

## What is wrong with Dark Tourism Research?

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The term dark denotes certain negative connotation, which suggests that dark tourism is inevitably associated with evil, or what something that frightens us. In biblical terms, the light is consecrated while the darkness associates to evil. In a society which ponders life death appears to be denied or considered as a far probability. This point leads us towards difficult questions: what is dark tourism?, is dark tourism a type of reflexivity with the Other's pain or an act of sadism or macabre taste developed by the first world's tourists.

The literature in the fields of dark tourism, far from reaching a solution, divides into two clear cut tones. Those scholars who argue dark tourism should be seen as an altruist type of empathy with the otherness (Stone & Sharpley 2008; Cohen 2011; Hartmann 2014). Others, rather, emphasize in dark consumption as an ideological instrument of control to placate the social discontent in days of high uncertainty and anxiety (Bowman & Pezzulo, 2009; Tzanelli 2016; Korstanje 2016). Both –in different viewpoints- probably have right (Light, 2017). Hopper & Lennon lament that the recent advance for dark tourism studies has invariably ushered scholars into a knowledge fragmentation which unless resolved may lead very well to the sub-discipline stagnation. The discrepancy of definitions oscillates from a type of anthropological reflexivity for visitors to understand their proper lives to educational purposes based on heritage and history. While Stone (2012) defines dark tourism as a new segment of tourists who looks to understand his own finitude in this world, Cohen (2011) calls the attention to the potentiality of dark tourism to develop resilient answers to the traumatic events of the pastime. In the same vein, Joy Sather Wagstaff (2016) argues convincingly that death is the only phenomenon which not only escapes to human control but makes all humans equal. Dark tourism activates ancient solidarity among humans which dilutes when the political power intervenes to mold the message of how the tragedy is remembered. Besides this fragmentation, there seems to be no conclusive evidence that explains why a growing segment of tourists incline to consume and visit these types of macabre spaces. Hence, the present note of research examines critically the contributions and limitations of current applied-research in dark tourism studies. This begs a more than a pungent question: why do scholars believe that the engagement (empathy) with the “Other's death” is the main factor that motivates dark tourist?

Although dark tourism studies have advanced by leaps and bounds, the problem to precise the borders between the empathy and pleasure as key factors that

explain why people pay to gaze a macabre spectacle is far from being closed. Is this a sort of new sadism or a new tendency based on reciprocity and solidarity?

Those works, which emphasizes dark tourism engages a type of reflexivity between the visitor, who is biographically constituted, and a projection of its own existential finitude, stems from authors such as Phillip Stone (2012), Erik (Cohen 2011), John Lennon and Malcolm Foley only to name a few (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Foley & Lennon 1996). They start their assumptions from empirical research or previous investigations administered on visitors in the different (dark) sites. The meditation about the philosophical tension between life and death, associated with the curiosity for history seems to be two of the main topics interviewees indicate as their main motivations to visit the site. As a result of this, authors complement the point of adding personal auto-ethnographies while validating their previous assumptions. But what is the real evidence that probes dark tourists are motivated by a much deeper empathy with the “Other’s mourning”?

Methodologically speaking, as ethnographers know, interviewees are unfamiliar with their emotional world and real motivations while in other simply they lie to protect their interests. The psychological inner-world represents an unknown universe inexpugnable for the human mind (Seraphin, Korstanje & Gowreesunkar, 2020; Korstanje 2016). The open or close-ended questionnaires administration only tells part of the story. What would respond a gangster if I ask, what is your profession? he will surely answer businessman!

Paraphrasing Adrian Franklin (2007), tourism research toys with the belief the tourist is the only reliable source of information, relegating other actors and voices to the periphery. This academic position, which dominates a whole portion of publication and knowledge production, has led towards a tourist-centricity widely legitimated by metrics and quantitative-related methods. What is equally important, theoretical and conceptual works help in resolving the limitations of tourist-centricity in dark tourism research but –at the same time- they run the risk to come out in general abstractions, simplifications or even speculations.

In perspective, R. Tzanelli (2016) mentions an additional problem, so to speak, those tourists, who come from the First World, visit macabre sites in the Third world, are unfamiliar with the cruelty and violence exerted by their respective states in the colonial past. Dark tourism offers a spectacle of visual consumption where the real reasons of the tragedy are ideologically fabricated, packaged and sold according to the luxury tastes of an international segment. When the rememorations of a traumatic event derive in a spectacle the risks to repeat it in a future are high. If the trauma is commoditized, the human suffering becomes in a product fabricated –if not perpetuated- by the marketplace. To put things in a straight, in a society fascinated by trauma, each disaster sets the pace to the next one. Whatever the case may be, dark tourism studies should overcome the barriers of tourist-centricity, incorporating other methodologies and epistemologies while avoiding speculative theories. In so doing, psychometric techniques based on draws, and other psychological instruments may very well help in laying the foundations towards a new understanding of dark tourism. Having said this, the efficiency of project drawing –if applied on dark tourism studies- lays the foundation towards new applications in dark tourism. In earlier

works, we have conducted an interesting experiment asking 40 participants to draw followed by a story about their latest holidays. Although not conclusive, the evidence suggested two important assumptions. The participants were subject to a test of personality (Meyer-Briggs test, MBTI). Furthermore, graphology techniques and analysis of content were employed as complementary methods. On one hand, the psychological personality develops a grim, light or dark landscape about the external world. The intensity or enthusiasm to withdraw or launch to the external world is based on the ontological security each person has. Those participants who draw landscapes in white and black have been socialized in the belief that the world is a dangerous place. Rather, those, who used colors in their drawing, were mainly moved by pleasurable hedonist landscapes –like beaches- have been educated to control and domesticate the world. While the former profile signals to “a morbid cosmology of the world” with focus on professions as historians, social scientists, educators or even physicians, the latter one needs to amass power and wealth. Typically this profile coincides with high self-esteem personalities and occupations associated with power as lawyers, politicians, and businessmen or women (Korstanje 2010). On another, participants actively look for experiences which are functional to their respective profiles, ignoring those events that contradict their personality traits (Korstanje 2010). This suggests the tourist experience is not derived from the sensations, expectancies and emotions after the travel ends, but it is prefixed in the biographical constitution of the self (Korstanje 2010). Doubtless, the same technique can be applied to dark tourism potential research to understand the motivations of this sub-segment overcoming the methodological barriers discussed in this piece.

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