

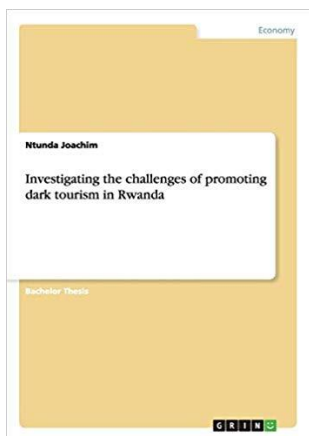
Review

Investigating the Challenges of Promoting Dark Tourism in Rwanda

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When I was a student, I was told that tourism is one of the most significant and largest industries of the World. Through tourism, local economies are revitalized according to the fluxes of foreign investment as well as the benefits of the multiplication factor. However, further investigations

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suggest that over the recent decades, its sense of attractiveness has substantially shifted towards more morbid ways. An emergent new segment which was named by academicians as *Dark tourism* is here to stay during a considerable lapse of time.

As the previous backdrop, two ethical assumptions should be taken into considerations. On one hand, dark tourism takes different shapes and contextual landscape according to hosting cultures. Dark sites not only contain the suffering of victims and their memories, which are negotiated with survivors, but a set of different allegories aimed at explaining why the traumatic event happened. The ground-zero for Americans takes a different connotation than Auschwitz for Germans or Polishes. From this point of departure moves J. Ntunda who proffers an interesting book which debates to what extent Rwanda is a fertile ground for implanting dark tourism. Let's clarify readers that Rwanda historically experienced a bloody and devastating civil war which left almost a million of Rwandans killed as long as 100 days-period.

The author interrogates to what extent dark tourism would be a product to be fostered in Rwanda. Based on formal interviews done over 43 specialists who take part of RDB [Rwanda Development Board], Ntunda holds that several incompatibilities which include lack of skilled staff and problems in the accessibilities to the site prevent today dark tourism would be a valid option. However, we live in a hyper-globalized world where information is produced, packaged and disseminated in minutes to a broader audience. In this new world, there is no place to hide. Therefore, specialists and policymakers should promote Rwanda taking advantage of global sources and the information which is digitally designed.

To some extent, the theory of branding and its application to sites of mass death plays a leading role in the process of embellishing a tragedy. For his insight, death is part of our consumers' society and during years humans have obsessed to gaze 'other's death'. Although originally the terrorist attacks to New York shocked American popular parlance, Ntunda adds, today it is one of the most attractive tourist destinations of the city. The same applies in Paris to Diana's accident. The case of Rwanda reveals a colonial past where violence and cruelty were everywhere, if not marking the character of the population. This bloody legacy accompanies the rise and ends of different coups and civil wars that devastated Rwanda for years. Tourism not only brings with poverty relief but also revitalizes the material asymmetries of modern capitalism. Behind the financial aid underdeveloped nations receive from tourism, lies the needs of progress and economic maturation.

Under some conditions, tourism fails to improve the conditions of exploitations or the gap between having and have-nots. This seems to be one of the goals of this fascinating research which forms in five chapters. While the first introductory chapter provides with the objectives, methodologies and ethical reasons of the book, the second concentrates in a review of the already-existent literature.

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The third chapter focuses on the limitations problems which will be continued once the investigation ends. The fourth chapter reconsiders not only the interpretation of gathered information but the new guidelines for the years to come. This led Ntunda to conclude that dark tourism would help to foster a rapid and substantial reconstruction of Rwanda in a not-so-distant future. Part of his cue comes from Stone's accounts (2012), which focus on dark tourism as an instrument towards the understanding of human pain.

Beyond the debate, dark tourism is discussed as a marketable place for new investors but at the same time as an anthropological attempt to domesticate death –once the process of secularization considerably advanced. It is worth mentioning some critical voices have alerted on the alienatory nature of dark tourism, but this does not apply in all contexts. In some cases, neighbors and survivors constructed dark site to pay homage their victims while foreign tourists contributed to local economy.

In a nutshell, the reviewed book which takes part of author's dissertation reflection on the symbolic force of death to create value (business) and attractiveness, at the best reminding that the as a phenomenon dark tourism has much to say. In consonance with Stone (2012), Ntunda acknowledges dark tourism is not a new issue, simply because it can be found in the medieval history. Equally important, as a side of heritage, dark tourism alludes to the possibilities of poverty-relief according to the interests first world tourists cultivate for Rwanda. In sum, Ntunda's book rests on the tradition of dark-tourism-as- heritage, which signals to the potentialities of heritage to touristificate the suffering.

Although Stone (2012) and Ntunda's stances are illustrative of what a great portion of scholarship (at least within tourism) thinks, three points should be in-depth discussed. First and most important, pilgrims -in Medieval Age- were not curious nor they were interested in visiting Saint's Tombs to learn further about their lives. Rather, they accepted the sacrifice to redeem a sin, or as a tribute to God. The pleasure maximization factor was not present in medieval days. Secondly, the quest for gazing death is a postmodern drive, stimulated by what we dubbed as 'thana Capitalism' (Korstanje 2016), in which case first world gazers reinforce their ethnocentrism through the consumption of others' suffering.

Even what is worst, as Tzanelli (2016) observed, behind dark consumption there is a logic of exploitation which derives from colonialism and the colonial rule. Today's dark commoditization poses a distorted message regarding the reasons of disasters, hiding –or blaming others- respecting the consequences. This means that first world tourists never internalize the suffering of the colonial bodies, they are incognizant of the cruelty perpetrated by their respective nation-states in the periphery. Dark tourism offers an interesting academic field of future investigations as Ntunda says,

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but ethics should be incorporated in the debate. To what extent dark tourism would help in setting Rwanda free from its dependency from European powers still remains an open question only with some accuracy the time will answer.

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