

## VISITING A SUFI SHAYKH: A CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGE

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**Abstract:** Modern experience of spiritual search has mixed up all the colors of the religious domain. It is no longer a strict definition of what the term pilgrimage implies. There is a growing number of seemingly secular places visited by both members of traditional religious institutions and New Age movements. However, the Western culture of pilgrimage is still recognized as individual and not accepting religious elements as such. Using reliable sociological approaches and the ethnographical material, the present article challenges this assumption and seeks to create a more productive discussion on the topic. For this, it examines the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi community of Lefke (Cyprus), a place of pilgrimage for Muslims, non-Muslims, Europeans, Americans—all motivated by the goal of visiting a Sufi shaykh. The article analyzes the pilgrimage to Lefke by means of John Urry's three bases of co-presence and illustrates how the Islamic vocabulary of pilgrimage has also changed in adaptation to the new realities of the post-secular world. As a result, it is argued that Sufism, with its historically proven ability to combine the individual and collective spheres of religious life, can provide a useful framework for understanding the contemporary pilgrimage phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage; Sufism; co-presence; travel; tourism.

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of pilgrimage has recently received an enormous academic attention in various fields of research. Victor Turner, one of the pioneers in the study of this phenomenon, designated pilgrimage as a temporal institution implicated in social processes and functions.<sup>1</sup> Turner emphasized the importance of the context, or theological conditions and folk traditions preceding the pilgrimage and giving meaning to the event, as well as the symbols that represent the pilgrimage experience. Since Turner's time, a large body of ethnographic, analytical, and comparative literature focusing on different perspectives of the topic has become available.<sup>2</sup> Pilgrimage begins as an individual and voluntary activity that includes a personal initial decision, expectations, goals, and experience. There are of course some cases, for example, the *hajj* in Islam, which imply an imperative. Whether the pilgrimage begins as a commitment or not, it becomes voluntary during the process. Moreover, even though pilgrimage is a personal act, it still remains very collective. It is important to underline that for a specific person the meaning of pilgrimage can change during the process, depending on many external and internal factors. Probably due to this reason, one should take into account the difference between the initial motivations and the final experiences of a journey.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of the sacred starts from private and gradually turns into public, particularly once the pilgrims reach their destinations. Moreover, social constructions seem to diminish, as participants share a collective experience and must (co)operate in certain conditions and experience similar situations. Pilgrimage in post-secular societies has the great socio-cultural and political meaning. The importance of shrines and cults relates to the analysis of processes of de-secularization and 're-enchantment' in the modern world. These processes have reinforced the meaning of pilgrimage

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<sup>1</sup> Victor W. Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ellen Badone and Sharon R. Roseman (eds.), *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Simon Coleman and John Eade (eds.), *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Peter Margry, "Secular Pilgrimage: A Contradiction in Terms?" in Peter Margry (ed.), *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 13-46.

and illustrated that the growing importance of religion in social, cultural and political contexts has only increased interest in pilgrimage.<sup>4</sup> From this perspective, the growing social and cultural presence of Islam in the global society has also been explained by the significance of the hajj, the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca, as reinforcing the identity awareness in the Islamic community.<sup>5</sup> The increasing politicization of the hajj challenges assumptions about the place of religion in modern society and the limited role of ritual in everyday life as well.<sup>6</sup>

The pioneering work of the British sociologist John Urry has created an important discussion on pilgrimage and its connection with another significant phenomenon of modern life, that is tourism.<sup>7</sup> Urry has pointed out the connection between the changing approach to tourism and the broader cultural alterations of postmodernism. In his recent work, in attempt to answer a simple question of why people travel, Urry has argued that in the world of ‘hypermobility’ three bases of co-presence may explain travel: to be face-to-face; the need to face-the-place; and the need to face-the-moment.<sup>8</sup> As one can understand from these three bases, the main argumentation of Urry is that the human co-presence remains very important even in the post-secular societies, aimed at informational and technical development, and due to this reason travel (and tourism) increases sustainably. It is interesting to note that it is a global trend that more and more people travel every year. Even though Urry understands the needs of human co-presence as highly significant within a socio-cultural context, one may notice that the need to be with other human beings (to be with a partner, group, community, etc.) is a vital need of human species. From this perspective, it is difficult to oppose something to Urry’s threefold explanation of travel. His explanation is universal, and one

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Open Road Integrated Media, 2011); Peter Berger, *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Moeslim Abdurrahman, “On Hajj Tourism: In Search of Piety and Identity in the New Order Indonesia,” (PhD. Diss. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Bianchi, *Guests of God*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> John Urry, “Mobility and Proximity,” *Sociology* 36, no. 2 (2002): 262.

can apply it to different phenomena, for example, religious pilgrimage, hacker meeting, and academic conference.<sup>9</sup>

The stability and flexibility of Sufism in the twentieth century have been explained by a strong emphasis on practice and assumed correspondence between the Sufi vocabulary of spiritual growth and modern discussions on the self and its development.<sup>10</sup> Sufi practices have been mainly studied from an anthropological perspective and their important meaning in the spread of Sufi ideas in the post-modern world was clearly emphasized.<sup>11</sup> For example, in his recent study on Sufism in Turkey, Fabio Vicini illustrated how small Sufi contemporary communities of Istanbul successfully create their own solutions to the complex entanglements with various modern discourses about the self, education, Islam and a place of Muslims in modern society. Their solutions are based on a strong connection and implementation of Sufi practices, in particular *dhikr*.<sup>12</sup> It is a form of meditation in which phrases and prayers are repeatedly chanted in order to remember God, which play an important role in their not only religious but also social life.<sup>13</sup> In the present article, I will focus on another important Sufi practice, that is a pilgrimage to Sufi spiritual masters (Per.: *ziyarat*), and reflect on its contribution to the comprehension of travel, tourism, and pilgrimage in the post-secular world. Methodologically speaking, following the snowball qualitative approach, I will describe the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi community in Lefke, using the material gained during the ethnographic fieldwork in 2013. I will apply Urry's bases of co-presence to the main structures

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<sup>9</sup> See Marion Bowman, "Going with the Flow: Contemporary Pilgrimage in Glastonbury," in Peter Margry (ed.), *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 241-280; Gabriella Coleman, "The Hacker Conference: A Ritual Condensation and Celebration of a Lifeworld," *Anthropological Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2010): 47-72.

<sup>10</sup> See Fabio Vicini, "Special Issue: Interiority Unbound: Sufi and Modern Articulations of the Self," *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 2 (2017).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Catharina Raudvere, *Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility and Zikr in Contemporary Istanbul* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> About the *dhikr*, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975). Also, Makhabbad Maltabarova, *Western Esotericism and Islamic Mysticism: Rethinking the Place of Sufism in the Work of George Gurdjieff* (Baden-Baden: Tectum Verlag, 2022), 235-246.

<sup>13</sup> Fabio Vicini, *Reading Islam: Life and Politics of Brotherhood in Modern Turkey* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019).

of this specific multicultural and multinational type of Sufi community in Lefke.

### **“To be Face-to-Face”**

Urry’s study is dedicated to one question: why does travel occur? Acknowledging many reasons, including human curiosity and improvement of material condition of most of the global population, he identifies one unifying component, that is corporeality. Urry argues that travel is always embodied, because people are either bodily in the same space with partners, friends, colleagues, or they bodily experience nature (landscape), or they participate physically in a particular live event. Put it differently, travel is about ephemeral moments of physical proximity to another person, place, or event. This corporeality can be considered as pleasant, obligatory, or desirable.<sup>14</sup> There are different aspects of corporeality. For example, physical presence implies the eye contact, which enables the feelings of trust and security in the individual connections and interactions. According to George Simmel, this type of communication, the eye contact, is the most direct type of interaction between people.<sup>15</sup> It can also be assumed that along with the eye contact, there are many physiological factors (touch, warmth, background noise) that make the physical presence of other people extremely important for both mental and physical health.

The Naqshbandi Haqqani branch was established by shaykh Nazim Adil al-Haqqani (d. 2014). It belongs to the Naqshbandiyya, one of the most socially and politically influential and active Sufi orders in the world. The origins of this Sufi Order are in the tradition of Great Masters—the Khwajagan—which thrived from the thirteenth till the sixteenth centuries in Central Asia. From there, it spread to Anatolia, to the Eastern Turkestan and to the Indian subcontinent. In the nineteenth century, the order reached such remote areas as Indonesia and the Caucasus, and later in the twentieth century Western Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, it is not surprising that the Naqshbandi Haqqani branch is also multinational. One of the most noticeable narratives in the Sufi

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<sup>14</sup> Urry, “Mobility and Proximity,” 258.

<sup>15</sup> Mike Featherstone and David Frisby, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage Publ., 2006), 111.

<sup>16</sup> Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–2.

community of Lefke is the importance of shaykh Nazim and his physical presence:

I am here because of shaykh Nazim. This unique opportunity to see him gives me energy and strength. It is not necessary to be a Muslim to come here, because shaykh Nazim is for everyone who comes to him. I personally do not belong to any religion, although I was baptized as a child. But I believe in God, and it is the most important thing. And shaykh Nazim does not ask you about your religion. Whoever you are, you can always come here. We are very lucky to be here.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, shaykh Nazim plays an authoritative role in the questions of Islamic religious life for his international followers:

My husband was the first to convert to Islam. I grew up in a Catholic family. But you know, their churches were always so cold and empty. I had many questions, but no one really explained to me what to do in life. Islam gave me a clear direction. Shaykh Nazim always explains many things in detail. We can ask any question and get answers. We decided together to come to Lefke. This journey is very important for us.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to notice that participants also acknowledge the importance of being a part of community they create:

No one here looks at me strangely. We are from different countries, but for a while we become like a family. I like that here we can dress colorfully and share our feelings. All people are nice and polite here. In Argentina, Muslims are strict and always dress in black. I do not know why they do not like to laugh and smile. They look at us as if we are not real Muslims. We are different. We are open to other cultures. Shaykh Nazim welcomes everyone. And he says that we should be nice to all people, Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

I like being here because I feel good here. This is the first time for me, but some of my friends come regularly. In ordinary life, I do not have the opportunity to travel a lot. Here I can meet people from different countries. It is great because we learn something new about each other and still we are all together with shaykh Nazim.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, for pilgrims, the religious openness and cultural diversity of the Lefke community contrasts with the 'outside' world.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nathan, November 15, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Maria, November 17, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Maria, November 17, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Mariam, November 20, 2013.

Participants travel to Lefke to meet, perform some rituals and also share their experiences. Some of them keep these connections after Lefke, thereby developing already more private and friendly relationships. All visitors follow a Muslim dress code. However, the style of clothes is not limited, and one can observe the multiplicity of Islamic world.<sup>21</sup> This liberality of Naqshbandi Haqqani can also be traced in everyday life: there are some tips from shaykh Nazim that many females found very helpful. As they have explained:

Shaykh Nazim says if it is difficult, or even dangerous, to wear a *hijab* [headcovering worn by Muslim women] at places where we live, we can wear a ribbon, scarf or a hairpin. Something must be on the head. But the most important is that we should dress decently and behave properly, and pray. Also, he says that it is nothing bad if we dress colorful clothes.<sup>22</sup>

For all visitors, there is an expectation of mutual respect and involvement, although there are no strict rules, and every pilgrim can decide for him—or herself how to spend time. There is probably only one strict restriction: men and women live separately. This rule also applies to married couples if they want to stay in community hostels for free. Most visitors decide for active participation, which includes visiting shaykh's house, eating together, prayer, sightseeing, and other collective activities. In other words, such meetings are multifunctional and may (or may not) include participation in the religious life of the community.

In this regard, one may mention a problem of *communitas* vs individuality, relationship between the individual and the group during a pilgrimage. An initial debate on this topic started in the middle of the twentieth century, in German academic anthropological circles, when the possibility of individual pilgrimages was questioned.<sup>23</sup> In short, the problem was that only a public manifestation of pilgrimage and its social and performative character were taken into account, not motives or relationships between pilgrims. As a result of this functionalistic approach, the pilgrimage was interpreted as an extension and confirmation of everyday social structure. The first attempt to go beyond functionalism in the study of pilgrimage was made by already mentioned Victor Turner. He argued that during a

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<sup>21</sup> Fieldwork notes, Istanbul, November 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mariam, November 20, 2013.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Bernhard Streck, "German Anthropology: Special Ways of the Twentieth Century," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 134, no. 2 (2009): 267-279.

pilgrimage a special type of group formation is created. This idea became a leading theory in cultural anthropology. Turner suggested a new theoretical framework for pilgrimage, as a rite of passage, and he saw the pilgrimage not only as a social phenomenon that confirmed the existing social structure, but as an alternative structure. His approach was named as ‘antistructural’. From this perspective, pilgrimage was in opposition to everyday life.<sup>24</sup> German scholars (and many others before Turner) surprisingly did not consider the limited and transitional character of pilgrimage, a situation when the pilgrim’s normal conditions disappear. Instead, the new group or ‘communitas’ appears. Turner’s theory has been criticized for the limitations of a material he used.<sup>25</sup> The main argumentation was about a huge variety of behaviors and experiences, and a suspiciously exceptional character of pilgrimage.<sup>26</sup>

The experience of being a part of the Lefke community plays an important role in motivating and justifying this pilgrimage. Probably, it is what Paul Basu describes as an experience of “a transcendental discovery ... as part of a larger ... community, ... in a distant homeland.”<sup>27</sup> It can also be explained by the idea of ‘Islamic *ummah*,’ a transcultural and transnational community based on the affiliation to the Islamic religion.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the followers of shaykh Nazim experience a mini version of the Islamic community, even though not all of them are Muslims. In Lefke, regardless their religious affiliation, participants emphasized the importance of the presence of shaykh Nazim. It is interesting to notice that many non-Muslim followers also used the Islamic vocabulary, including phrases and words commonly used by Muslims in their everyday life: *mā shā Allah* (“what God has willed has happened”), *al-ḥamd li-Allah* (“praise be to God”). In many cases, non-Muslim followers were also referring

<sup>24</sup> Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Paj Publications, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> John Eade and Michael Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 4-10.

<sup>26</sup> See Michael Sallnow, “Communitas Reconsidered: The Sociology of Andean Pilgrimage,” *Man* 16, no. 2 (1981): 163-182; Coleman and Eade, *Reframing Pilgrimage*, 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Basu, “Route Metaphors of ‘Roots-Tourism’ in the Scottish Highland Diaspora,” in *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, ed. Simon Coleman and John Eade (London and New York: Routledge), 166.

<sup>28</sup> About the Ummah, see, for example, Alexander Blair Stewart, *Chinese Muslims and the Global Ummah: Islamic Revival and Ethnic Identity among the Hui of Qinghai Province* (London: Routledge, 2018).



to ‘receiving baraka,’ whatever they might understand by that. For example, free food offered at shaykh’s house was of great value to many of them precisely because of ‘baraka.’ The pilgrims would never throw it away. They would always finish the food served in the shaykh’s house.<sup>29</sup>

In Islam, for an average believer, visiting a saint’s tomb was a possibility to have baraka, a blessing from a saint.<sup>30</sup> Sufi saints were accepted as protectors, as help in everyday life troubles connected with health, marriage, and education. Ahmet Karamustafa also points out an ideological and political character of the saint cults:

In practical terms, the saint cults manifested themselves as an ideological and ritual complex organized around the basic concept of *baraka* “spiritual power” and ritualistic performance of *ziyāra*, “visiting tombs and other holy places” .... Through *ziyāra*, devotees became beneficiaries of the saint’s *baraka*, and in this sacred transaction, the saints were perceived as patrons who could intercede in the divine court on behalf of their devotees.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned, these components of the public veneration of Sufi saints are also recognizable among the visitors of Lefke. This overlapping is crucial to understanding Western modern culture of pilgrimage, which is despite external collective manifestations, including religious pilgrimages, journeys and tours, is interpreted as an individual, inner emotional, and very personal event.<sup>32</sup> There is a growing ethnographic material showing clearly that in Western pilgrimage culture, pilgrimage has a tendency to be separated from religious performances and attributions. It is possible to say that pilgrimage is a personal journey, which is collective mainly when there is not other option. In this regard, the case of the Lefke Sufi community is unique, because it questions the modern individual model of pilgrimage. The Lefke pilgrims show a balanced combination of personal and collective factors of pilgrimage, which can be explained by its Sufi ‘origin.’ In particular, that Sufism

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<sup>29</sup> Fieldwork notes, Lefke, November, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambala, 2007), 71-72.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 130.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Morinis, *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992).

combines individual and collective religiosity and does not divide between these two essential forms of worshipping.



Figure 1 Waiting for the Shaykh Nazim Adil al-Haqqani  
Photo Credit: Makhabbad Maltabarova

### “The Need to Face-the-Place”

Emphasizing the need for the physical presence of others, Urry also mentions the importance of visiting a place, encountering it directly: “there is further sense of co-presence, physically walking or seeing or touching or hearing or smelling a place.”<sup>33</sup> In this regard, some pilgrims complained that some individuals come to Lefke only because of the Mediterranean Sea and a possibility to stay at community hostels for free.<sup>34</sup> Lefke has an insular location and very beautiful landscape. Many followers describe Lefke as a spiritual place per se, though manifesting the power of God:

I have never seen such a beautiful place. It is indeed blessing. And also, shaykh Nazim is here. Nature shows us how powerful he is. I think we should enjoy more the beauty of nature.<sup>35</sup>

Do you know how many trees they have planted here? It was abandoned land and shaykh Nazim planned to turn it into a blooming garden. And he succeeded. I feel very relaxed here. It is as if this place gives me a lot of energy.<sup>36</sup>

As one can notice, participants mix two different topics: a specificity of Lefke and shaykh’s spiritual presence. In this regard, it is useful to mention that “the need to face-the-place” can be explained

<sup>33</sup> Urry, “Mobility and Proximity,” 261.

<sup>34</sup> Fieldwork notes, Lefke, November, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mariam, November 20, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Nathan, November 15, 2013.

by the need to see the shaykh. In other words, the place itself does not play a vital role in motivating and justifying the pilgrimage. However, the importance of a geographical remoteness of the place should also be taken into consideration. Visiting the Sufi shaykh is about spiritual purification and also about a physical distance from everyday reality and routine, identified in secular travel as well.<sup>37</sup> Probably due to this reason for many visitors of Lefke, it was also an opportunity to travel and venture.



Figure 2 Lefke

Photo Credit: Makhabbad Maltabarova

In Islam, there is a long tradition of pilgrimage connected with the concepts of *hajj* and *ziyarat*. The hajj is an obligatory religious duty for Muslims that must be performed at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically and financially capable of undertaking a journey.<sup>38</sup> The hajj is a pilgrimage to the Kaaba, the “House of God,” in the sacred city of Mecca (Saudi Arabia). It is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, alongside *shahādah* (witness), *ṣalāt* (prayer), *zakāt* (almsgiving) and *ṣawm* (fasting in Ramadan). Muslims can also undertake the ‘*umrah*’ or ‘lesser pilgrimage’ to Mecca at any other time of the year. In addition, being a mandatory religious duty, the hajj is seen to contain a spiritual value, which provides Muslims with a possibility of self-knowledge and the possibility of experiencing a feeling of belonging to a larger community that goes beyond any cultural and racial

<sup>37</sup> See Phil Macnaghten and John Urry, “Bodies of Nature: Introduction,” *Body and Society*, no. 6 (2000), 4.

<sup>38</sup> For the hajj, see Solomon Nigosian, *Islam: Its History, Teaching, and Practices* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Abdellah Hammoudi, *A Season in Mecca: Narrative of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

border.<sup>39</sup> This motive was clearly expressed in the interviews of the Lefke visitors, when they were describing their experiences of being like ‘family,’ without division and discrimination. Interesting to notice that both Muslim and non-Muslims have emphasized a sense of belonging to one community, which they think is extremely important and helpful.<sup>40</sup>

*Ziyārat* is about visiting tombs and shrines of saints, descendants of Muhammad, religious teachers, founders of Sufi orders or Shia imams. Different Muslim groups use different word for this type of pilgrimage. The principal idea behind is visiting a holy place. *Ziyārat* is very popular among Muslim population across the globe, but it lacks the authority of the Quran. This term was only recorded in the Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*), the authenticity of which is not unquestionable. Beliefs and rituals associated with the *ziyārat* are mainly connected with visiting the tombs of different local Sufis and saints—activity often condemned by Muslim scholars (*‘ulamā’*). The practice created debates about the relevancy of mosques next to graves; the question of women performing such types of pilgrimage; the question of prayers in graveyards; and most importantly, the question of seeking help and protection on behalf of other human beings.<sup>41</sup> Regardless the mentioned factors, the small pilgrimages to local Sufi saints remain an important part of a religious life for the majority of Muslims in the world. For example, after visiting shaykh Nazim, on the way back, many of pilgrims decided to visit the tombs of local saints in Istanbul. They used the term *ziyārat* for their visits and prayer on the tombs asking of the saints for the protection and help.<sup>42</sup> As one can understand, for these pilgrims the above-mentioned questions (the authenticity of a visit, prayer, the allowance for women, being near the graves, etc.) do not play any important role.

Not only they did not show any concern regarding these issues, being probably aware of their existence, but some of them were not

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 346.

<sup>40</sup> Fieldwork notes, Lefke, December 2013.

<sup>41</sup> See Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999). See also the second volume of Marco Schöller, *The Living and the Dead in Islam: Studies in Arabic Epitaphs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Fieldwork notes, Istanbul, November 2013.

even Muslims and there was no problem for them to visit these graves with their Muslim friends. In this regard, one might notice that not only the concept of pilgrimage requires a new theoretical framework but also the concept of religion.

As Peter Margry argues, in order to comprehend the concept of religious pilgrimage, it is necessary to define religion. He understands religion as “all notions and ideas that human beings have regarding their experience of the sacred or the supernatural in order to give meaning to life and to have access to transformative powers that may influence their existential condition.”<sup>43</sup> He identifies pilgrimage as “a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit.”<sup>44</sup> From an anthropological perspective, it is clear that pilgrimage is no more an exclusively religious phenomenon. As well as, it is not exclusively individual/spiritual search manifested in a physical journey. As the pilgrimage to Lefke has illustrated, some aspects of this activity are connected with religious settings. In the Lefke case, giving the religious affiliation of shaykh Nazim, they are still central. At the same time, there is clear evidence that there is no strict rule about religious affiliation during the stay on the island. Lefke is a good example of how Sufi pilgrimage include different elements, such as nature, a religious figure (the Sufi shaykh), personal search, and a collective activity.

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<sup>43</sup> Margry, “Secular Pilgrimage: A Contradiction in Terms?” 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



Figure 3 Shaykh's Nazim House  
Photo Credit: Makhabbad Maltabarova

### “The Need to Face-the-Moment”

This phase of co-presence needs to be understood as to ‘be-with’ others in the present moment of intense action and feeling. These special moments of co-presence may include festivals, observing natural phenomena, sport events, etc. Such intensive moments of ‘living’ the moment together are necessary to maintain patterns of social life mostly based on the distinction between time and space.<sup>45</sup> In Lefke, one of the most important ‘moments’ of living together is probably the meeting with Shaykh Nazim. In 2013, his health condition was very bad, but he regularly went outside to greet followers. Before it was possible to have a personal meeting with and interview him. For many pilgrims, the moment of meeting with shaykh Nazim is the culmination of their journey and foundation of further interpretations of their spiritual growth:

I first heard about shaykh Nazim from my friends. They were attending the classes organized by his followers. My friends told me about their visits of Lefke and I decided to come. I did not have enough money. And I saved up for this trip for a long time. My intention to see shaykh Nazim was strong because I felt lost in life. And I did not know what to do. Now, thank God, I am here.<sup>46</sup>

In this regard, Paul Heelas suggests that many religious traditions become so-called a ‘life-as’ religion, which provides detailed

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mariam, November 20, 2013.

instructions and information how one can live one's life. Spirituality also takes a general 'life-as' form. Unlike traditional spirituality oriented towards the inner life and liberation or freedom, 'life-as' spirituality emphasizes the importance of personal experience.<sup>47</sup> Heelas mentions the main difference between New Age spiritualities of life and traditional religions, that is the former are too superficial and vague. However, they can 'change' one's life too.<sup>48</sup> Spiritualities of life refer to different teachings and practices "which locate spirituality within the depths of life. Spirituality is identified with life itself, the agency which sustains life... [o]ur most valued experiences of what it is to be alive."<sup>49</sup> In this regard, interestingly, the Western followers of the Sufi shaykh were not searching for a personal experience and enlightenment but specific rules on how to deal with real life situations. From this perspective, Sufism with its focus on both spirituality and social life illustrates how Islamic religion can successfully co-exist with modern trends in spiritual development.

Other examples of "the need to face-the-moment" in Lefke include a collective prayer and evening gatherings with singing, drinking tea and communication. During these events, the pilgrims share their spiritual experience and feelings. In this formulation, the pilgrimage can be described in terms of recreation and joy. The activities performed while on the island are believed to improve health, both physical and mental. It is interesting to notice that tourism, travel and pilgrimage share many things in this regard, being involved into a "dialectical interplay between the distant and the familiar through which travelers seek perceived meaning and value."<sup>50</sup>

Even though most visitors of Lefke are not practicing Muslims, there are some exceptions. For example, there were some women who simply described themselves as *murids* ('students') of shaykh Nazim. On my question why they are here, they replied that shaykh Nazim wanted them to come. Moreover, if he sends them to another places, they will go without any objections. One of them was already

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: From Romantic to Wellbeing Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 55.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ellen Badone, "Conventional and Unconventional Pilgrimages: Conceptualizing Sacred Travel in the Twenty-First Century," in Antón M. Pazos (ed.), *Redefining Pilgrimage: New Perspectives on Historical and Contemporary Pilgrimages* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 7-32.

in Damascus, where he sent her to continue the study under supervision of another Sufi shaykh. In other words, if for many followers the pilgrimage means seeing shaykh Nazim and being a part of the Lefke community, for some of them staying there is only part of their Sufi 'journey':

You better ask these questions K. She is a real student of shaykh Nazim. As I know, she is for many years practicing Islam. She keeps a little apart from others. But it is because she has received some special tasks from the shaykh. I mean, she is not like us. The majority of people come here if they have problems. Well, I am also one of them.<sup>51</sup>

I do not know. But many people told me that to become shaykh's Nazim pupil, one need to say some special words. I think, one also need to convert to Islam. Well, I am an Orthodox Christian, and I was baptized. I mean, it is unlikely that I will convert to Islam. It will be very difficult to explain to my family, relatives, and friends why I decided to do so. That is why I try to find new friends here. Unfortunately, we cannot stay here for a long period of time. But I know there are some people who are really involved into the spiritual process. They are students of shaykh Nazim. They are Sufis.<sup>52</sup>

Accordingly, the followers are fully aware that they are visiting the Sufi shaykh who is a Muslim and a spiritual master. This awareness creates a sense of respect and obedience, as well as a mystery that makes the pilgrimage experience even more fascinating for them.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Human beings have been moved during the whole history of humankind. This is not a recent phenomenon that people move across the globe. However, the reasons for this activity have changed. Pilgrimage is to some extent both a voluntary and compelled action. People are driven by the satisfaction of their needs, whether it is asking a Sufi saint about a protection/help in solving health, family problems, or it is about the inner journey to the self. Pilgrimage includes different aspects, such as religious, collective, and individual. The present article has illustrated that it is problematic to separate these aspects, since the pilgrimage is a complex event for a person

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Nathan, November 15, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Mariam, November 20, 2013.



involved. The main motivation of the pilgrimage to Lefke is visiting the Sufi shaykh. Although there was little chance of getting a personal meeting with the shaykh Nazim, due to his deteriorating state of health, his followers did not despond and stayed optimistic to see him at least during his short walks. It should be noted that different types of visitors came to Lefke: Muslims, non-Muslims, disciples initiated into the Naqshbandi Haqqani order, foreigners, and locals.

According to John Urry's classification, there are three phases of co-presence: "to be face-to-face," "the need to face-the-place," and "the need to face-the-moment." The present study has innovatively analyzed the pilgrimage to Lefke through the lenses of Urry's approach to travel. What Urry defines as "to be face-to-face," in our case, is directly connected with the opportunity to see shaykh Nazim. The opportunity to see him is described by many followers as unique. They described the experience in terms of peace and motivation they were looking for. The moment of meeting with the Sufi shaykh can also be described as the most important event for most people who come to Lefke, or "the need to face-the-moment." Moreover, the pilgrims have clearly articulated the importance of the communication with other visitors during their stay on the island. They have also emphasized the significance of the experience of being a member of the Lefke Sufi community. In particular, the converts from various non-Muslim countries stressed the value of living with local Muslims and international Muslims, even though for a short period of time. For many of them, it was a unique opportunity to experience Islamic religious life, which, due to different reasons, they cannot perform completely in their homelands. For both Muslim followers and non-Muslim visitors, the community serves as a place where one can forget about the external world and its burdens. Moreover, it is a place where some personal problems are thought to be solved. For example, the issues of education, a profession choice, health, family were mentioned. From this perspective, the pilgrimage to Lefke is not very different from the *ziyarat*, a traditional (and sometimes only available) way of pilgrimage for many Muslims in the world. The idea behind is that Muslims visit the saint places, usually the tombs of Sufis and other local Islamic saints, to receive a type of blessing or 'baraka' in the issues of health, marriage, and school.

Speaking about "the need to face-the-place," there is one interesting example that can clarify the specifics of this type of

pilgrimage. Some followers changed their normal clothes to a more Islamic dress code, at the airport shortly before arriving in Lefke. After departure, and the end of pilgrimage, they changed their clothes again.<sup>53</sup> In this regard, Urry points on an important phase of travel, that is the ‘out-of-time’ zone between departure and arrival.<sup>54</sup> One should not forget that travelling may include unpredictable things and difficulties. In other words, the participants have to react properly to them if they want to continue travel. Such situations involve different modes of feelings, such as tiredness, expectation, fear, comfort, risk, surprise and so on. In other words, there is a part of pilgrimage that also requires commitment and self-organization to reach the goal of the journey. In the Lefke pilgrimage, the main goal of the journey was to see the Sufi master and receive his blessing. However, this type of pilgrimage cannot be strictly identified as a religious one, as many of the visitors were not Muslims or did not have any religious affiliation. Therefore, Urry’s approach to travel can be applied to the pilgrimage to Lefke, yet with some important clarifications. The pilgrims and visitors of Lefke are mostly the followers of shaykh Nazim. In other words, the importance of ‘face,’ ‘place’ and ‘moment’ is determined by the purpose of visiting the Sufi shaykh and the following consequences.

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<sup>53</sup> Fieldwork notes, Istanbul, December 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Urry, “Mobility and Proximity,” 271.

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