Arabic (with Berber)	Islam (Sunni)
Oman	AL, GCC	309,500	4,974,986	0.834	47	46,584	Arab, Baluchi	Arabic	Islam (Ibadi)
Palestine	AL, OIC	6,220	4,981,420	0.690	119	3,199	Arab, Jewish	Arabic (Hebrew also in occupied territories)	Islam (Sunni, non-denominational)
Qatar	AL, GCC, OIC	11,586	2,832,067	0.848	40	130,475	Arab, Asian	Arabic	Islam (Sunni)
Saudi Arabia	AL, GCC, OIC	2,149,690	34,268,528	0.857	36	55,944	Arab, Asian	Arabic	Islam (Sunni)
Syria	AL (suspended), OIC (suspended)	185,180	17,070,135	0.549	154	2,900	Arab, Kurds, Armenian	Arabic	Islam (Sunni, Alawite)
Tunisia	AL, OIC	163,610	11,694,719	0.739	91	12,372	Arab, Berber	Arabic	Islam (non-denominational)
Turkey	OECD, OIC	783,562	82,003,882	0.806	59	*9,370	Turkish, Kurds	Turkish (with Kurdish)	Islam (Sunni)
UAE	AL, GCC, OIC	83,600	9,770,529	0.866	35	69,382	Arab (Emirati), South Asian, Egyptian	Arabic	Islam (non-denominational)

Yemen	AL, OIC	527,968	29,161,922	0.463	175	2,377	Arab	Arabic	Islam (Shia, Sunni)
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*World Bank figure for 2018

AL: Arab League; GCC: Gulf Corporation Council, formally known as Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, and is a transnational political and economic union of Arab countries surrounding the Persian Gulf; OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; OIC: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Source: UN World Population, 2019; International Monetary Fund, 2018; UNDP, 2019

The MENA region accounts for approximately 6% of the world's population, 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves (Khatib, 2014). Many of the 12 OPEC (The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nations are within the MENA region together with the region's substantial petroleum and natural gas reserves, makes the region an important contributor to global economic stability, and clearly demonstrates the centrality of the region to the global oil and gas market. Nevertheless, while oil and gas are very significant for economic growth in the region (Al-Mulali, 2011) and indirectly contribute to tourism demand, dependency on these products has historically limited the development of the tourism sector as well. Therefore, there is a growing focus on tourism as a means of economic diversification in the oil and gas rich states of the region (Morakabati, 2013; Tang & Abosedra, 2014), although its development in Saudi Arabia and Iran remains primarily guided by conservative Islamic values and religious perspectives, especially as both countries aspires to present itself as an epitome of a Muslim society (Seyfi & Hall, 2019). In Saudi Arabia which has begun to seek to encourage heritage and cultural tourism by non-Muslims as well as increases in domestic tourism (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH), 2018a, 2018b), the growing emphasis on developing tourism outside the hajj pilgrimage and building an entertainment city 'not subject to conservative kingdom's rules' is still a source of domestic political contention (Madden, 2018).

It is not just the states in the region with carbon-based economies that are trying to diversify through tourism. Nearly, every MENA country has begun to see tourism as a means of economic diversification and private-sector employment generation (O'Sullivan, Rey, & Mendez, 2011) (see Case Study 1.1 on Morocco). And, in those countries which are experiencing war and political instability, tourism will undoubtedly become a focus once relative peace stability resumes, as has already been demonstrated in the region with respect to the Lebanon (Ladki & Dah, 1997; Ladki & Sadik, 2004; Issa & Altinay, 2006; Rowbotham, 2010), Iran (Seyfi & Hall, 2018, 2020a), Israel (Mansfeld, 1999), Palestine (Isaac, Hall, & Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016). Indeed, in some cases war sites have become tourist attractions and become locations of national and secular pilgrimage.

That tourism is of growing economic significance to the region should not be surprising. MENA represents a market of 389 million consumers which has a combined GDP of USD 2.4 trillion (2017) accounting for 3% of the world's economy (UNWTO, 2019a). The growing middle class in many countries, especially in the Gulf region, as well as significant international diasporas means that there are substantial international outbound markets for VFR travel as well as leisure markets. Given the central role of the Abrahamic religions in the region religious tourism and pilgrimage is clearly of importance (Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016; Seyfi & Hall, 2019), while there is also a small but possibly growing Islamic tourism market (Hall & Prayag, 2020). The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) (2017) perspective on Islamic tourism is significant for some forms of cultural heritage tourism in that it argues that.

Islamic tourism includes visions and ideas that outline the inclusion of Islamic religious cultural sites in tourism programs with “pedagogical” and self-confidence building elements. It tries to encourage a reorientation inside the tourist destinations towards less consumption and “western culture” loaded sites towards more Islamic historical, religious and cultural sites (OIC, 2017, p. 28).

However, the OIC goes to explicitly describe Islamic tourism as a ‘religious conservative’ concept:

The religious conservative concept for Islamic tourism is based on the conservative interpretation and understanding of Islam. Merging elements of the extremely conservative Islamic lifestyle with the modern tourism industry could indeed present new tourism options, spaces, and spheres. For a growing conservative intra Arab and intra Muslim tourism market, the implementation of a religious conservative concept in tourism planning as an extra option and as an insertion into the existing mainstream tourism could indeed have a positive economic and social effect (OIC, 2017, p. 28).

While there is undoubtedly a religious conservative element in some forms of tourism within the region, that is particularly reflected in the tourism policies of Iran and Saudi Arabia (Seyfi & Hall, 2019, 2020a), less conservative members of society are increasingly likely to engage in leisure oriented domestic and international tourism. Indeed, in a study of domestic tourist camping in Israeli national parks, Ram and Hall (2020) reported that religiously conservative individuals, whether Jewish or Muslim, show little engagement in leisure camping. Heritage tourism there need not be regarded as implicitly conservative although the recognition of intangible heritage and the cultural dimensions of heritage undoubtedly call on appropriate sensitivity by tourists and in the

development of heritage tourism. Significantly, international heritage tourists may potentially offer higher yields than more conventional coastal resort tourism and may also offer significant returns for more peripheral areas (Wright & Eppink, 2016; Lak, Gheitasi, & Timothy, 2019). Therefore, given the rich cultural heritage of the MENA countries, it is perhaps unsurprising that the economic value of heritage tourism is gaining greater attention from government as they face the challenge of generating employment at a time of substantial economic, social and environmental change.

This chapter provides an introduction and background to the MENA region in general and the cultural and heritage tourism in the region in particular and the challenges it faces given the current conflict in the region. It also outlines the development of tourism in the MENA region and identifies key issues in the region in relation to the chapters in the book. These issues and their respective implications for heritage tourism will set the context for the chapters to come.

Case 1.1 Tourism and heritage in Morocco

Being bordered by two seas, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and straddling mountain ranges, oases and the Sahara, Morocco's geography and history has some significant differences to those of other MENA countries and which have significantly influenced its cultural heritage and tourism. First, Morocco is a thousand-year-old monarchy consolidated by dynastic alternation. Second, the kingdom escaped Ottoman domination in 1512 when the eastern Maghreb was occupied and this has led to some important historical differences compared to much of the MENA area. Third, it was spared the wave of coups d'état that eliminated the last African kingdoms in the twentieth century. Finally, Morocco put up resistance to the colonial expansionism of France and Spain, before undergoing a short-lived tripartite protectorate (1912-1956). The 44 years of occupation did not greatly alter the country's culture, let alone its heritage. On the contrary, the protectorate favoured tourism as a means of economic development, certainly modern and colonial, but nevertheless primarily cultural in nature.

As soon as it was established, the administration of the Protectorate assigned a symbolic dimension to the conservation of Morocco's monuments and cities (Hillali, 2007a, 2007b; Berriane, 2009). After independence in 1956, Moroccan tourism went through a period of stagnation (1956-1964) before benefiting from the effects of a targeted liberal orientation with respect to tourism development. The geographical resources and the cultural heritage of the kingdom provided planners with the necessary arguments to give tourism an important role, second only to

agriculture, among the national economic priorities (Hillali, 2007a; Moudoud & Ezaïdi, 2005; Bouzahzah & El Menyari, 2013). However, the inexperience of the tourism actors and the persistence of internal and external crises disrupted the evolution of this sector, once described as the "engine of development" for Morocco (Hillali, 2007a).

Tourism has received a major boost with the reign of Mohammed VI since 1999, via a series of large-scale development plans (e.g. Vision 2010 and 2020), substantial investment in infrastructure and increasing foreign investment in the sector (Almeida-García, 2018). As a consequence, tourism has become the main factor of economic growth and is the second biggest contributor to GDP and the second largest source of employment generation (Bilali, 2016). In 2018, over 12 million tourists visited Morocco and made Morocco the top African tourist destination and the 30th most popular in the world (UNWTO, 2019b; WTTC, 2019). Hilali (2007a) argues that for Morocco, the choice of tourism is above all an option compatible with the monarchical doctrine and its heritage and politics being suitable for the continued evolution of the moderate liberalism desired by Morocco.

In the case of Morocco, heritage in general, and the commoditisation of culture for tourism in particular, has evolved in a social and political climate where tradition and modernity seek to coexist. The museums in Morocco are primarily visited by international tourists than domestic ones. Data from Morocco's Tourism Observatory Office shows French tourists as the main market for tourism in Morocco, representing 27.6% of the total foreign tourists during 2018. The other major source markets for Moroccan tourism are Spain followed by the United Kingdom, and Belgium. Culture, museums, and the history of Morocco are key elements for more than 34% of French students, who make cultural visits to Morocco (Kasraoui, 2019). The 13 museums managed by the Ministry of Culture and the 20 historic sites open to the public bring in about 15 million dirhams' revenue per year reflecting that the entrance fees are very low (10 dirhams (approximately a little under one Euro, to which the currency is pegged) for public museums and 20 dirhams for private ones). A study by the Tourism Observatory (2014) showed that visits to monuments and museums were undertaken by 40% of international tourists with 12% participating in cultural and artistic events (table 1.2). In comparison, walks in the city/beach accounted for 19% of the activities undertaken by foreign tourists in 2014.

Table 1.2: International visitation by type of tourism activities in Morocco in 2014

Activities	Percentage
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Visits to monuments, museums	40 %
City/beach walks	19 %
Calm, rest, idleness	17 %
Hiking	16 %
VFR and wedding	15 %
Cultural and artistic events	12 %
Beach	11 %
Gastronomy	10 %
Business and professional activities	9 %

Source: Observatoire du tourisme Maroc, 2014

The income generated by visits to monuments and museums is significant for heritage conservation as well as the wider destinations (Morocco's Tourism Observatory, 2014). As with many MENA countries World Heritage listing is regarded as important for tourism as well as being a source of national prestige. The inscription of nine heritage sites by UNESCO on the World Heritage list contributes both to the protection and recognition of these properties (Table 1.3). There are five items inscribed on UNESCO's representative list of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2015) (Table 1.4) which also serve to reinforce the importance of several location as tourism sites. This is especially the case with respect to Jemaa el-Fnaa square in Marrakech which is a market as well as space within which traditional storytelling, music and performance occurs. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the UNESCO listed sites are only a very small part of the many sites of national significance.

Table 1.3: Morocco: Tangible heritage inscribed on the UNESCO Heritage List

<i>World Heritage Sites</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Sites on the Tentative List</i>	<i>Year</i>
Ksar of Ait-Ben-Haddou	1987	Moulay Idriss Zerhoun	1995
Medina of Essaouira (formerly Mogador)	2001	Taza and the Great Mosque	1995
Medina of Fez	1981	Tinmel Mosque	1995
Medina of Marrakech	1985	Lixus (ancient city)	1995
Medina of Tétouan (formerly known as Titawin)	1997	El Gour	1995
Rabat, Modern Capital and Historic City: A Shared Heritage	2012	Taforalt (Grotte des Pigeons)	1995
Archaeological Site of Volubilis	1997	Talassemiane National Park	1998
Historic City of Meknes	1996	Aire du Dragonnier in Ajgal	1998
Portuguese City of Mazagan (El Jadida)	2004	Khniouss lagoon	1998
		Dakhla National Park	1998

Source: UNESCO, 2019

Table 1.4: Morocco: Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO

Name	Location or city	Year
Jemaa el-Fnaa square (market)	Marrakech	2008
Tan-Tan Moussem (tribal gathering)	Tan Tan	2008
The Mediterranean Diet	Morocco	2013
The art of falconry	El Jadida	2012
Practices and know-how concerning the argan tree'	popular areas	2014

Source : Morocco's Ministry of Culture, 2019 (<http://www.patrimoineculturel.ma/>)

Although tourism growth remains a major focus of the government, tourism strategies such as Vision 2011-2020 have attempted to correct the mistakes of the past by emphasizing the protection of the environment and heritage. In its Vision 2020, the Ministry of Tourism has drawn up a plan for the development of national culture, entitled 'Legacy and Heritage' which sets out to put forward the cultural identity of Morocco through the structuring and the upgrading of the physical and non-physical legacies of the Kingdom and the building of coherent and attractive tourism products (Ministry of Tourism, Air Transport, Handicrafts and Social Economy, 2018). As a part of this plan and in the first instance, two world class museums are being developed, the African Museum of Tangier and the Moroccan Museum of History of Meknes, to allow the tourists to discover and interpret the historical and cultural inheritance of the Kingdom in a manner similar to major contemporary European museums (Ministry of Tourism, Air Transport, Handicrafts and Social Economy, 2018). These high-profile projects aim to promoting tourism by enhancing culture while many other heritage sites remain important for tourism (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5: Location and nature of the main monuments popular with tourists

Monuments	Characteristics	Location
Palace	Royal residences and residences associated with the members of a royal household	Imperial cities or locations frequented by the royal family
Riads	Traditional multilevel houses of the wealthier members of society	Grandes villes du Bled el Makhzen
Kasbahs	Adobe fortresses	Oases and on trading routes
Ksour	Fortified villages	Oases and palm groves
Attics	Fortified collective granaries	Anti-Atlas and surroundings
Madrasahs	Old religious educational institutions / universities	Imperial cities and surroundings
Medinas	Ancient cities	All over Morocco

Nevertheless, coastal development remains a major focus. For example, Plan Azur 2020 focuses on strengthening Morocco seaside resort industry on both the Atlantic and Mediterranean shores and also seeks to develop new tourist destinations in the Souss and Sahara (Bilali, 2016). Overall, it aims to build a competitive Moroccan offer on an international basis and seeks to raise Morocco to be one of the world's top twenty tourist destinations by 2020 and a model of sustainability in Mediterranean destinations (Bilali, 2016).

Cultural tourism in Morocco is constantly increasing and the culture and heritage tourism accounts for 80% of tourism activities in the country, despite the desire of government authorities to develop seaside resorts, often to the detriment of other forms of tourism. The historical heritage elements, whether tangible or intangible, old or recent, dispersed or concentrated, are sensitive products requiring great care. The inscription of nine historic properties on the World Heritage List, between 1981 and 2019, has certainly helped to anchor this type of tourism in the country. And yet, beyond the idyllic image of tourism advertising, the relationship between tourist activity and cultural heritage in Morocco is highly complex. While the contribution of Moroccan built and intangible heritage to tourism is visible in the form of attractions, foreign exchange, revenue, and employment, the opposite, the contribution of tourism to the conservation and maintenance of heritage, remains to be proven. It is true that, in terms of safeguarding or protection, historic sites and monuments have often been enhanced to serve as a platform for socio-cultural events of a seasonal nature. Moreover, craft products (weaving and porcelain), traditional activities (cooking and gastronomy) and popular arts (songs and dances) have experienced a certain renaissance, or at least have been maintained, at the cost of only limited change. Nevertheless, opinions differ on this point: optimists believe that tourism is an excellent savior of heritage, while pessimists see it, on the contrary, as an agent of its long-term annihilation.

Mimoun Hillali

The geopolitics of MENA region

Heritage and tourism in MENA is very much affected by the region's geopolitics. The rivalry between major powers in the region, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran which is played out in Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and postwar Iraq, along with Iran's sophisticated interventions in Bahrain and other countries in the region and, more recently, Saudi-led intervention in Yemen has shaped the geopolitics of the region since the 2003 US invasion and occupation of Iraq (Salloukh, 2013). The popular uprisings of the Arab Spring intensified this geopolitical confrontation and the

regional struggle which spread to Syria and Yemen (Dalacoura, 2012; Malmvig, 2014). The fall of a number of the region's long-time dictatorships as a result of the Arab Spring, has intensified awareness of the geopolitical significance of the region (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016). Salloukh (2016, p. 33) commented that:

The sectarianisation of the region's geopolitical battles, and the instrumental use of some of the uprisings for geopolitical ends, has hardened sectarian sentiments across the region, complicated post-authoritarian democratic transitions, and, at least in Syria's case, transformed its popular uprising into a veritable civil war.

In addition, the extremely volatile oil market of the producing countries in the region has had influence on international markets and, for many, oil is seen as particularly sensitive to sudden shifts in geopolitical climate (Brew, 2017). Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz in response to U.S. sanctions on the country's oil industry and export as well as several attacks on tankers clearly demonstrates the geopolitics of the oil and the significance of the region in shaping the global oil market (Kausch, 2015; Cordesman, 1999). Such issues affect not only global energy markets but also affect perceptions of the region in terms of safety and security, including the major aviation hubs that have been developed by some of the Gulf states.

Civil war in Syria has generated a new wave of geopolitical manoeuvring in the political geography of the Middle East and has brought the U.S. and Russia into direct military competition, along with significant regional interventions by Turkey and Iran. Clearly indicating the MENA's position in global affairs and in geo-political and geo-strategic equations. Rashed (2019) argued that:

For most of its modern history, the Middle East has been besieged by international conflicts. Since the early nineteenth century, European powers have competed to colonise the Middle East's territories in an attempt to control its natural resource and geostrategic location. Almost two centuries later, the region finds itself embattled in another round of intense crises in which both super and regional powers compete for territorial influence. The once stable region became an arena for violence in the aftermath of the popular uprisings of the 2010s, and what started as peaceful demands for democracy and freedom soon metamorphosed into civil and regional wars in many areas. The rise of violent change and the counter violent quest to maintain the status quo has been closely tied to the region's resources.

Moreover, the broken diplomatic and commercial ties in the aftermath of the sanctions against Qatar by the Saudi-led coalition has forged a new series of relations among countries in the region. Visitors from the rest of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) usually account for approximately half of all tourists to Qatar. Therefore, the decision by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt to cut diplomatic and transport ties in 2017 had a substantial impact on the country's tourism industry along as its role as an aviation hub for Qatar Airlines (Reuters, 2017). As of February 2020, the governments of Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen had still not restored diplomatic ties with Qatar. The number of visitors to Qatar fell by more than a third in the first half of 2018, with 945,000 visitors arriving in the first six months of 2018, compared to 1.5 million in the same period in 2017. Key to the change in the number of arrivals was an 84% in visitors from the GCC and a 45% drop in visitors from other Arab countries (Dudley, 2018). Hassan Al-Ibrahim, the acting chairman of the QTA, said Qatar had been faced with a situation where 'other countries are weaponizing tourism' and said that Qatar was going to follow a strategy of trying to diversify its source markets (Dudley, 2018).

These geopolitical upheavals in the region along with the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Iran's nuclear agreement (known as JCPOA) and imposition of further the stringent sanctions against Iran (Seyfi & Hall, 2019, 2020b); the targeted killing of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad by a U.S. drone and the subsequent accidental missile attack on Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 (Hubbard, 2020); President Trump's "peace plan" for Israel and Palestine (Beaumont & Proctor, 2020); and ongoing tensions between Iran and major powers in the region, particularly Saudi Arabia and Israel (Guzansky & Shapiro, 2019), demonstrate the level of political uncertainty and potential instability in the region, with subsequent direct and indirect implications for tourism and heritage.

Cultural and heritage tourism in the MENA region

Heritage is regarded as one of the more significant and fastest growing components of tourism in many developed economies (Richards, 2018; Timothy & Boyd, 2015), with much of the focus placed on World Heritage sites (Adie, 2019). Since the adoption of the *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Natural and Cultural Heritage* in 1972, as of January 2020, some 1121 sites (869 Cultural, 213 Natural, and 39 Mixed) throughout the world have been designated as World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2020). Many significant sites in the region grace this list (Shackley, 1998). For many countries, World Heritage sites serve as cultural icons and a means for developing a positive national image and increasing international visitation (Adie & Hall,

2017). Heritage tourism is also an important sector of domestic tourism in many countries. Besides its role in economic development, heritage tourism is widely accepted as an effective way to achieve the educational function of tourism by helping government influence public opinion and gain support for national ideological objectives and ambitions, developing a positive national image, and contributing to national and regional identities (Adie, Hall, & Prayag, 2018; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Bourdeau, Gravari-Barbas, & Robinson, 2016).

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are home to 129 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (119 cultural, five natural, and five mixed) which are of outstanding universal value. 325 sites are also tentatively listed which shows the huge potential of the region. As table 1.6 shows, around 12% of World Heritage sites are located in the MENA region together with sites recognised under national heritage legislation.

Table 1.6: Number of World Heritage Sites in MENA region by countries as of January 2020

Country	Cultural sites	Natural sites	Mixed sites	Total sites	Sites on the tentative list	UNESCO region
Iran	22	2	-	24	56	Asia and the Pacific
Turkey	16	-	2	18	78	Europe and North America
Morocco	9	-	-	9	13	Arab States
Tunisia	7	1	-	8	13	Arab States
Algeria	6	-	1	7	6	Arab States
Egypt	6	1	-	7	33	Arab States
Israel	7	-	-	7	18	Europe and North America
Iraq	5	-	1	6	11	Arab States
Syria	6	-	-	6	12	Arab States
Jordan	4	-	1	5	15	Arab States
Lebanon	5	-	-	5	10	Arab States
Libya	5	-	-	5	0	Arab States
Oman	5	-	-	5	7	Arab States
Saudi Arabia	5	-	-	5	11	Arab States
Bahrain	3	-	-	3	6	Arab States
Palestine	3	-	-	3	13	Arab States
Qatar	1	-	-	1	1	Arab States
Yemen	3	1	-	4	10	Arab States
UAE	1	-	-	1	8	Arab States
Kuwait	-	-	-	0	4	Arab States
Total	119	5	5	129	325	

Source: own compilation, UNESCO, 2020

The wealth of cultural heritage endowments of the MENA countries reflects the importance of the region's contributions to humanity's history (Timothy, 2019). Nevertheless, despite the growing

significance of heritage to tourism in the region, substantial contestation remains over its conservation and recognition which, at its most extreme, can result in its deliberate destruction.

Cultural property destruction and representation in the MENA region

The destruction of cultural heritage and attacks on cultural property has been the subject of war crimes and international outcry and has received increasing international focus (Cunliffe, Muhesen, & Lostal, 2016). Cultural property has suffered and continues to suffer severe damage during the recent upheaval and armed conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (Al Quntar, 2013). Munawar (2019, p. 157) observes, ‘The targeting of cultural heritage, which has taken place during the current political instability in the Middle East and North and West Africa, has evidently had a direct impact on the collective memory and cultural identity of the nations concerned’. The escalation of the conflicts in the region since early 2011 has caused, and is still causing, dramatic human suffering. Cultural heritage destruction has become an important and irreversible collateral damage in those conflicts. Extremely rich and varied cultural heritage buildings, sites and cities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya are either eliminated or severely damaged to the point of devastation, (e.g.; the Old City of Aleppo and Nineveh (Iraq), some of which has been deliberately targeted (see case 1.2). The looting and trafficking of antiquities in the Middle East and North Africa has also reached unprecedented levels since the rise of ISIS with subsequent substantial effects on the heritage values of some sites.

However, it should also be noted that some cultural property destruction may be state sanctioned, or ignored, particularly as a result of unrestrained urban development. Naccache (1998), for example, writing in the context of heritage in post civil war Lebanon (see Sandes, 2013), writes of Beirut’s ‘memoricide’ in terms of a mutual forgotten memory as archeological projects that were aimed to find common historical ground of all Lebanese (Kaufman, 2004), from all sects and ethnicities, were halted due to politics. Nevertheless, archeology and heritage conservation and management have always been tied to advancing political (imperialist, colonialist, nationalist, racist, religious) and economic objectives (Hamilakis & Duke, 2007).

In the case of Lebanon, Heinz (2008, p. 464) notes that archaeology focused on Phoenician, Greek and Roman history has been useful at times ‘for many divergent interests. Politicians and residents used archaeology in order to create a common identity, the building industry and the Department of Tourism to attract visitors and to make money with the “visibility of the past”.’ Yet different interests will take different views on heritage and may not be willing to give up their view of

history and identity. For example, in the case of the Beqa'a Valley in Lebanon, which is inhabited by Muslims and Maronite Christians, Heinz (2008, p. 466) notes that, 'visible evidence for a community from Islamic times would be politically desirable for one group, reinforcing their identity, and be politically exploitable as a proof for the long history of Islamic history and culture in the area'. As a result, so long as archaeology and heritage management and interpretation with their specific ways of producing knowledge 'supports the locally dominant worldview, it is considered helpful. However, where the archaeological evidence foils the political concepts of the local authorities, it runs the risk of becoming troublesome' (Heinz, 2008, p. 466). In such a context heritage management and tourism may deliberately focus on one aspect of history and ignore others. In the Beqa'a Valley

the desire to keep Islamic evidence visible on the site at the same time implied the impossibility of excavations of any older levels. In addition, exposing older settlements would qualify the Islamic culture as only one part in a long cultural development of various traditions and complicate the construction of local identity and its use for political purposes by one of the concerned groups. Thus, a differently interested approach to the past, the archaeological one which ideally tends not to 'favor' specific periods, runs counter to local views of the value of the past (Heinz, 2008, p. 466).

In Israel archeology and heritage management is used to reinforce certain narratives of the Israeli state and its establishment (Bauman, 2004; Rego, 2012; Rashed, Short, & Docker, 2014; Hijazi, 2016; Jubeh, 2018), especially with respect to the state's creation and highlighting the idea that Palestine has been the land of Israel from ancient times (Okada, 2012). In both Israel and Jordan, substantial attention is given to focusing on Christian archeology and heritage often to the neglect or damage of other heritage because of the economic benefits that it can bring, including with respect to tourism, as well as donations, investment and aid especially from the United States. For example, Addison (2004) noted that USAID (United States Agency for International Development) investment in road-building and tourist signage was undertaken in Jordan almost entirely for Christian sites adding that 'the Hashemite regime in particular has worked overtime [in its relations with the West] to configure itself as a secular, Western-identified state' (Addison, 2004, p. 246). Indeed, this theme is also picked up by Abu-Khafajah, Al Rabady and Rababeh, (2015) in their examination of World Bank funding for urban heritage projects in Jordan. They argue that the World Bank approach, particularly its emphasis on conventional 'readings' of urban space that highlight universal values and histories, serves to neglect and marginalise local values and understandings and suggest that 'local sociocultural and economic contexts as assets to enrich

development projects, rather than obstacles to be ‘fixed’ and ‘fitted’ for tourism’ (Abu-Khafajah et al., 2015, p. 441; see also Abu-Khafajah & Miqdadi, 2019). Of course, marginalisation can occur not only in the conservation, development and management of heritage sites but also in interpretation. For example, in the cases of the City of David (Jerusalem Walls) National Park interpretive centre in Jerusalem and the Yigal Allon Center, the "Jesus boat" museum in Ginosar, separate interpretive introductions to the heritage of the sites are available from Christian perspectives that ignore other historical identities, memories and interpretations. The City of David site is particularly controversial, as since 1997 it

has been run by an Israeli NGO called El-Ad (acronym for “To the City of David” in Hebrew), making it the only national park in Israel to be operated by an organization whose aim is to promote a particular ideology. The decision to entrust the City of David to El-Ad was made contrary to the position of the Israel Antiquities Authority, namely that the site should be operated by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (B’Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2015).

Case 1.2: The Syrian armed conflict and its impact on the country’s cultural heritage

The Arch of Triumph in Palmyra... has been part of Syria’s heritage ever since it was first constructed during the third century CE, regardless that the intention behind its construction was to commemorate a victory for the Romans who, in a later period, humiliated Palmyra’s queen Zenobia when the Roman emperor Aurelian brought her back to Rome in golden chains. Today, and after the destruction of the monumental arch, it represents a permanent scar in Syrian history, a symbol of violence, and a reminder of the intolerance and brutality of Daesh (Munawar, 2019, p. 157).

Syria, home to some of the oldest and culturally rich cities and archaeological sites in the world, has witnessed damage to much of its heritage. UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), 2014) assessed the status of 18 larger cultural heritage areas that contained the countries six World Heritage sites. 290 locations were found to have been affected in the 2011-14 period, of which 24 were destroyed, 104 severely damaged and 85 moderately damaged.

The country’s six World Heritage Sites have all been placed by UNESCO on the List of World Heritage in Danger, namely: the Ancient City of Damascus, the Ancient City of Bosra,

the Site of Palmyra, the Ancient City of Aleppo, Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, as well as the Ancient Villages of Northern Syria, so as to draw attention to the risks they are facing because of the situation in the country. Moreover, many sites tentatively listed by UNESCO including the Ebla, Apamea, Dura Europos, and Mari sites, have also witnessed extensive looting. The danger listing is intended to mobilize all possible support for the safeguarding of these properties which are recognized by the international community as being of outstanding universal value for humanity as a whole (UNESCO, 2013). The World Heritage Centre, the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), and the International Centre for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments (ICCROM) have reached the conclusion that, in some places, the extent of the damage is such that the outstanding universal value of these sites, a feature that is necessary for these properties to retain the special status of World Heritage, may have been permanently compromised.

Escalating violence in Syria has had devastating effects on the country's cultural heritage site since 2011 and these sites continue to be casualties of the ongoing Syrian Civil War and have also been damaged and/or looted during the conflict (Buffenstein, 2017). The looting and destruction of cultural heritage in armed conflicts has been a feature of war for long decades and has growingly received increasing international focus (Cunliffe, Muhesen, & Lostal, 2016). Cunliffe et al. (2016: 2) commented that:

While cultural heritage is threatened during peacetime, the severest damage takes place during social disorder and conflict, not only resulting in the loss of something unique and irreplaceable but also psychologically affecting the communities linked to it and potentially causing increased violence.

Due to escalation of the conflicts in the region and to the significant destruction of cultural heritage in the light of rising of Islamic extremism, UNESCO has stressed the issue of post-conflict reconstruction in the Middle-East context, and in the Ancient City of Aleppo in particular as part of a wider approach to post-conflict reconstruction in the Middle East. Many of the region's innumerable cultural sites are threatened, in some cases by overuse, in others by neglect, and in many simply by the pressures of economic development.

The increase in the prospects of criminal accountability for the destruction of heritage has also been a driving force in the adoption of international laws for the protection of cultural

heritage. However, many have criticised the ineffectiveness of such laws for protecting the cultural properties of international value. For instance, Lostal (2015) concluded that:

This is especially frustrating if one takes into consideration that the driving force behind the adoption of conventional laws for the protection of cultural property has mostly been motivated by a desire to hold individuals accountable. The accountability gap shown in the case of Syria should serve those involved in the implementation of cultural heritage laws (e.g., UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee at the international level) as a warning that the 2003 UNESCO Declaration, or any other instrument before that, did not manage to have consequences for Bamiyan or beyond (2015, p. 17).

Moustafa (2016) has also argued that preserving cultural heritage in conflict zones presents a number of challenges. The level of expertise is low among those who work to preserve cultural heritage in the Middle East. However, deliberate and direct destruction of cultural heritage is by no means a new phenomenon, particularly during armed conflict. Noyes (2013: 1) argues that ‘the destruction of religious and cultural icons has gone hand in hand with the political construction of the modern State’. Indeed, such a situation raises some extremely important points with respect to the potential reconstruction of heritage sites and the relationship to memoricide. As Munawar (2019) cogently argues with respect to how ‘the ongoing destruction of cultural heritage in Syria is writing new episodes of Syrian collective memory and how the inclusion of wartime memories in post-war heritage’:

The destruction of monuments, including those considered to be material representations of a nation’s identity, does not inevitably mean the end of the lifecycle of those monuments. Rebuilding cultural heritage in the aftermath of war should not be taken for granted, and the focus should first be on the semantics and motives of the destruction—i.e. how and why these heritage sites and monuments were built and later damaged, and what reasons lay behind the targeting of historic cities by state or non-state actors.

Pursuing the same approach that was implemented to reconstruct Palmyra’s Arch of Triumph as it was before the war could result in erasing a significant portion of the collective memory of wartime or... ‘political amnesia’, something that could bury and/or erase specific histories for the sake of forgetting the memories of Syria’s war. Establishing a just and healthy society in the aftermath of war, where displaced people

will be able to live together in harmony, would require a reconstruction plan that relies mainly on public engagement and negotiating individual and collective memories so as to be inclusive in the formation of post-war Syrian heritage (Munawar, 2019, pp. 157-8).

Tourism in the MENA region

The MENA region comprises a wide range of destinations including established and emerging destinations in the Mediterranean (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia) and the Arabian Peninsula to high-spending outbound markets from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (UNWTO, 2019). The MENA region has vast natural, historical, and cultural resources with an abundance of tourist sites, diverse climate, different foodways, and hospitable hosts (Mansfeld, 1999; Bassil, 2014; Isaac, 2013; Morakabati, 2011, 2013; Seyfi & Hall, 2019; Hall & Prayag, 2020). Despite the wealth of tourism sites and resources and positive global tourism trends, the MENA region as a whole remains one of the world's least developed tourism regions (Stephenson & Al-Hamarneh, 2017; Isaac et al., 2016; Seyfi & Hall, 2018; Timothy, 2019a), and the region has generally failed to capitalize on its resources to reap the benefits of international tourism. The region's share of international visitor arrivals therefore remains one of the lowest in the world estimated at about only 6% (UNWTO, 2019). For instance, the MENA region welcomed 87 million international tourist arrivals in 2018 (Table 1.7), equivalent to 6% of the world's total arrivals and the region earned USD 77 billion in international tourism receipts in 2017 (Table 1.8), an estimated 6% of world's receipts (UNWTO, 2019). As a result, tourism is emerging as a major economic pillar in many MENA countries that is regarded an alternative to energy-based economies and as a means of diversification (Daher, 2007). Accordingly, it has been put at the core of the long-term development vision of the countries in the region (e.g. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Iran's 20 Year National Vision, Oman's clustering system to 2040, or Sharjah's Tourism Vision 2021) and is increasingly becoming integral to notions of regional competitiveness (Table 1.9).

Table 1.7: International tourist arrivals in MENA countries, 2000 – 2018 (million)

Country	UNWTO region	2000	2010	2016	2017	2018
Bahrain	Middle East	0.8	1.0	4.0	4.4	-
Egypt	Middle East	5.1	14.1	5.3	8.2	11.3
Iraq	Middle East	0.1	1.5	-	-	-
Jordan	Middle East	1.6	4.2	3.6	3.8	4.1
Kuwait	Middle East	0.1	0.2	0.2	-	-
Lebanon	Middle East	0.7	2.2	1.7	1.9	2

Libya	Middle East	0.2	-	-	-	-
Oman	Middle East	0.6	1.4	2.3	2.4	-
Palestine	Middle East	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6
Qatar	Middle East	0.4	1.7	2.9	2.3	1.8
Saudi Arabia	Middle East	6.6	10.9	18.0	16.1	15.2
Syria	Middle East	2.1	8.5	-	-	-
UAE	Middle East	3.1	7.4	14.9	15.8	15.9
Yemen	Middle East	0.1	1.0	-	-	-
Algeria	North Africa	0.9	2.1	2.0	2.5	-
Morocco	North Africa	4.3	9.3	10.3	11.3	12.3
Tunisia	North Africa	5.1	7.8	5.7	7.1	8.3
Iran	South Asia	1.3	2.9	4.9	4.8	-
Turkey	Southern/Mediterranean Europe	10.4	28.6	25.3	37.6	45.7
Israel	Southern/Mediterranean Europe	2.4	2.8	2.9	3.6	4.2

Source: Compiled from data in World Tourism Organization (2019a, 2019b); The World Bank (2020)

Table 1.8: International tourist receipts in MENA countries, 2000 – 2018 (million)

Country	UNWTO region	2000	2010	2015	2016	2017
Bahrain	Middle East	0.6	1.4	1.6	3.8	3.6
Egypt	Middle East	4.3	12.5	6.1	2.6	7.8
Iraq	Middle East	0.0	1.7	4.1	2.4	-
Jordan	Middle East	0.7	3.6	4.1	4.0	4.6
Kuwait	Middle East	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.3
Lebanon	Middle East	-	8.0	6.9	7.0	7.6
Libya	Middle East	0.1	0.1	-	-	-
Oman	Middle East	0.2	0.8	1.5	1.6	1.7
Palestine	Middle East	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.2
Qatar	Middle East	0.1	0.6	-	5.4	6.0
Saudi Arabia	Middle East	-	6.7	-	11.1	12.1
Syria	Middle East	1.1	6.2	-	-	-
UAE	Middle East	1.1	8.6	-	19.5	21.0
Yemen	Middle East	0.1	1.2	-	0.1	-
Algeria	North Africa	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.1
Morocco	North Africa	2.0	6.7	6.3	6.5	7.4
Tunisia	North Africa	1.7	2.6	1.4	1.2	1.3
Iran	South Asia	0.7	2.6	4.7	3.9	4.8
Turkey	Southern/Mediterranean Europe	7.6	26.3	35.5	26.7	31.8
Israel	Southern/Mediterranean Europe	4.6	5.6	6.5	6.6	7.6

Source: Compiled from data in World Tourism Organization (2019a, 2019b); The World Bank (2020)

Table 1.9: The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness of MENA countries in 2019

Country	Global rank*	Natural Resources	Cultural Resources and Business Travel
Bahrain	64	140	113
Egypt	65	69	22
Iraq	-	-	-
Jordan	84	119	101
Kuwait	96	137	127
Lebanon	100	130	93
Libya	-	-	-
Oman	58	108	54
Palestine	-	-	-
Qatar	51	136	92
Saudi Arabia	69	133	58
Syria	-	-	-
UAE	33	103	45
Yemen	140	135	109
Algeria	116	126	51
Morocco	66	63	47
Tunisia	85	90	90
Iran	89	99	33
Turkey	43	77	17
Israel	57	111	64

*Among 140 countries

Source: Compiled from data in World Economic Forum, 2019

The region also attracts significant amounts of corporate travel with its vast financial and corporate growth opportunities and estimates show that the influx to the region is expected to continue to increase to reach over 150 million tourists by 2030 with an increase from the current 6% to 8% of all global tourists (UNWTO, 2019). Cultural heritage is still the major reason for travel to the region, however the leisure travel to countries in the region such as UAE reflects the growing significance of leisure-oriented destinations and the development of intercontinental transport hubs. According to the UNWTO (2019), improved political stability and security measures, market and product diversification, visa facilitation policies, lifting of travel restrictions, new routes and air capacity enhancement, expansion in accommodation, marketing and promotion in key source markets are some of the factors that have helped MENA tourism to go demonstrate a positive performance.

The MENA region – a turbulent legacy

Despite positive tourism growth, geopolitical tensions, instability, and conflict, and religious extremism and military interventions will undoubtedly prove critical for future tourism

development. Since the early 20th century, the turbulent political climate of the MENA region has led to a negative image of the region in many potential markets in which it has been substantially portrayed as a theatre of war (Hazbun, 2004, 2008; Morakabati, 2011, 2013; Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Isaac et al., 2016; Seyfi & Hall, 2018, 2020a). Events such as the 1947–1949 Palestine war (known also as the War of Independence in Israel and al-Nakba or the Catastrophe in Palestine) and the subsequent Arab-Israeli wars have created political tensions, military conflicts and disputes between the Arab countries and Israel (Seyfi & Hall, 2020a).

During the Cold War, major oil discoveries in the Persian Gulf and the growing demand at international level, made the region an economically significant geostrategic area. Perhaps a major consequence of this oil discovery was the overthrow of a democratically-elected Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in a coup orchestrated by the CIA and British intelligence in 1953 following his aim to nationalize Iran's oil industry (Goldsmith, 2005; Israeli, 2013). The Six-Day War (also known as the Third Arab–Israeli War) in 1967 between Israel and the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria also contributed to the displacement of civilian populations resulting which have had long-term consequences for the region in general and for its tourism industry in particular (Gharaibeh, 1985; Isaac et al., 2016). The Arab Spring and the subsequent political transitions in the region along with the more recent civil wars in the region as well as the competition between the major powers in the region have created fertile ground for further violence, especially given that many of the underlying issues that led to the Arab Spring have yet to be significantly addressed (Campante & Chor, 2012; Malik & Awadallah, 2013). This has hindered political and economic development and has meant that the region has some of the lowest levels of intra-regional trade and political cooperation in the world in spite of its relative close cultural and historical ties. This long history of political instability along with ongoing security events and crises has negatively affected the development of tourism in the Middle East and have presented significant challenges to the inbound flows of international tourism to the region and, more importantly, the cultural heritage in the region (Avraham, 2015; Tomazos, 2017).

Case study 1.3: Cultural heritage and conflict in the Western Sahara

Located on the northwestern coast of Africa, between Mauritania and Morocco, the Western Sahara (formerly known as the Spanish Sahara), has been the subject of a territorial conflict between Morocco (which occupies some 80% of the territory) and the indigenous Polisario Front (the independence movement of Western Sahara forming the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) - which is composed largely of the indigenous nomadic inhabitants, the

Sahrawis) backed by Algeria (which administers the remainder of the territory known as the 'Free Zone' or 'Liberated Territories' from the Saharawi refugee camps in southwestern Algeria) since the withdrawal of Spain (the colonial power) in 1975. Western Sahara and its indigenous Berber ethnic group, has been described as the 'last colony in Africa', and its situation has often been compared with that of East Timor before the latter's recent independence from Indonesia (Brooks, 2005).

The former Spanish colony is one of the most sparsely populated territories in the world, mainly consisting of desert flatlands although it is also home to significant phosphate and iron ore reserves and is believed to have untouched offshore oil deposits (Gaffey, 2016). The region depends mostly on pastoral nomadism, fishing, and phosphate mining as the principal sources of income for the population while incomes and standards of living in Western Sahara are substantially below the Moroccan level. Nevertheless, over the last years, there is some evidence that tourism is providing modest additional income for locals (Brooks, 2007; Bhatia, 2001) with much of this tourism focused on archaeological sites. The Sahara embodies an immensely rich natural and cultural heritage, both prehistoric and living, much of which has been recognized as warranting UNESCO World Heritage status (Keenan, 2005). Archeology is believed to be an economic resource for Sahara in the long-term (Brooks, 2007) and the Polisario have encouraged archaeological research in the Free Zone to be undertaken by the international research community. Brooks (2007: 174) commented that:

A greater appreciation and more detailed understanding of the archaeology within the Saharawi community, and care stewardship of the region's cultural heritage, thus has some very tangible benefits.

Given the ongoing political and territorial conflict with Morocco and the security situation in neighboring Algeria, archaeology is believed to be less vulnerable as it addresses issues of cultural identity and sheds light on the history of human occupation in the region. Because of its political past and isolated desert location, this disputed area of the Sahara is mainly attractive for more adventurous tourism markets. Against the long-running background of international contention over the governance of Sahara, more recently, there are some efforts to the develop the occupied territory into a tourist destination and a small group of pioneering expatriates are developing eco-aware and low-impact tours exploring the lagoon, rocky landscape and surrounding desert in the SADR-controlled areas (Le Monde, 2019; Lonely Planet, 2017). However, given the vast majority of Western Sahara is administered by

Morocco, independent travel in the region is restricted and the western countries have warned their citizen to travel to this disputed area (Minvielle & Minvielle, 2010; Le Monde, 2019).

Structure of the book

This book consists of 14 chapters that examine a number of significant themes surrounding cultural heritage tourism in the MENA region. Chapter 2 and 3 provide a broad overview of some of the religious heritage issues in the region. Timothy (Chapter 2) examines the multi-faith heritage of the region, while Olsen and Emmett (Chapter 3) detail some of the ways in which religious heritage has become a source of contestation.

Issues of contestation over representations of heritage, both religious and secular, is a recurring theme in a number of chapters. Chapter 4 by Tataroglu discusses how the Safranbolu World Heritage Site has been used to present certain interpretations of Turkish national identity and political narrative, a theme also taken up in more touristic terms in Chapter 9 by Rıza Mancı on Gobekli Tepe, Sanliurfa, Turkey. Chapter 5 by Dhaher et al. also details how cultural heritage in Tunisia is increasingly commoditised to serve tourism as well as national narratives, although they note that local opposition to such narratives provides opportunities for the formation of new relationships with heritage and identity. Adie (Chapter 6) focuses on the use of heritage as a tourist attraction in post-colonial Morocco and the disconnect that can occur between tourist and local interpretations of heritage and its significance. Ram (Chapter 7) also examines differences between official and local narratives and understanding of heritage in Ashkelon in Israel. However, here the official heritage narratives of the national park stand in stark contrast to that of local users who see the park more as somewhere to have a picnic and barbeque.

Chapters 8 to 11 look at heritage more as a tourism resource. Chapter 8 by Isaac focuses on the how cultural heritage is an important source of tourism income as well as national identity. Chapter 9, also notes the significance of identity, but here Thani and Heenan note how the commodified theme park Arabism of the UAE has been primarily undertaken to attract the Western tourist and convey certain narratives of national identity, a theme also raised in earlier chapters in the book. The potential lack of inclusion of such an approach is also touched on in Chapter 11 in which Helmy, highlights the integrated cultural planning approach in Egypt as a means to respond to the economic impacts of the Arab Spring on Egyptian tourism. While the Egyptian strategy has been

developed to seek to boost employment and economic growth whether the heritage of Ancient Egypt is relevant to many present-day Egyptians potentially remains a moot point.

The final series of chapters deal with further emerging issues in cultural heritage tourism in the region. Chapter 12 by Bardia Shabani et al. continues some of the themes of earlier chapters in terms of the nexus between local, national and international understandings and uses of heritage in the case of the Gonbad-e Qābus Brick Tower World Heritage site in Iran. Chapter 13 by Rasoolimanesh et al. discuss issues of gender in heritage tourism while Fitchett and Roshan look at the emerging threat of climate change has on heritage sites in Iran given temperature increases at peak visitation times. The final chapter by Hall and Seyfi (Chapter 14) discusses emerging research issues.

Conclusion

The MENA region is one of the most significant areas for cultural heritage in the world, especially in the context of the Abrahamic religions and Western and Islamic civilization. Tourism in the region has long been driven by its cultural heritage resources. However, tourism is also increasingly problematic in the way it is serving to commoditise heritage and reinforce certain narrow narratives of identity, history and place. Indeed, the chapters in this book serve to reinforce Hammond's (2019) observation that cultural heritage in the Middle East provides two key insights with much broader relevance. 'First, examining how heritage is made (and unmade) shows one way that regions are constructed through the articulation of material and symbolic connections. Second, these regions might be better understood not as containers but as complexes in and in relation to which people articulate and communicate shared meanings'.

Significantly, the chapters in this book also highlight the incredibly dynamic nature of heritage in the MENA countries. This is not just as a result of the way in which heritage has been deliberately destroyed, thereby creating new layers of meaning on the past, but also how heritage and its interpretation is multi-layered with different levels of attachment and understanding depending on the nature of the relationship between viewer/commodifier and the heritage resource. Such concerns are especially important given the way that heritage is commonly used in the region to service national political, economic and religious agendas. Nevertheless, this process of heritage-making demonstrates how heritage is in a constant process of transformation which, positively may potentially contribute to rebuilding identities in the aftermath of war and political violence (Munawar, 2019), as well as, when undertaken appropriately, return positive economic and social

benefits from cultural heritage tourism. It is with such a hope that we commend the various chapters in this book.

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