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## Dark Tourism in an Increasingly Violent World

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### Introducing Dark Tourism and Death Consumption

This chapter theoretically examines dark tourism in an increasingly violent world. While early conceptualizations of dark tourism guide us in examining the phenomena of exposure to death-related tourism, a more violent age in a post-9/11, post-Charlie Hebdo world forces us to come to terms with a more violent existence. Violent death and orchestrated mass murder, once largely sequestered for many in the West, are now ever more evident in our own personal spaces and communities. Indeed, ISIS and violent extremism, not necessarily a stranger to those in the perpetually war-torn Middle East, is now in the forefront of the minds of those in the UK, Continental Europe and North America. Moreover, entertainment and the media incorporate increasingly violent narratives, including an emphasis on gruesome experiences in dystopian worlds whereby there is an embracing focus on moral decay, personal responsibility, and atrocity images (Podoshen et al. 2014). Resultantly, the study of death and its intersection with consumption has gained significant momentum in the literature (Dobscha et al. 2012; Dobscha 2016; Levy 2015; Podoshen 2016; Stone and Sharpley 2013; Venkatesh et al. 2014).

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Consequently, Podoshen et al. (2015a, b) note that a seemingly more violent world and a stronger closeness to death in contemporary society require new conceptualizations. As scholars, this requires a more forceful and direct approach to theory building in the realm of dark tourism. There are relationships and phenomena that cannot be explained by positivism alone or by existing conceptualizations. While positivism can assist us in strengthening existing frameworks and help in examining relationships between variables involved in dark tourism, both the discipline and the (visitor) experience require fresh theoretical inquiry. In this chapter, therefore, I present two particular conceptualizations of dark tourism consumption. These conceptualizations blend and bridge theory from tourism as well as consumption and consumer culture theory (CCT) (Ozcaglar-Toulouse and Cova 2010). Firstly, I discuss the relationship between conspicuous consumption and dark tourism, arguing that engaging in dark tourism in the age of the 'selfie' denotes *a form of signaling behavior* (Iqani and Schroeder 2016; also see Chap. 24). Secondly, I present the concept of dark tourism as *a form of preparation*. In this instance, engaging in dark tourism activities allows individuals to aptly prepare for a more violent existence. Thus in this chapter, I respond to Askegaard and Linnet's call for the strengthening of more macro-social frameworks of an exploratory nature in consumption-related research adjacent to the phenomenology of actual experiences (Askegaard and Linnet 2011). As a special note, I offer ideas that may be considered controversial by some. I do so wholeheartedly and in defense of non-positivism in dark tourism theory building. Ultimately, I argue that the positivist-dominated world of tourism studies can only take us so far in terms of explanation and breaking new ground in understanding the 'why' of tourist experiences.

## Dark Tourism as Signaling

Conspicuous consumption is a practice whereby one displays wealth through a high degree of luxury expenditure on consumption and services (Trigg 2001). It can also involve competitive or extravagant consumption practices as well as those that are niche or non-mainstream (Patsiaouras and Fichett 2012; Schaefer 2014). This consumption is often separated from general consumption in the sense that the primary need satisfied is prestige (Belk 1988), and that satisfaction is often tied very strongly from the admiration of others (Podoshen and Andrzejewski 2012; Wong 1997). As Segal and Podoshen (2013) explain, the concept and target of conspicuous consumption altered in the 1980s whereby luxury goods became accessible to many,

not just to the higher socio-classes. As such, those looking to display increased levels of conspicuousness moved from tangible items, which became obtainable by many, to more 'cutting edge' purchases such as liposuction and plastic surgery. Closely related to materialism conspicuous consumption, by its very definition, cannot be conspicuous if the consumption is not noticeable by others (Podoshen and Andrzejewski 2012). In other words, consumption needs to be hierarchal in order to maintain the social order. If everyone is able to display and consume the conspicuous item, the item is no longer conspicuous and merely becomes a commodity. For example, it is not enough to possess a Hermes handbag, but rather the exclusive and extremely limited Birkin bag (at US\$16,000). Of course, the ante rises as the prized consumption item becomes increasingly commoditized and thus available. Subsequently, the notion of 'luxury' is now accessible to the mass markets (Atwal and Williams 2009), and even very prestigious brands have created entry-level commodities. Therefore, it is unsurprising perhaps that current research in consumption alludes to a relationship between high uniqueness and high evaluation (Childs and Jin 2016). As what was once unique becomes more attainable, individuals will seek things that are even more unique. Arguably, at the same time, the role of materiality and conspicuous goods and services help maintain the social order, either for better or for worse, and as part of an externally based reference system (Heisley and Cours 2007; Chatterjee et al. 2000). As such, we can turn to tourism as an activity that allows for conspicuous consumption, and, as with tangible goods, finds itself moving in new directions to newer levels of conspicuousness.

Crouch (2013) considers tourism as a form of socially driven behavior and elucidates on how some individuals choose conspicuous destinations or experiences. Destinations can be perceived by others to be conspicuous or inconspicuous (Phillips and Back 2011), and travel choices can be influenced by the desire to enhance social identities (Sirgy and Su 2000). Carr (2005) suggests that some tourists are even willing to take on debt to go on holidays and that these holidays, when shared with peers, constitute a form of conspicuous consumption. This conspicuousness derives from a destination's image (Correia et al. 2014). Importantly, while sharing photos and stories about exotic and expensive destinations is nothing new, either inside or outside of social media, destinations or at least destination image and their perceptions are changing. For instance, recent news media have alluded to a growth in dark tourism especially that related to death and crime (Coldwell 2013; Podoshen 2013; Woollaston 2015) and have even raised issues of the 'selfie' spectacle at solemn destinations such as Auschwitz or at Ground Zero. As Murray (2015) notes, the selfie phenomenon is something many might associate with narcissism

and shallow personal representation, which, of course, mirrors that of thoughts associated with overtly conspicuous consumers. Arguably, therefore, social media-driven selfies at remote, shocking, or abject-oriented places put the tourist in a situation whereby s/he is attempting to display a more exclusive form of tourism—that is, moving ahead of and away from the pack. Thus, it is one thing to display oneself at a Four Seasons resort or similar exclusive tourist destination; it is another (even more exclusive) notion to share images and experiences at places many do not dare even attempt to visit. As Iqani and Schroeder (2016) argue, *nouveau* selfie styles are featuring people in front of open caskets and funerals. The selfie, as Gram (2013) also argues, can be a way for people to turn themselves into objects. Hence, if this idea is taken further, a selfie in a ‘rare’ or unique instance can allow an individual to turn *him/herself* into a *rare object*. The repulsiveness of the abject and fear of death, for many, then creates a unique landscape for the unique object creation and the ability to create a distinct narrative of the self.

Buda and Shim (2015a) present the idea of ‘a desire for novelty’ in their explanation for increases in North Korean tourism. They dovetail this with ‘danger-zone tourism’ in their introspection on dark tourism motivation in the greater public consumerscape (Buda et al. 2014). The capstone of this quest for the novel and dangerous is what they term ‘desire as recognition.’ In their sense, recognition by others which is valued by the tourist. In essence, this is a conspicuousness in consumption and clearly a form of signaling behavior. It is not a very far stretch to see the operationalization of their novel theory by examining the wealth of attention of the few who are able to tour North Korea. Undoubtedly, the communist implemented dystopia of North Korea allows the tourist to engage in tourism that may center on the secretive and the highly dangerous (Buda and Shim 2015b). Those who are able to successfully venture to North Korea are able to garner a great deal of press and maybe even an appearance or two on cable television programming (Vice 2015).

Disaster and atrocity tourism in today’s environment of selfie sticks and competitive conspicuousness requires a revised look at theory related to atrocity and disaster attractiveness. Ashworth and Hartmann (2005) provide a solid foundation in theorizing atrocity attraction and provide three main arguments for this type of tourism motivation. These are curiosity, empathy, and horror. Ashworth and Hartmann’s *curiosity* argument likens atrocity tourism to the quest for unique satisfaction of human curiosity—similar to the desire to visit Stonehenge or Niagara Falls. Meanwhile, *empathy* as a motivator relies on the ability and need to identify with the victims in the atrocity being toured. This offers some synergy with the educational value

and feelings of hope tourists can feel in disaster or grief tourism (Biran and Poria 2012; Seaton 2009; Sharpley 2009). Lastly, Ashworth and Hartmann posit *horror* as a motivation which goes back to our very nature and drive as humans to seek out fear and heightened emotional states—a morbid fascination with death (Seaton 1996; Seaton and Lennon 2004). Other scholars have put forth the notion that this type of tourism activity assists in the contemplation of one's own mortality (Stone and Sharpley 2008; Stone 2012). Therefore, contemplating one's own mortality at particular dark tourism sites provides an emotional state to share with others that is clearly unique and novel.

Biran et al. (2014) offer an interesting framework for understanding motivations to sites of disaster and carnage (also see Chap. 21). In particular, their examination of post-earthquake tourism determined that some tourists are actually motivated to tour disaster sites for leisure pursuits—including that of prestige. This is a significant finding in the sense that disaster tourism motivations are not just relegated to issues of understanding, empathy, or affect-oriented desires—they are also driven by status. However, while there has not been much exploration of this type of tourist motivation, it does appear that feelings of terror can have a positive effect on materialistic disposition (Rindfleisch and Burroughs 2004). These types of findings, which may be shocking to many, should not really surprise us in today's age as we witness individuals taking smiling selfies at Auschwitz or at Ground Zero for consumption on social media (Daily Mail 2014). It is not enough to tour a dark site, but you have to show that you have been there.

This then brings us back to the examination of the presentation of the self and the quest for uniqueness in a marketplace filled with ubiquity. Specifically, over a decade after Ashworth and Hartmann's (2005) work, I present here an additional motivation to consider—one based on conspicuousness and a desire to show others specific tourism activity as a form of signaling. Drawing upon Murray (2015), we integrate narcissism and the tendencies to promote one's selective and exclusive activities as a motivator. Indeed, both Carr (2015) and Acocella (2014) theorize that selfies are a product of a culture fixated on media and combined with high levels of self-absorption—an insatiable need to consume and display. One taking a selfie at a disaster site might not be as concerned with empathy or even helping victims, but rather in how others perceive the activity. By way of illustration, this may be similar to the American high school student who is only really concerned with playing video games and watching sport but spends some time cleaning up a local park (with photos to match) so that his/her

resume is padded for a better shot at getting into the university of his/her choosing. Therefore, the selfie in essence becomes a condensed and widely disseminated promotional message (Podoshen 2014). Tourists can post selfies at disaster sites, even in the act of 'helping the recovery,' and can immediately share their act of (conspicuous) aiding with potentially thousands of onlookers. The destination image, therefore, is one that embodies not just a mere signal of something in the vein of wealth or status but one that signals a heightened level of empathy—whether that empathy actually exists in the mind of the tourist or not. Arguably, empathetic and educational aspects of the destination matter far less than desire to promote one's own image. Promoting one's image and fishing for 'likes' is, of course, a key driver of social media in today's self-obsessed age. Potentially then we are left with outcomes of a destination image being altered through the meaning and exposure of dark tourism as individuals tour dark sites with a new feeling of vapidness.

In terms of altering or evolving meanings along the lines of dark tourism for conspicuous purposes, we have to re-examine the 'sequestration of death' thesis and the 'absent-present death' paradox Stone (2009) presents in explanation of dark tourism consumption. While Stone's theory clearly still holds strong in a wealth of dark tourism situations, for some 'dark tourists' there may be an evolution from the conceptualization of motivation based on reducing individual levels of anxiety related to death to that of confronting death with a conspicuous and daring zeal (also see Chap. 8). Potentially then, as death consumption becomes less sequestered in contemporary societies, there is the compounding goal of death-related tourism that is more and more dangerous and extreme. The more extreme, unique, and abject, the more attention the tourist might receive. Ultimately, this brings death fervently from private space into public consumption.

The modern ubiquity of social media spurs the commoditization of 'common' tourism destinations as does the newly wealthy tourists from Asia or Russia who previously did not exist in great numbers during the last major global consumption booms. With increased 'competition' emulating from social media sharing, the world becomes a more challenging place for one to stand out in the clutter. Images of abjection, death, or extreme behavior and images at dark sites, for now at least, still stand out and are going to draw attention. In this respect, the morality of dark tourism is likely to be questioned as tourists flock to places associated with death not necessarily for reflection and commemoration, but as a personal platform to engage in and display conspicuous behavior.

## Dark Tourism as Preparation

As noted earlier, an increasingly violent post-9/11 world means it is time to update conceptualizations and theory about dark tourism and ‘absent death.’ While the past 20 years has given us some interesting, if not contested, insights into the realm of death-related consumption and tourism, specifically related to dark heritage sites, the contemporary manifestation of real death, dying, and the abject (Kristeva 1982) has put death into more places to consume than ever before. Additionally, as our politically fractious world finds itself in seemingly never-ending conflict, the opportunities for death-related tourism are apparently increasing. Indeed, it is difficult to not consume death and abjection in today’s world, no matter how hard one tries to avoid it (Drummond and Krszjanek 2016). In the past, news media often sanitized images for public consumption; however, today through internet distributed ISIS propaganda videos, for example, individuals can view horrific, unsanitized, and unedited videos within seconds of the actual death event. Media and shared media sites such as Reddit allow us to witness real death/murder often very quickly after or during the event. For instance, in 2015 we witnessed a news reporter and cameraman murdered on live US television—and the question remains, is this an anomaly or merely a preview? However, in terms of dark tourism theory, novel insights must be synthesized and created to ensure fresh theory building in light of recent happenings in the media, politics, and a globalized world. With this in mind, it is important to contrast the study of death and tourism in the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 worlds.

Mellor (1993), Mellor and Shilling (1993), and Willmott (2000) all pointed to a sequestration of death in the pre-9/11 world whereby dying was conceptualized as a largely private affair. Hence, much of dark tourism scholarship that occurred during this time focused on heritage-based, (secular) pilgrimage or commemorative experiences that took tourists to physical locations of dark events but also allowed them to commemorate on their own and distance from actual killing (Ashworth 1996; Foley and Lennon 1996; Seaton 1996, 2002). However, after the Islamist terrorism attack in New York on 9/11, these conceptualizations of death (and dark tourism) started to evolve (also see Chap. 8). Indeed, Stone (2009) in his seminal essay—‘Making Absent Death Present: Consuming Dark Tourism in Contemporary Society’—critically examines the tourist gaze upon death and dying at Ground Zero whereby tourists are directly confronted with a sense of mortality. Stone (2009) notes the discourse of ‘actual’ death in the public sphere and its conceptualization as ‘taboo.’ Similarly, Sharpley (2012) suggests tourists can come

face to face with the remnants of genocidal actions and discusses the question of how 'genocidal tourism' can be a reality (also Beech 2009; Schaller 2007). As previously mentioned, this discourse and activity brings death—once absent in the contemporary gaze—to have a presence even though the inevitability of death continues to be disavowed. With the bloody rise of ISIS and increasing global violence and strife interspersed with economic upheaval, the presence of death and 'life-endings' becomes even more pervasive. This makes attempting to understand the escape of death even more compelling.

Adding to his earlier theory building, Stone (2012) introduces the philosophy of *bracketing* in his conceptualization of dark tourism consumption. Bracketing is a process whereby the tourist may feel or create a perceived immunity from death by engaging in dark tourist activity. This then allows the tourist to confront death with a neutralizing effect and a sanitization of the subject matter. It is important to note that Stone (2012) places bracketing within the confines of exposure to the relics of death and not the actual reality of death. In other words, tourists are consuming what once 'was' and not what 'now is.' We can integrate bracketing with Podoshen et al.'s (2015b), take on exposure to violent consumption, and deduce that there may be theoretical differences in why one exposes him/herself to death given the moderating factor of the closeness to the actuality of death in situ. In this respect, tourists in today's world searching and touring death as it happens may not be engaging in bracketing to sanitize the subject matter of death but rather to get closer to it in a rather non-sanitized form. For example, during the Gaza/Israel war of 2014, a number of tourists watched bombs and rockets in real-time, live as it happened (Mackey 2014). While some were disgusted by these events, it is plausible that the characterization of the tourists was not one of bloodlust or perverse pleasure but rather a closeness to the act of war itself—to see what might come next as enemy fire appeared to inch closer and closer. While Israeli citizens were, for years, largely isolated from Gaza-based rocket fire, the range of Hamas-fired weapons increased and this put Israeli citizens in a direct path of harm that previously was not there.

With this theoretical framework in mind, we are challenged to rethink (or even extend) the notion of morality in consuming dark tourism. Engaging in this type of activity is, for many, not voyeurism as Lennon and Foley (2000) generalized as the key motivating factor for dark tourism. Arguably, it is much more profound than that. Indeed, cheering or applauding in times of war is nothing new, but understanding the dispositions, thoughts, and emotions behind the cheers is paramount to assessing the entire picture. Of course, there are reasons for cheering that are firmly based in the emotional contagion, which is going to be at the cusp of this type of activity. However, there are also the factors of motivation and contemplation that occur before and



after the activity. Questions that may arise include: What motivated tourists to watch war unfold? Was it to cheer or was it something else? How do the tourists feel after engaging in cheering after close-up pictures of bodies are viewed, and those involved can witness the aftermath of destroyed homes and schools requires massive economic redevelopment at monstrous cost? To deride real-time dark tourism as merely emotionally based activity purveyed by bloodthirsty tourists, therefore, is shortsighted and problematic without understanding the antecedents and outcomes.

In the present climate, however, with lingering and violent realities ever close by we find ourselves in a world that has apparently gone backwards in race relations, has witnessed rapidly developing economic strife and collapse of markets, and a wealth of ambiguity about the future of humanity. There has been an increase of random acts of violence across the globe—even in places once thought to be ‘immune’ to it—for instance, recent terrorist attacks in Norway. Of course, this leads to an increasing number of sites and locations related to and immersed in death and disaster. At the same time, consumers have been flocking to more experiential consumption as traditional shopping experiences become more mundane and/or move to the online realm (Schmitt 1999; Williams 2006). Consumers searching for affect, once found in shopping malls and physical stores, find themselves looking for new venues that make the experience of consuming more than simply the act of purchasing required items. Cookie cutter shopping malls and the allure of leisurely mall experiences such as *Fast Times at Ridgmont High* are largely over. Arguably, therefore, dark tourism consumption for some people for some of the time fills that experiential void, and there has been some early work that has examined the burgeoning experientially minded immersion tourism experiences (Dalton 2014; Knudsen 2011a, b; Robb 2009).

## Understanding Dark Tourism: Emergent Perspectives

Heritage tourism allows a connection with the past and an ability to educate oneself about past events, culture, and history. Meanwhile dark tourism today can allow a connection with the future. Wars such as World War I have been labeled ‘the war to end all wars’ along with other shortsighted slogans, only to remind us that war is really never ending. Additionally, tourism to dark places not only allow us to connect or reconnect with events of the past and generate memories, but rather give us a unique perspective into what may happen to us in the future.

In recent years, dark tourism scholarship has permeated top journals in the field of tourism studies, and that's certainly a positive development. However, as discussed in this chapter, much about dark tourism has still yet to be discovered, and changing environments calls for casting a wider net in epistemology and ontology. With this, it is paramount that dark tourism inquiry be expanded in ways that the dominant positivist orientation cannot fully explain. Consumer culture theory (CCT) as a tradition (Arnould and Thompson 2005) can assist tourism scholars in the quest to build theoretical insights and address questions we ordinarily would not be able to answer or to reduce to simple positivist and normative inquiry. The nature of dark tourism today is multifaceted and multidimensional and that requires a blending and bridging of theory from multiple subject fields. In order to open up this path, dark tourism scholars should immerse themselves in the field and rely more strongly on interpretative methods that give rise to introspection based on lived experiences and the socializing function (Dunkley 2015; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) that may exist in the activity (Dunkley 2015). While some have embraced this method of inquiry wholeheartedly (Buda et al. 2014; Healy et al. 2016; Miles 2014; Reijnders 2011), there is still a great deal that remains unexplored or unexplored in significant detail at the field level. Prasad and Prasad (2002) and Sandberg (2005) demonstrate the value of interpretative methods in explaining the lived experiences of human behavior—yielding new forms of knowledge. Deep, immersive inquiry allows for more intensive and sharper identity work that can assist in understanding more nuanced subcultures of consumption which can elucidate the microcultures, consumer tribes (Cova et al. 2007), and consumption communities that underlie identity work (Arnould and Thompson 2015). Thus, while some may be turned off by tourism and related commerce that is intertwined with death, the reality is that we have just scratched the surface in understanding dark tourism phenomena. Areas of exploration in dark tourism are wide open.

As noted in Podoshen (2015), death consumption was once viewed as largely commemorative, religious, or historical. Later, some likened it to morbid fascination or mere curiosity. Today, however, individuals across the globe are more prone in their search for answers in their ever increasingly violent world with death right on their doorstep, in their markets, their concert halls or public squares. Death consumption can no longer be derided as a mere transgressive activity or something people might engage in for 'fun' but rather as part of quest for deeper immersion in the world we actually exist in.

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