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Understanding the Lived Experience of Pilgrims of Arba'een Walk in 2016 (The Contexts of the Arba'een Mega Event Formation)

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Abstract


Understanding the conditions and context of the religious tourism establishment as an event is immensely necessary and important. The current research, studies the Arba'een event, as a unique phenomenon in the field of religious tourism. Following the interpretative paradigm and thematic analysis approach and by means of the qualitative research methods techniques (semi-structured interviews, crosswalk, and participant observation) the current research tries to understand the lived experience of the Iranian participants in the Arba'een walk. By means of this procedure it tries to discover the nature, context and factors in line with the formation of the Arba'een event. The findings indicate that the conditions and the underlying factors of the Arba'een event were multi-mode, and the enormous participation of the people in these walking events has not been just diminished to one element. The cultural-ideological, social-economic, and political-national factors and contexts are of the important factors and, their diversity is the hallmark of the mega event and the uniqueness of this event.

Keywords: *Religious tourism, Arba'een, Context, Event, Pilgrim.*

Introduction and statement of the problem

Some of the religious symbols and rituals are more important than the others. The reason for this can be searched in the context of the formation of the religious memory of that community and the various readings of different religious symbols in different historical periods. Imam Hussein's (AS) uprising and various readings from this narrative in history

have given him and the Ashura narrative a lively and vibrant color and this dynamism can be observed at the special mourning ritual of Ashura and Arba'een. In different narratives of the same incident that have been covered commensurate with the urgencies and sovereignty, intellectuals and public needs in recent history (instrumentalizing the narrative), it can be observed that this narrative is sometimes an instrument of "criticism" and sometimes a means of "the masses mobilizing". It is often an instrument of "suppression"

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and sometimes it is used for “resistance”. This narrative plurality indicates its capacity for interpretability in line with preserving or creating the majority and the minority socio-political benefits. The substance of Shi’a’s social-political life has been formed based on a movement contrary to dominant political hegemony and has been continued all through history in conflict with the dominant trend. In the meantime, the Third Imam of the Shiites, as a fighter and leader of an uprising, has a special place in the Shiites’ mind and has permanently been the source of inspiration for their protest movements.

This ritual should be scrutinized in the setting of the Shiite political and social life and its protesting nature. Looking at the history of the Arba’een ceremony in Iraqi history exemplifies a permanent contradiction between political sovereignty and the Shiite religious minority. After the Middle East political and military events and transferring Iraqi sovereignty to Shiites, this conflict has been removed, and in recent years this issue has led to an increase in Shiite participation in the event and its transformation into a mega event.

The social, cultural and symbolic features and the attitudes of the participants in this event are of the important components that have been mostly discounted in the researches of this field. For this purpose, to appreciate the lived experience of pilgrims on Arba’een walk, the widespread dimensions, meaning and nature of this great event according to the participants can be described and analyzed as the main references of the phenomenon.

The current research explores the Arba’een event as an exclusive phenomenon in the field of religious tourism. Hence, with regard to appreciating the lived experience of Iranian participants of Arba’een walk, this study tries to extract and analyze the basic and fundamental factors behind the formation of the Arba’een event, because these contexts, driving factors, and passengers’ motivations define the nature and meaning of their travel.

Theoretical fundamentals and research background

• Arba’een Walk

According to some scholars and jurists, the historical foundation of the Arba’een ritual is the entry

of the Ahl-al-Bayt to Karbala at the first Arba’een (61 A.H.) and the burial of the head of the Karbala battlefield martyrs alongside their bodies. Most of the Shi’ite and Sunni historians similarly believe that the basis for the commemoration of this day is the arrival of Jaber and Atiyya in Karbala (Motahhari, 1984: 30). The history of Arba’een walk is as long as the Shiite history and, during many years, while preserving Shiite unity, it has been also a factor in Iraq and Muslims history development. The leading originator of this movement, which lasts so far, is Sheikh Ansari, who introduced this movement as a tradition and symbol for the Shiite, but after a while, it was forgotten. But finally this tradition was restored by Sheikh Mirza Hossein Nuri and it was published as a good custom and tradition among Shiites. In line with doing these spiritual ceremonies, some scholars and even Marjas also traveled on foot to Karbala (Gharsban, 2018).

• Event

Generally, there is no agreement in line with the classification and determination of the keywords of the event. The events can be defined based on the purposes that gather people or based on the unique indicators and attributes of each event. At large, events are temporary phenomena, and due to the interaction between the components of the event, people, management systems, designing, planning, and implementation are unique, and in order to use this unique experience, one should be present at the place to not lose experience (Zhou, 2007). The events are illustrative of the cultural characteristics of the coordinator community. Due to this fact, they can accelerate the process of cultural promotion and intercultural exchanges. That is why in many events, a large crowd of cultures will be present and there will be a context in which people from different cultures interact with one another. Even the culture and tourism can be developed at the same time (Hussain, 2012). Religious events are one of these events, which is the place of a broader gathering of people all over the world, “those events which are presently very important in attracting tourism on an international scale” (Cerutti & Piva, 2015). Vukonic (1996) describes the religious event as “congregation at large scale for historical and

anniversaries.” In fact, religious events, for people who have dominated religious motives and desire also those who are interested in the cultural aspects of the religious event, are considered a powerful attraction. In these events, contributors are more intervener than a spectator. Getz (2005) considers religious events as a kind of planned event and a subcategory of cultural events. Raj, Walters & Rashid (2013) offers an additional typology of events and, as shown in Figure 1, places religious events in a separate category (Fig. 1). Such a separation indicates that religious ceremonies require a particular management and experience of religious tourism (Cerutti & Piva 2015).



Fig. 1. Typology of events. Source: Raj et al., 2013

• **Religious tourism**

Religious tourism can be considered as one of the oldest forms of travel and pilgrimage that based on statistics, 300 million pilgrims travel around the world every year, out of which 29 million are international religious tourists. Pilgrimage, religious celebrations, I’tikāf etc. are examples of such tourism (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Generally, religious tourism is done based on the tendency toward transcendental and sacred religious symbols. Mostly this type of tourism is accompanied by visiting or participating in religious rituals, religious meetings, and ritual ceremonies by pilgrims and tourists. Commonly religious tourism is structured in a collective manner

with regard to a sacred place.

In religious tourism, in addition to visiting holy places and performing other rituals, attending religious conferences and other cultural events and experiencing art, culture, tradition, and religious architecture are also considered by tourists. So there is no clear distinction between “religious tourism” and “pilgrimage”. Many studies have compared religious tourism and pilgrimage. Researchers have defined pilgrimage as a return to a religiously important place for religious rituals and customs, or meeting a spiritual need based on religious spirituality or faith, while the tourists’ religious actions are similar to both pilgrims and tourists (Firozjaeian, Yousefi & Mir Mohammadtabar, 2014: 146). Thus, religious tourism can be defined as a kind of trip which is located between pilgrimage and tourism.

There are different categories of religious tourism; however, Nieminen (2012), in a comprehensive category, classifies religious tourism into four classes of pilgrimages and tours, missionary and volunteer travel, religious events and fellowship travel.

The entertainment component through fun, playing and actually pleasing people during religious journeys is one of the most important parts of religious travel plans, and these factors in best situations and the guaranteed state will be happened in trips based on group interactions. What is important in these trips is a common language for worship or orators’ speech (Nieminen, 2012: 18). Preferring the “path” to the destination is a distinctive feature of some spiritual-religious journeys which brings a kind of conduct to the minds of those who want to their path. The “path-based travel” is the label that the author used to refer to this sort of trips. Journeys in which the journey procedure itself is at the center of attention or at least passing the route is a major part of religious ceremonies, and it seems that this journey will be so sacred and attending the walk and walking the path will be considered as a ritual. Pilgrimage tours along the Santiago de Compostela path and also the Arba’een walk can be considered as examples of these trips, which can be debated in the form of Islamic tourism literature. The conducted studies in the field of the Arba’een phenomenon can be separated into numerous groups.

The first group revolves around Karbala and Ashura and Arba'een related narratives and interpretations, and the emphasis of this section is on the aspects of religious and political validity (Shirazi, 2014; Abazari, 2014; Qazi Tabataba'i, 1989; Goli Zavareh, 2014). Out of these inquiries, which today political debate is much more highlighted, one can mention the Mohammadi's et al. research (Mohammadi, Salimnejad & Ahmadi, 2017), that following Arba'een walk tries to redefine Shiite geopolitics and explains the political dimensions of this phenomenon. The second category deals with social and cultural subjects and the lessons taught by Ashura and Arba'een (Hosseini Jalali, 2014; Zare' Khormizi, 2013), that the volume of social studies from this category can be considered. The third category of studies talks about the religious tourism. Iranian society due to its cultural and religious capacities has this advantage (Imani Khoshkhoo & Bod, 2017; Mafi & Saghaei, 2009; Shafia & Doroudian, 2017). Nevertheless what can be mentioned today as a mega event in the field of tourism is Arba'een event, which has been the focus of attention of the world for many years and has brought about obvious outcomes in the social field. In this subsection, studies have been conducted with an outcome-related approach and the effect of these events on host communities (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2016; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Kim, Gursoy, & Lee, 2006; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Jeong, 1998).

Method

In order to conduct this research, the interpretative paradigm and thematic analysis approach were used, because this process has qualitative, reflective, and interpretive nature, it is committed to understand the nature of the common experiences of the activists. Documentary and library study was used to investigate theoretical and empirical literature, and in order to collect the field information, ethnography (as well as auto-ethnography or autoethnography) method was used and with the tools of in-depth and semi-structured interviews, along with direct participation during travel and participate in walk (Crosswalk) were considered to study the subject matter in the target community. The current study considered the Najaf - Karbala route and

was done during the period of 2013-2016. With regard to the sensitivity of the issue, the researcher used a non-probability sampling with judgmental sampling or snowball sampling and by referring to the reality and eliminate prejudices and conducting case interviews and attending group discussions on the researcher, tried to reach the nature and meaning of Arba'een walk. By conducting interviews, the procedure of coding and extracting codes from the declarations of the participants in the discussion began, and after doing each step of coding, the process of codes categorizing in the same and distinct classes sustained until reaching the repeated codes and theoretical saturation.

Conceptual framework (discussion)

The formation of the Arba'een mega event is directly and indirectly rooted in the socio-cultural and political issues of the Iraqi and Iranian societies in particular and the Shiite communities of the region in general, and the social activists of the Shiite community have had significant effects in preserving and creating it as a mega event permanently and have they tried to create a ritual from the symbolic capacity of the Ashura uprising.

What was obtained from the interviews and autoethnography during Arba'een walk and after doing the process of coding and conceptualizing of the presented propositions by the participants in the discussion with the researcher has been presented in Table 1. This table shows that the conditions and factors of the formation of the Arba'een event are multi-modal, and massive attendance in these marches does not just end in a political element, but multiple meanings and understandings have been considered for the Arba'een mega event, and this diversity and multiplicity of the nature of the people participating in such a massive assembly are considered as the obvious feature of this mega event and uniqueness. The findings of the current research indicate that the three main underlying factors (cultural-ideological, social-economic and political-national contexts) have provided suitable conditions for the participation of people in this mega event. In the following section, these factors will be mentioned below in more detail.

Table 1. Concepts and codes extracted from interviews. Source: Authors.

Row	Concepts	Initial codes extracted from interviews
1	Cultural-Ideological contexts	Considering the travel to sacred places as recommended or obligatory Obtaining a spiritual identity Recommendations of narratives and hadiths Forgiveness and reach purity Religious-ideological dependency Response to spiritual needs Avow to walk and request to meet the needs and wishes Aesthetics aspect of Imam Hussein’s suffering and capacities Commemorate the Ashura event Sanctity of Imam Hussein (AS) Covenant revival with Imam Hussein’s ambitions and goals
2	Social-Economic contexts	Reinforcement of social relations Accumulating the social capital elements Revitalizing communities and religious interconnected networks of a sense of being together Consolidating social cohesion Increasing participation motivation in self-development activities Gaining a novel and legitimate social identity Psychological clearing and relaxation Experiencing a travel to another religious community Curiosity and gaining more religious awareness The presence of an uprising and a collective sense with excitement Escape from the routine life Cheap and affordable travel Provide basic needs The sense of social security
3	Political–National contexts	Reinforcing peaceful political-religious contexts Restoration of Transnational Shiites’ Identity Regional convergence against political rivals Increasing the sense of national identity and authority Consolidating relations with Shiite countries Showing international power in regional governance and fighting against terrorism Political and security stability in Iraq Obtaining legitimate political identity

• Cultural-Ideological Contexts

By means of conducted field studies, and interviews with Arba’een pilgrims, more than anything else, cultural-ideological categories have been emphasized. The narrative richness and Imam Hussein’s (AS) capacities in line with being reinterpreted are so that the different spectrum of society from the political elite to the statesmen, from the general public to the intellectuals, each one communicates with Imam Hussein (AS) and inevitably had to define their place in relation to it. This wishful thinking was echoed in

some interviewees’ comments so that by suffering the hardships of the journey of Karbala, they will reach identification with their Imam in line with the day of Ashura, and attain spiritual refinement and inner purity. Most of the interviewees have pointed out how they tolerated the suffering and desolation of the trip. The sufferings not only did not dissuade them from the walk, but increased their passion and, with a sense of spirituality and augmenting religious affections, the continued their trip. One of the participants explains her experience as follows:

"I had a pain in my knee and I was not able to walk, but I clearly felt that a force was pulling me forward and in my ears, say, come! ... I have had no such a sense in my life. Whenever I did not know what to do with knee exhaustion and pain, I imagined Imam Hussein, and thought about this issue that what problems he had and he suffered difficulties for the salvation of Islam for his people, and now I cannot go through this path to visit him? In fact, when I thought about Imam Hussein, these thoughts gave me incentives and motivations" (A 31years-old female pilgrim).

Another factor of Imam Hussein's (AS) attractiveness and capacities and the Karbala event is the mobilization of the Shiites; insofar as that none of the other imams have so far affected the Shiite's religious emotions, and such a potential throughout history has created a "collective desire for mournful action" in connection with the Karbala incident among the Iranians; the socializing that first appeared in the form of creating mourning groups in the country, and then, chose a single route and a single destination for itself at a broad level, and created a mega event that in terms of diversity and number of participants is rare in the world.

In fact, such an event has been able to help to re-draw Shiite existence and identity on international dimensions. According to interviewees' declarations in this big community, this mega event can be viewed as "identity lineup" against other global religious identities. A community identity with such a religious identity at such a level can stimulate many Shiites who have a religiously powerful religious background and increase their participation motivation in the Arba'een event. Some of the participants have noted a sense of belonging that has obtained from the participation in the Arba'een walk. For example, one of the interviewees has a statement that is the indicator of "the identity attachment to the Arba'een event":

"When I see that the world media is paying attention to this event so much, I am very proud of myself as a Shiite. I feel that, after centuries, Shiites have come to the point where they deserve and have been forcibly deprived of that. Even those who are not Muslims like to take part in this walk and this issue will make Shiite

proud and proudly, say that I'm a Shiite ... We could have the largest congregation in the world without any blood coming from someone's nose (Someone is hurt), where Western countries act civilized like this" (A 48-years-old Iranian pilgrim).

Another religious reason for participators to participate in the ceremonies is the fulfillment of desires and resorting to holy characters to solve problems and achieve their desires. Some of the participants point to some problems in their lives and, based on their religious mentality and their worldview, have considered the way of fulfilling their wishes, resorting to Imam Hussein (AS). One of the interviewees indicates her experience from this tendency as follows:

"Two years ago, I wanted to go to Karbala. Once at home I saw that my daughter in law who has never hugged me and cried before, hugged me and cried. I said, why do you cry "M"? She said that my father has visited many doctors and they have stated that they will not be able to have a child. I cried and said that we have a doctor and you went to someone else. We have our own doctor. I went to Imam Hussein, Karbala; besides the shrine, I vowed to Zahra and our friends from Yazd vowed one million Tomans to Zeynab, I said I'll go there to pay that money. I came to Iran and when I come to Iran, I go to Mashhad. I went back to Hussainiya. I was going that suddenly I saw that my daughter in law is crying. Now 25 days was passed since arrival from Karbala. I saw she is crying. Well, I asked what's up again, she said that I got pregnant, the test was positive. After 7-8 years, Imam Hussain fulfilled my needs. You must have a heart full of certitude" (male: 68-years-old).

• Social-economic context

Some of the interviewees in order to express their identity in a social context enter the gathering of Arba'een walk, and they seek to improve their socializing capacity and group membership (belonging) in ceremonies such as the Muharram mourning and the Arba'een ceremonies. The unsuccessful experience of socializing and the need to be identified as a member of an established reference group and the aspiration for solidarity with other members of the reference group, when talking about the Arba'een event, the reference

group is the Shiite community, and the identity that individuals obtain from this group is a coherent and common religious identity that as an attraction factor attracts many Iranian Shiites for participation in the ceremony present in Shia culture, and in the section related to the participants' religious reasons, entitled "religious identity and the reflection of Shi'a collective identification in regional and global dimensions" has been discussed briefly. For some interviewees, the presence among the crowd of pilgrims and the feeling of solidarity with them created a satisfaction sense in them, because after that event they felt their acceptance and membership in a reference group more than ever, and benefit from the pleasures of belonging, role taking, and more prominent identification from society.

"For a long time, I wanted others to know me for something. For example, I wanted to have the Marxist label, the feminist label, I wanted to have something to say to others, see what I am! When I went to Karbala and became friend with new people, who considered me to be part of them, this feeling arose in me. I said to myself see! You belong to this place. You are a part of the Arba'een event. I do not work and now I do not pray, but the atmosphere of this event affected me. Right now, my phone wallpaper is a landscape of Arba'een, and for some time now, my Telegram profile photo was also related to Arba'een. Most of the time, I try to use everything I've learned there in my life. I decide to go to Arba'een every year and I have persuaded some more people to come with me" (A 23-years-old female pilgrim).

In the absence of a context to join the ceremony, public celebrations, carnivals, festivals and other public cultural events in Iran that have accumulated the collective excitement of people and faced social expression of people in community gatherings and mass gatherings with challenges. It can be claimed that the Arba'een mega event with, its alluring cultural-environmental diversities and its distinct excitements and the high level of extraordinary, unpredictable, exciting and attractive interethnic experiences, has offered a suitable alternative to social activists in Iran. Some of interviewees in line with talking about the reasons for the Arba'een journey, in his speeches, has

clearly indicated how "the desire to escape boredom and daily routine, and the desire to get new experiences, social happiness, the desire to experience the traveling attractions to an unfamiliar culture and land ..." has made them go to Arba'een journey. For example, in the following a part of an interviewee's speech is quoted:

"I heard a lot about Arba'een in Iraq. It was very interesting for me that someone invites you to his/her home and cooks Iranian and Iraqi dishes for you. I wanted to go and feel. Actually, when I went on a trip, the same was true. I was very excited. I was very excited when I arrived in Iraq until I returned to Iran. Every moment I saw very interesting things that I had never seen before. I was excited about the fact that someone washed my feet and the other massaged it, and so many people came from everywhere. I was very cool when I arrived from the trip. I was no longer bored. It was very good for me and made a good memory for me" (A 28-years-old pilgrim).

According to the majority of interviewees, the other attractions of Arba'een trip is a lower travel cost than other travels. Supplying facilities and services and most of the needed travel goods and items for free on the walking path, has satisfied most of the interviewees. The Iraqi people's hospitality and the dominance of the pilgrim-centeredness culture on the interactions between Iraqis and travelers have intensified this satisfaction. These factors have created a decent reputation and a mental image for Iranians, and this point can be considered as the most important factor in accumulating the number of pilgrims in this event. The person, who used the designated services, recounts her experience as follows:

"Yes, at the service stations for pilgrims, everything was already there, even though they were thinking of a cell phone charger, for example, those who had a Samsung phone or iPhone or any other phone could charge their phone. At these stations, they wash your socks and clean their shoes. They asked me if I need something I said I do not need anything. When I wanted to leave, I saw that they prepare a backpack and a blanket for us, we put the blanket inside the station because it was not needed at all". (A 23-years-old female pilgrim)

• **Political-national contexts**

Most of the countries are pursuing events to attain different objectives such as gaining prestige, attracting attention, business prosperity, and national membership. In this regard, governments, based on the economic need for economic evolution, can create or organize events or, depending on the specific situations of each country, may use event as a legitimate element to escape the crisis of legitimacy, or to strengthen the national identity for countries faced with a crisis of national identity and social frustration, events can have a restorative and positive role. If the scope of the events (quantitative, qualitative) is large enough, their impact will be greater. Most of the interviewees believed that the Arba'een event was actually a factor in "legitimizing the Islamic regimes in line with acquiring international prestige"; interviews indicated that the Arba'een event was a kind of "legitimation" for Islamic governments. This event affords the needed potential to attract support from governments and official organizations of participating countries. After the Iraqi government and central Iraqi power collapse, Iraq faced a crisis of social identity. The appearance of radical terrorist groups such as ISIL in the region led Iraq to act as a catalyst for shaping a united front against these groups. The same thing made some countries in the region and the Iraqi government realizes the expansion and deepening of a local ceremony, such as the Arba'een event.

"In terms of quantitative aspects, the Arba'een event has been developed a lot in recent years. What was the effect of Iraq on this process? What role has the government played? The government has a security providing entity role and provides the place. The good thing the government did was to provide all schools during the event of Arba'een" (Iranian pilgrim and the responsible for pilgrims' service station, 28-years-old).

In order to transform the Arba'een event into a mega event, the role of the country in Iran is also important and based on the experiences and reports of Iranian participants and authorities, Iran's role is really important. The regional issues of the crisis in Syria, Iraq, and Libya, and competition with Saudi Arabia themselves can be seen as a factor in the aspiration of the Iranian government to reinforce the Arba'een event and also "to strengthen

regional convergence against political rivals".

The interviewees emphasized that the Arba'een event is a context of "showing power at international level in line with regional management and fighting against terrorism", because the formation of "political stability and security in Iraq" and the promotion and advertising the Arba'een event have been an important factor with regard to "strengthening the religious-political peaceful platforms for the Shiites". Most of the interviewees regarded the participation in the Arba'een event as a political-religious and national duty, and emphasized that the Arba'een event has to be held magnificently, and according to their description and interpretation, the Arba'een event can be a factor for "revival of transnational identity of the Shiites" and strengthen the "political affairs and relations of Shiite countries"; these issues have been one of the most important and underlying factors in line with the formation of the Arba'een mega event, although other different issues can be mentioned in this regard, and it also requires the wider scope of investigation in line with the subject.

In general, the main incentives and backgrounds of the creation of the Arba'een mega event can be summarized as follows (Fig. 2):



Fig. 2. Underlying contexts and factors in line with formation of Arba'een walk event. Source: Author.

Conclusion

The current research was done in line with understanding the lived experience of pilgrims of Arba'een walk with the aim of extracting and analyzing the underlying contexts and factors of this event formation.

The domestic conducted studies have been mentioned in line with narratives and interpretations related to the Karbala, Ashura, and Arba'een events, and they have emphasized the narrative aspects of religion and politics or

the studies that have investigated the political dimensions of the event, also those investigations that have paid attention to the social and cultural issues and lessons taught from Ashura and Arba'een, but in this research, in a different way from the aforementioned research (field and qualitative methods), the understanding of the lived experience of the participants of Arba'een walk has been studied as the motivations of this mega event from the religious tourism approach.

In contradiction of previous foreign studies (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2016; Kim & Petrick, 2005; Kim, Gursoy & Lee; 2006; Fredline & Faulkner; 2000; Jeong, 1998), that mainly paid attention to the effects of religious tourism, in the current research, studying the Arba'een event is considered as a unique phenomenon in the field of religious tourism, which has been subject to motivations and contexts; consequently, the present research has emphasized the issue of the mentioned contexts and narratives by the participants in the Arba'een event. Research findings specify that the underlying contexts and factors with regard to the formation of the Arba'een event according to participants of this event, have not simply been reduced to one factor, and have been subject to several factors, and actually, it was multimodal. So that according to the interviews and their coding, three overall dimensions were extracted as the main contexts of the event, which included cultural and ideological, social and economic, and political and national contexts. With regard to the abundance of codes, among these dimensions, the cultural and ideological contexts have been prioritized by pilgrims. Out of the components of this dimension one can mention the causes and reasons according to pilgrims and interviewees as the most important factors, out of these factors and issues we can mention suffering from hardships of the journey of Karbala, identification with Imam Hussein, reduced guilty feelings and forgiveness due to this journey, meeting the needs and wishes, and trust in the hadiths and traditions of religious leaders. The second dimension of this religious trip is the social and economic context that among the components this category according to the interviewed participant one can mention achieving the coherent and common religious identity, the desire to escape boredom

and daily routine, and the desire for a new experience, attaining social happiness and the experience of the appeals of traveling to an unfamiliar land and the low level of Arba'een walk costs compared to other trips. The third underlying dimension of the Arba'een pilgrimage trip, which was considered by both the participants and the interviewees in relation to the two dimensions mentioned above, was a political and national context. In this regard, according to the participants, Arba'een has been the underlying factor for the legitimizing the Islamic government to gain international prestige, a context for showing international power and the fight against terrorism and strengthening the peaceful religious-political context for the Shiites. An important factor among the findings of this study, according to majorities of the interviewees, as a participant in the Arba'een pilgrimage trip, was related to obtaining social and religious identity, as well as the relatively low cost of the trip, which are both very important factors in attracting religious tourists, what the Iraqi government has already been successful in making it happen. On the other hand, the findings of the current study showed that Arba'een pilgrimage trip by Iranian participants included the four categories of religious tourism foreseen by Nieminen (2012), which is indicative of the high potential of this event.

Of the strengths and advantages of this research one can mention the presence and participation of the researcher in the Arba'een walk along with the studied pilgrims, due to this fact those groups participated in this walk presented their ideas and approaches in line with interviews sympathetically and "actively in the field".

It should be mentioned that a research will also be needed with regard to the capacity and context of religious tourism, with the case study of Arba'een trip in Iran, and by means of this research, the "path-center" pilgrimage trip will indicate its socio-economic feedbacks in the origin country.

Endnote

1. The presence of the researcher in the process of gathering information and lived experience in line with the Arba'een walk has facilitated the extraction and discovery of the meaning and nature of this phenomenon.
2. The initial letter of interviewees were used instead of the full name not to show their identity.

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