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Dark Tourism: Philosophy and Theory

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Section 2

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Introduction

Memorials are dead. Memorialisation has failed. Or at least there is a contention that some war memorials in particular are not fit for purpose and have neglected to adequately recall horrific memories of the hostile past (Jones 2016). Of course, memorials not only pay reverence to the deceased, but also act as symbolic markers of our own mistakes, fights and follies. Past (and present) struggles have witnessed totalitarian regimes across the world thrive on a mantra of intolerance whereby swathes of populations have been tyrannised, persecuted, or murdered. Now, an apparent rise of the anti-liberal right in the West and rejection of globalisation under the political parlance of *populism* means that seeds are once again being sown for democracy's 'other' to return. Prejudice is a stain on society and the chaos of hatred, bigotry, and unreason cannot be easily conveyed through bleak memorials for the (conflict) dead which, subsequently, are strategically placed in the (dark) tourism landscape for contemporary consumption. Arguably, artistic abstract memorials that act as sombre tourist attractions and civic symbols have failed to remind the masses of fascism and xenophobia of yesteryear wars (Gold 2017; Jones 2016). However, the issue is not with memorialisation itself but with memory—or at least shared narratives of collective memory. The Holocaust, for instance, was not only the bureaucratic calculus of death by a Nazi German State but also

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involved demonic passions of the populace. Holocaust memorials rarely convey this message; and as tourists consume places of pain and shame, 'we would be utter fools to think it can't happen again, or that the world will never have any more reason to build memorials' (Jones 2016: 1).

Therefore, the ability to locate ourselves in a 'dark tourism world' where memorials are insufficiently narrating hurtful memories calls out for philosophical responses. At a rudimentary level, philosophising is the ability to extract ourselves from a busy, engaged world of making and doing things, and to disengage and pause for reflection and thought especially about meaning and purpose (Tribe 2009). The ability to offer philosophical approaches to dark tourism that are grounded in conceptual frameworks and meta-narratives is crucial to our understanding of signifying death within the visitor economy. Indeed, deaths of significant Others and destruction of physical places is often transformed into memory and historicity through a fluctuating process of socio-cultural and political production and construction, as well as performance and consumption of commemorative visitor sites. 'Heritage that hurts' (Uzzell and Ballantyne 1998) and sites of dark tourism are not automatically sanctified or deemed of historical note simply because an act of atrocity or disaster has occurred. Rather, spaces of dark tourism are continuously (re)negotiated and (re)constructed into places of meaning and meaning-making through human interaction and semiotics. Cultural expressions of tragic memory are both generated and informed by colloquial or official pasts and displayed within auratic memorial landscapes, as well as being consumed by polysemic tourist experiences (see also Section 5). It is within public places of tourism that memory mediates between dominant and usually authorised narratives and individual consumption. Tourism sites of tragic history are places where public and vernacular histories and memories intersect and act in dialogue (Sather-Wagstaff 2011). Yet, the question remains as to the relevance and application of this dialogue, and whether dark tourism and inherent memorial messages are getting through.

About This Section

This section outlines a number of different but complementary philosophical viewpoints of dark tourism, its challenges and components, as well as offering conceptual frameworks for locating future dark tourism studies. In the first chapter (Chap. 6), Erik Cohen addresses dominant Western-centric perspectives within dark tourism research and, subsequently, offers a comparative conceptual framework in which to locate dark tourism (or thanatourism as Cohen refers). Drawing upon the paradigmatic approach offered by Stone

(2012) in which Western dark tourism could be seen as a functional secular substitute for religious institutions in the face of mortality; Cohen examines dark tourism within non-Western emergent world regions. In so doing, Cohen offers a much-needed examination of dark tourism from an Asian context and, in particular, outlines a conceptual framework of dark tourism based on different ontological assumptions of death. Using a range of empirical illustrations including from Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Laos, Japan, and China, Cohen argues that Asian dark tourism sites might differ from Western counterparts because of a fundamental difference in the theology of death and soteriology of the main Asian religious traditions.

In the second chapter (Chap. 7), Jeffrey Podoshen locates dark tourism within a dystopian world with ever-increasing violent narratives that embrace moral decay and atrocity images. Podoshen provides a deliberately provocative account of dark tourism at the intersection of death, its contemporary consumption, and consumer culture theoretics. He proposes that dark tourism denotes a *form of signalling* as well as a *form of preparation* and, consequently, the study suggests dark tourism is an extension of conspicuous consumer behaviour in a modern world where death can be immersed as a consumer activity.

The third chapter (Chap. 8) by Philip Stone draws upon the work of Jacobsen (2016) and, as a result, completes his trilogy of thanatological-themed papers within dark tourism (the first one being Stone and Sharpley 2008 and, the second, Stone 2012). In particular, Stone extends his earlier conceptual works which located dark tourism within a secular response to mortality mediation and an historical mentality of the 'forbidden' (or absence) death. Specifically, he contends that contemporary dark tourism is now a distinct component of what has been termed 'spectacular death'. Where death, dying, and mourning have, arguably, become increasing spectacles in Western societies, Stone suggests dark tourism offers a re-reversal of so-called 'forbidden' death. Ultimately, Stone argues that dark tourism as a mediating institution of mortality has the paradoxical tendency of making death linger uneasily between (market) liberation and denial as well as (heritage) autonomy and control.

In the fourth chapter (Chap. 9) by Rami Isaac and Vincent Platenkamp, a Nietzscheism approach is adopted to the study of dark tourism. Specifically, with Western morality ending in a form of relativism that rejects any substantial value in the norms of the modern world, a resultant crisis of identity emerges. In what Nietzsche compared to as a state of 'passive nihilism' in which no criterion can deliver the foundations of any identity; Nietzsche views an alternative to nihilism in the form of human (Greek) tragedy and the relationship between Apollo and Dionysus. It is here where Isaac and Platenkamp take

their philosophical cue and, subsequently, examine the Apollonian (dreams and harmony) and the Dionysian (intoxication and chaos) as guiding principles within identity construction through dark tourism. Using the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as a contextual case study, Isaac and Platenkamp offer a thought-provoking account of confrontation, interpretation, authentication, and national identity through binary Apollonian/Dionysian perspectives of dark tourism.

The final chapter (Chap. 10) in this section by Richard Morten, Philip Stone, and David Jarratt examines dark tourism as an intrinsically emotional, subjective, and phenomenological place-based pursuit. In particular, they address spatial subjectivity within dark tourism environments and, as a result, the specific effects of geographical environments on the emotions and behaviours of individuals. The study suggests a transactional nature to the production and consumption of dark tourism; a process entirely influenced by a very personal framework of knowledge, memory, and associations. Adopting a psychogeographical approach, and drawing upon the work of Foucault and Debord, the study considers dark tourism not as a passive mode of tourism, but rather as a dynamic and individualistic way of interacting with space and place. Ultimately, Morten, Stone, and Jarratt argue that dark tourism exists by way of deeply personalised responses to geographic places and, consequently, the chapter is the first ever to comprehensively locate dark tourism as a specific form of psychogeography.

As a final note, this section offers a thematic approach that is selective and not exhaustive. That said, given the dynamic and complex nature of dark tourism across the globe and the ever-increasing significance accorded to the subject as a focus of contemporary consumption, dark tourism as a concept requires further theoretical underpinnings. Indeed, philosophical approaches to dark tourism as the production and consumption of 'difficult heritage' provide meta-narratives in which to conceptually frame future empirical research. It is hoped, therefore, that the chapters in this section will not only contribute to knowledge and understanding of a phenomenon that continues to grow in social and cultural significance, but will also act as a catalyst for future scholarship within dark tourism and heritage and memory studies.

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