Enlightening the "Dark" in Dark Tourism: Re-conceptualising Dark Tourism in the Era of Late Capitalism

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Abstract

Over the past 50 years, dark tourism has seen exponential growth in terms of both physical and digital contexts. Dark tourism is primarily a concentration around documented accounts of physical violence, and theorisations centred on dark tourism studies have generally fallen within either behavioural or interpretivist perspectives. Such perspectives are indicative of the continually evolving nature of dark tourism and its receptiveness to new definitions, conceptual frameworks, and theorisations. Taking this into consideration, this chapter seeks to develop and broaden the notion of "dark tourism" within the era of late capitalism by presenting fresh theoretical perspectives stemming from critical criminological frameworks. Specifically, in drawing upon critical notions of violence and the emerging deviant leisure framework, this chapter will aim to instigate fresh academic enquiry into the nature of dark tourism, expand its theoretical underpinnings, and subsequently provide a means in which to examine how banal forms of tourism play an integral part in the proliferation of some of the most serious harms that populate the contemporary neoliberal landscape.

Keywords

Dark Tourism; Late-Stage Capitalism; Violence; Harm; Deviant Leisure

Introduction

Dark tourism primarily centres around well-documented and often widely publicised instances of physical violence that disrupt the ordinary course of day-to-day life (Žižek, 2008). When delving into the realm of dark tourism, one encounters a strong emphasis on this form of bodily or, as Galtung (1969) defines, direct violence. This emphasis can be observed, for instance, in renowned attractions associated with Victorian-era serial killer "Jack the Ripper" in London, the so-called "murder castle" attributed to H.H. Holmes in Chicago. Additionally, there are locations dedicated to showcasing bodily violence, such as the Alcatraz East Crime Museum in Tennessee, the Museum of Death in Los Angeles, and the Museum of Death in New Orleans. Established as commemorations of historical occurrences, such as the Auschwitz concentration camps in Poland, the Choeung Ek killing field in Cambodia, and the Jeju 4:3 memorial in South

Korea, also falls within the area. Furthermore, within this sector, there are well-known destinations related to prison tourism, exemplified by the Karosta prison hotel in Latvia and Dartmoor prison in Devon. Academic discussions commonly characterise dark tourism as encompassing locations associated with death and grief worldwide, attracting tourists with a wide range of motivations (Bathory, 2018), and 'those tourists who [are] interested in the memorialisation of the dead, who were concerned with historical atrocity and evil' (Hooper, 2016: 2). Sharpley (2009) observes that individuals have long been drawn to locations or occurrences connected, in some manner, to death, calamity, and anguish. According to Sharpley (ibid), the expansion of general tourism over the last five decades has paralleled the substantial growth of dark tourism, both in physical destinations and the digital realm. This surge in the creation of dark tourist attractions has, naturally, sparked considerable academic examination. For example, scholarly literature typically investigates apparent ethical dilemmas (Lisle, 2004), marketing-related issues (Seaton, 1996), challenges in interpretation (Cooper, 2006), and site management matters, including the need to ensure respect for the victims (Blom, 2000).

Whilst these are all important and valid avenues of enquiry, this chapter aims to enhance the existing critique by incorporating significant viewpoints from modern criminological research to expand the examination of dark tourism. This expansion is particularly relevant as we progress toward the apocalyptic zero-point, marked by growing inequality and environmental deterioration (Žižek, 2010). We have so far briefly outlined the broad conceptual threads that bring together most academic work concerned with dark tourism in which violence, death and tragedy are central. Nonetheless, Sharpley (2009) acknowledges that the field is ready for additional conceptual exploration (pg.12). This chapter, in turn, endeavours to contribute to this advancement by examining and elaborating on the connection between dark tourism and violence at a deeper philosophical level. In doing so, this chapter argues that some of the most banal and culturally accepted forms of tourism generate far more harm than the orthodox examples outlined above. To locate and capture such harms, we will also need to look outside of conventional dark tourism theorisations and towards the emerging deviant leisure perspective. Specifically, its concentration on the adverse effects of commonplace and culturally ingrained forms of commercialised leisure offers a pathway to transcend normative accounts and theorisations related to dark tourism.

This chapter will commence by establishing the essential background in the remit of dark tourism, paying particular attention to the various conceptions and interpretations of this term. Subsequently, our focus will shift to prior theories concerning dark tourism, with specific emphasis on the two primary perspectives: the behavioural and interpretive approaches. We will then introduce critical viewpoints on violence and the deviant leisure framework to provide the requisite theoretical underpinnings for our later discussion.

Dark Tourism: The Usual Suspects

The public's fascination surrounding death has long been ingrained within our society before an 'official' definition of dark tourism was developed (Foley and Lennon, 1996). Early illustrations of death-related tourism included the Roman colosseums for gladiatorial games and the turnout crowds for public executions in medieval central London (Stone, 2006), making this type of tourism a phenomenon that has become both widespread and diverse over the last century (Ashworth and Isaac, 2015). Smith (1998), for instance, suggests that sites or destinations associated with war constitute the 'largest single category of tourist attractions in the world' (pg. 205). However, war-related attractions, yet diverse, remain one of the numerous tourist destinations associated with death and suffering (Stone, 2006). From graveyard tours (Raine, 2013), the holocaust (Heřmanová and Abrhám, 2015), sites of devastation (Sharpley, 2005) and the macabre (Ibrahim, 2015), the dark tourism industry continues to thrive due to its ability to connect people to the past through objects, exhibits, spaces and dramatic recreation (McDaniel, 2018). Therefore, there has been a growing recognition that it is important to consider the social, cultural, and geographical contexts in which people consume dark tourism and its theoretical underpinnings (Hohenhaus, 2013).

Despite growing awareness, academic enquiry into dark tourism tends to be 'theoretically fragile' (Hooper, 2016: 4). A fact with which we would concur. Studies into dark tourism are highly 'eclectic' (ibid), with terms such as 'thanatourism' (Seaton, 1996), 'morbid tourism' (Blom, 2000), 'black spot tourism' (Rojek, 1993), and 'fright tourism' (Bristow and Newman, 2004) all being proposed and interjected into the dark tourism vernacular. Stone (2006) perhaps provides the most succinct classification that synthesises these seemingly disparate terminologies into a coherent definition, which is the 'act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre' (cited in Sharpley, 2009: 10). Dann (1998)

provides some distinction to this somewhat broad definition, generating a series of categorisations that distil dark tourism to ‘Perilous Places’ (i.e. dangerous destinations), ‘Houses of Horror’ (i.e. dungeons of death), ‘Fields of Fatality’ (i.e. the holocaust), ‘tours of torment’ (i.e. locations where the murder took place), and ‘Themed Thanatos’ (i.e. morbid museums). While such categorisations provide some distinctions between such forms of tourism, they again provide minimal attention towards theoretical considerations and such works of largely, as stated by Sharpley (2009), descriptive in nature.

There is also confusion in dark tourism studies as to whether a location being purposefully produced for the consumption of death makes it “darker” or, “less dark”. Sharpley (2005) argues that the deliberate classifying of encounters intended to satisfy a wish to consume death is much darker. Conversely, Stone (2006) suggests that these types of sites are often highly mediated, and the darkest experiences are conversely more authentic in comparison to these mediated forms. As noted by Denham (2023), in online spaces, we have a meeting of these two opposing stances – with user-generated content appearing in almost real-time being extremely organic but curated in a contrived and artificial ‘space’ and setting. Stone (2006) refers to dark tourism as ‘a diverse and fragmented […] product’ (pg. 157) – and this is perhaps best illustrated and evidenced within the fractured spaces of the internet. Certainly, the internet is a place that some users go to recreationally consume death – and by that definition, we can understand some internet spaces as Dark Tourist attractions within the traditional sense. The internet has been studied alongside dark tourism principally as a mode to improve or complement the dark tourist experience for traditional, physical sites (Bolan and Simone-Charteris, 2018), but there is scope to consider the internet’s role more broadly, ‘as a destination in and of itself’ (Denham, 2023). However, despite a long history and evidence to support societies' eagerness to visit such places and now digital locations (Tarlow, 2007), our collective understanding of what dark tourism encompasses remains delicate and lacks cohesion.

Dark Tourism: Existing Theorisations

In the realm of dark tourism, various theoretical perspectives have been proposed, including the interpretivist and behavioural viewpoints. The interpretivist perspective suggests that these sites require an emotionally charged interpretation of a war or conflict to convey a specific event’s “authentic” significance or meaning (Uzzell, 1989) more effectively. This perspective

has also given rise to further discussions concerning stakeholders (Ashworth, 1996), debates about historical accuracy (Muzaini *et al.*, 2007), and the distortion and displacement of the historical legacy associated with such locations (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996).

In contrast, the behavioural position focuses on tourists' motivations rather than the specific characteristics of locations. It introduces the concept of a "continuum of intensity," which is contingent on the reasons for visiting specific sites and whether those reasons are general or personal, such as visiting with a relative (Seaton, 1996). Within this framework, several motivations have been identified, including morbid curiosity and a shared sense of identity 'in response to disruptive events in collective life routines' (Rojek, 1997: 61).

Seaton (1996) categorises dark tourism activities into five distinct categories, which include travelling to witness public representations of death, visiting sites where individual or mass deaths have occurred, touring memorial or internment sites, exploring symbolic representations of death and re-enactments of specific events, and observing re-enactments of death. Sharpley (2009) highlights that this array of diverse theoretical perspectives has 'facilitated the deconstruction of many overarching assumptions related to dark tourism' and has laid the groundwork for further conceptual analysis (pg. 12).

Beyond the Physical: Critical Notions of Violence

We will now move attention away from previous theorisations to the importance of violence. Robb (2009) stresses that dark tourism primarily consists of 'visiting destinations at which violence is the main attraction' (pg. 51). So, too, Gillen (2018) highlights the importance of violent performances and enactments of violence to dark tourist spots. We will now critically examine the pivotal role of violence. To be clear, this chapter does not aim to undermine its significance, but rather seeks to broaden our comprehension of the essence of violence within the vocabulary and conceptual framework of dark tourism studies. In doing so, it will seek to shine a light on those forms of tourism that have been, ironically, left in the dark.

Ray (2011) states that the social context in which the enactment and comprehension of violence occur holds significant relevance. Stanko's (2001) frequently referenced definition of violence, which pertains to an individual who inflicts or poses a threat of 'physical, sexual, or

psychological harm to others or themselves' (pg. 316), is commonly employed in scholarly discussions. Notably, it becomes evident that this conceptualisation of violence forms the foundation for most conventional manifestations and, thus, academic discussions on dark tourism.

Inclusive interpretations of violence strive to encompass types of harm that may be significant without necessarily being physical in nature. Galtung's (1969) concept of 'structural violence' is particularly noteworthy in this context. According to Galtung's framework, elements such as job insecurity and the reduction of welfare entitlements can all fall within the category of structural violence. Žižek (2008) further elaborates on the notion of 'structural violence.' In his characteristic dialectical reversal, he redirects our attention not toward forms of violence that disrupt what is considered a civilised norm but rather toward the actual formation and perpetuation of this civilised norm itself. Such violence is necessary for the continuation of consumer-driven societies. Therefore, these forms of violence should be regarded as a benchmark against which we can evaluate other types of violence (in Žižek's tripartite schema, these are subjective violence and symbolic violence). Subjective violence constitutes direct violence committed by a clearly identifiable individual or entity, while symbolic violence encompasses symbols, signs, words, and narratives that signify the implicit, unacknowledged violence inherent in capitalist intersubjective domination. Žižek employs Lacan's concept of the Symbolic to elucidate an implicit system of authority and oppression that transcends subjective (direct) manifestations of violence. As pointed out by Recuero (2015: 1), while objective violence is readily discernible within the backdrop of "normality", it is precisely within this backdrop that symbolic violence exists, upholding the current status quo through language. This Žižekian perspective holds significant potential for expanding our understanding of what constitutes dark tourism and the motivations behind tourists' visits to such destinations.

Deviant Leisure

Within the field of criminology, it is essential to utilise critical theoretical frameworks capable of addressing harms that extend beyond conventional understandings of both crime and deviance. The term "deviance" often refers to behaviours that deviate from societal norms. In contrast, beyond these normative views of deviance, the concept of "leisure" in a consumer

capitalist society has evolved from being considered a 'moral good' to a 'moral right' (Raymen and Smith, 2019: 122). Engaging in leisure activities allows us to exercise individual agency and express internal desires on cultural, economic, and political levels (Rojek, 2010). This sentiment has also been reflected in previous criminological research, where leisure took the forefront only when leisure behaviours crossed legal boundaries or when scholars erroneously identified proto-political resistance in leisure and consumerism (Raymen and Smith, 2019: 115). However, these perspectives have started to face critiques.

Deviant Leisure constitutes an intricate and advanced theoretical framework (Raymen and Smith, 2019, 2020; also see Smith, 2019). Although limitations in space prevent a comprehensive exploration of all its fundamental aspects, this chapter primarily focuses on its categorisation of subjective, environmental, socially corrosive, and embedded harms to provide a framework for discussing this reconceptualisation of dark tourism. By incorporating ultra-realist theory in conjunction with contemporary cultural criminological research and zemiology, Raymen and Smith (2019) introduce a theoretical framework that transcends the boundaries of criminology. With such theoretical foundations, deviant leisure shifted its focus towards redefining social deviance and delving into examining how individual, social, economic, and environmental harms are intricately woven into various widely accepted and normalised leisure activities. This shift emphasises the necessity for criminologists to expand their horizons beyond the boundaries of socio-legal definitions of crime and venture into the domain of harm.

Zemiology, the study of harm, becomes essential to acknowledge the widespread presence of harms ingrained in the consumer capitalist system buoyed by an ever-evolving legal structure. An illustrative example is the profound consequences of the online gambling industry, where a culture of indebtedness, 'family instability, and detrimental patterns of consumption' have been recorded in the context of the online gambling industry (Raymen and Smith, 2020a:1). This perspective has also been used to examine the rise in substance use within the night-time economy (Ayres, 2019) and the negative consequences of luxury tourism, including the environmental impacts associated with travel and the development of tourist infrastructure (Smith, 2019). The deviant leisure perspective sheds light on broader harms that escape the notice of other criminological viewpoints linked to leisure and the existing conceptualisations and theories related to dark tourism. Within the deviant leisure perspective, there are four main

categories of harm: subjective harms; environmental harms; socially corrosive harms; and embedded harms. The following sections will now examine each of these harms as we introduce several tourist destinations not conventionally considered as forms of dark tourism.

Subjective Harms

Subjective forms of harm evoke Žižek's notion of subjective violence but are refined within the context of leisure, with Smith (2016) stating that it 'involve[s] an identifiable perpetrator visiting harm upon an identifiable victim in action related to a defined leisure activity' (pg. 7). Whilst such a definition locates clear and identifiable agents behind such actions within leisure contexts, within the remit of dark tourism, we argue that such manifestations are often opaquer. It is this very murkiness that proves to be far more damaging than conventional forms of dark tourism in which violence is its primary attraction.

For instance, certain corporations are now beginning to draw upon leisure and, more pertinently, tourism tropes to evade critical attention towards their treatment of employees. Perhaps a good starting point would be Amazon's introduction of both in-person and virtual fulfilment centre tours. Amazon initially launched their warehouse tours in 2014, in which they stated that members of the public can now visit such facilities, which the company deemed "safer than a department store" (Cook, 2014). The tour, which you can either arrange to attend in-person, virtually, or watched via pre-recorded videos on YouTube, provides an insight into the mechanisation behind your Amazon order when you click checkout on the website or app. This tour, which follows the procedures from receiving an order to its eventual outbound journey for delivery, present a very positive, friendly, and safe work environment. However, is this indicative of the everyday experiences of working for Amazon? Here we need to recognise the symbolic violence that 'naturalises the discourse about things and legitimates the domination system' (Recuero, 2015: 1) and draw upon documented accounts of working in such environments.

The authenticity of conventional forms of dark tourism has been a prevailing theme within academic studies, with many sites having been extensively reconstructed. This 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1973) of life as an Amazon worker can be witnessed in such tours but ultimately implies an authenticity that is not there, often presenting a sanitised and

unrealistic representation far removed from actual working conditions. For instance, studies have shown that Amazon employees often perceive their jobs as physically demanding and alienating, imposed by strict management and surveillance (Alimahomed-Wilson and Reese, 2021). This was highlighted in the investigative podcast *Megacorp* (2022), where various individuals were interviewed, including an undercover journalist and a former inmate who likened the workplace conditions to be even more unbearable than the prison where he had been incarcerated. The journalist disclosed that employees could accrue "idle points" whenever they exceeded a certain duration for bathroom breaks. When someone amassed sufficient idle points, they could face a "disciplinary point," and accumulating too many of these marks could lead to termination. The increasing performance goals and demands have had a substantial effect on the well-being of employees, with 55% of Amazon UK workers indicating that they have experienced depression during their tenure at the company (McCarthy, 2018). Such demands have also resulted in 'backaches, knee pain, and other symptoms of constant strain [that] are common enough for Amazon to install painkiller vending machines' (Newton, 2020). Deaths have also been reported, with the National Council for Occupational Safety and Health's report (2019) citing six US Amazon worker deaths between 2018 and 2019 (pg. 12). In one incident where a man died after suffering a heart attack, workers were "forced to go back to work. No time to decompress. Basically, watch a man pass away and then get told to go back to work" (Sainato, 2019).

With these points in mind, the way Amazon ultimately attempts to conceal and remove traces of such forms of harm speaks to a far more insidious relationship with violence. We are witnessing an inversion of sorts, in which instead of attempting to profit from the display of violence, companies such as Amazon are instead attempting to maintain "business as usual" and ensure we, the consumer-turned-tourist, do not ponder or reconsider our use of their services. Amazon is also not alone in this attempt to conceal the violent realities of their working conditions, with companies such as Boohoo launching in-person and virtual tours in 2021 (Rodgers, 2021) and Shein using pre-recorded videos of warehouses on TikTok (Shein_Official, 2022) – indicating a growth in such practices in order to conceal the harsh realities of many employees within the era of late-capitalism. Here we see how the process of green-washing (Vollero, 2022) has been co-opted by corporations who increasingly utilise what we would term "leisure-washing" to propel sublimination of recognition within the context of the subjective harms their business models necessitate.

Environmental Harms

Drawing upon the increasing recognition of harms upon the environment as a necessity of criminological attention (Beirne and South, 2007), Smith (2016) observes the utility of such perspectives for understanding the harmful nature of contemporary leisure pursuits. He notes that, from the deviant leisure perspective, the harms of the engagement of leisure should not be the limitation of this green perspective. Rather, the lens allows us to analyse how the wider culture, engulfed in an entrenched mode of competitive individualism is spurned on by consumer culture. This culture creates, maintains and necessitates desire for ornamental consumerism (Hall, Winlow and Ancrum, 2008) in the form of Instagram-able moments (Woods, 2023) and unique, exotic experiences. Through the deviant leisure lens though, the environmental impact of such desires is laid bare. Within this context, Smith (2016) highlights the challenges of destinations such as the Maldives. Increasingly, the luxury destination is synonymous with honeymoons, and the idealised image of a post-wedding luxury destination is synonymous with honeymoons and the idealised image of a post-wedding paradise (Smith, 2019). Employing special liberty (Hall, 2012), brides and grooms disregard the litany of harms perpetrated against the local ecology of the Maldives archipelago, with the government creating the world's largest "garbage island" called "Thilafushi" to which waste is disposed of and burned to cope with the overwhelmed local infrastructure (Smith, 2019; Smith and Smith, 2023). Within this context, the environmental harms perpetrated for the opportunity of the perfect Instagram-able moment, taken on a phone that works due to the cobalt within it - often mined by impoverished children in the global south (Kara, 2022) - is available for the deserving individual at the cost of the local environment: increased carbon emissions and decimated eco-systems.

Away from the extremities of luxury tourism, the very nature of tourism, which is increasingly global in nature and more accessible than ever before, offers a litany of environmental harms. White (2019) notes that the leading cause of transportation CO_2 emissions is from aviation, with most of these flights being used for tourism. These staggering contributions to the process of global warming do not cease upon the arrival of the tourist, however. As White notes, upon the arrival of the average tourist, they increasingly have the expectation to eat cuisine they are accustomed to available at their hotel, further compounding the consumer's carbon footprint

when we account for the carbon accumulation of moving huge amounts of food across the globe to be available at the hotel buffet the next morning (ibid.). A plethora of environmental harms linked to tourism have been identified in recent years. These include the decimation of local habitats for tourist developments such as beaches (Smith and Smith, 2023), hiking routes (Garrihy, 2023), and mountainsides (Smith, 2023). Harms against animals are in abundance, ranging from overweight, gluttonous western tourists riding donkeys up the slopes of Santorini (Smith, 2019), defanged tigers being petted by visitors in zoos in Thailand (Alberts, 2018) and exhausted elephants tramping through the forests of Vietnam with tourists on their back under the coercion of a mahout brandishing a flail (Chen, 2023). The overt death of animals often becomes the focus of the tourists' pursuit. Prime examples of this include the slaughter of local wildlife in the form of canned hunting (Smith, 2019; Berry and Potter, 2023) and for the use in African Traditional Medicine as a psychopharmacological novelty for tourists (Nurse, 2023). Perhaps most stark, however, are the routine yet sublime examples of man's detrimental effect upon the environment, such as a taxidermied North American Black Bear that died from the ingestion of a large amount of cocaine it found next to the body of a deceased drug trafficker. As Linnemann (2023) observes, rather than reflect on the grim nature of American hedonism and the ecological cost of the war on drugs that the bear's grim biography captures so vividly, its carcass was turned into a tourist attraction and placed in a gift shop to attract would-be consumers.

Socially Corrosive Harms

The third category of harm proposed by Raymen and Smith (2019) is the socially corrosive forms. Within this context, they draw acknowledgement of the socially corrosive nature of contemporary society. Acknowledging Baudrillard's recognition of the 'death of the social' within an increasingly consumer-oriented society, socially corrosive harms recognise the ever more atomised and cynical nature of individuality that disregards the importance of collective interests (Young, 1999, Atkinson, McKenzie and Winlow, 2017). Drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalysis put forth by Žižek (2002), they observe how consumer culture underpins the economy and has thus forced a reformation of the super-ego towards a 'cultural injunction to enjoy'. The super-ego no longer acts to temper our desires; rather, it is driven by intense anxiety of missing out (Raymen and Smith, 2019: 23). The super-ego drives the individual forward through a compulsion to fill the void with enjoyment to offer a temporary escape from the

culture of anxiety that drives contemporary consumer life. Within the context of modern life, however, in which identity is formulated and exhibited through consumerism, the void can only be filled for fleeting moments in a world where freedom is increasingly un-free. Freedom of choice is increasingly limited to a range of consumer products (Lasch, 1985 in Raymen and Smith, 2019). Smith (2016) recognises the necessity for social researchers to recognise:

> ...the potential for leisure to cut individuals adrift from the social, contribute to the further erosion of social institutions such as family, class, community, and exacerbate the fragmented and individualized nature of the social under late capitalism *(*Smith, 2016: 8-9).

The range of socially corrosive harms within the context of tourism can be identified across the social strata. Smith (2019) builds upon the work of Young (1999) and Atkinson (2020) in analysing the "exclusive" society. Within this context, he highlights how leisure zones are increasingly demarcated based on both wealth and cultural capital. Within this context, he highlights ex-president Donald Trump's luxury golf courses that engulfed a huge swathe of the Aberdeenshire coastline. Destinations of permanence do not hold the monopoly on corrosive harms, however.

Hayward (2023) details such harms within the context of the Burning Man Festival in recent years. The festival, beginning in 1991, attracts over 80,000 visitors yearly to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada for nine days each August. Originally, the event and the conduct of those who attended were driven by ten fundamental principles: radical inclusion, gifting, decommodification, radical self-reliance, radical self-expression, communal effort, civic responsibility, leaving no trace, participation and immediacy (Hayward, 2023:143). In recent years, though, many of these guiding and pro-social principles have been increasingly corroded by increasing commercialisation underpinned by social media, price hikes for tickets and a deluge of wealthy attendees who arrive on makeshift airstrips and rushed to luxury encampments in which they are attended to by paid staff.

Within the context of dark tourism within the global south, however, much more devastating examples are in abundance driven by the pursuit for exclusive and individualised experiences by primarily western tourists. The disregard for the collective interests of communities and wider society in the pursuit of enjoyment sees the disregard of human rights. For example, the

hosting of the World Cup by Qatar in 2022 was underpinned by human rights violations against migrant workers contracted to rapidly build infrastructure for the games (Gallacher, 2023). Here we see that disregard for other individual's welfare take primacy. The 1950s saw the onset of wealthy American tourists within Nepal, shortly followed by younger American and European tourists through to the 1970s across the 'hippie trail' (Smith, 2023b). Coinciding with the influx in tourism was the arrival of Tibetan refugees escaping the persecution of the Chinese government. Smith (ibid.) details that Kathmandu quickly became a regional hotspot for cultural artefacts, which were routinely sold by refugees struggling to survive. Vast private collections were soon accumulated across America and Europe. Museum collections in the west continued to bloat as tourism increased, and huge swathes of artefacts from temples and sacred sites across Nepal were looted into the 1980s. The collection of objects to satisfy the compulsion to display individuality is not exclusive to physical objects. As Large (2019) notes, increasingly, individuals focus on collecting experiences to increase social capital and demark individualism. Drawing upon the example of charity tourism, much in the way that Woods (2023) explored, Large (2019) demonstrates how ornamental consumerism has transcended the physical world and grown to include the consumption of experiences to bolster social capital. Underpinning this transition within contemporary leisure spaces, however, is the othering of the locals within the tourist destination. This is perhaps most overtly demonstrated within the work of Frankis and Patel Nascimento (2023), who detail the tours of Brazilian Favelas and the commodification of violence and the lived realities of inhabitants. Whilst much of the tourism is a key exemplar of edgework (Lyng, 2005)with tourists motivated by visiting areas they deem as risky, much of the tourism was underpinned by sex work (Frankis and Patel Nascimento, 2023).

Embedded Harms

The vast majority of leisure cultures are within the fourth harm of the deviant leisure perspective, embedded within legitimate consumer markets (Raymen and Smith, 2019). Within the context of embedded harms, Raymen and Smith propose the most ubiquitous example is gambling, noting its penetration of leisure cultures in such an extensive manner. They note that gambling has become synonymous with sports, the nighttime economy and online spaces despite the myriad of harms such activities imbue (Raymen, 2019; Brown and Osman, 2019; Raymen and Smith, 2020a; Raymen and Smith, 2020b; Niklin *et al.*, 2021). As

Raymen and Smith (2019) note, as gambling becomes more embedded within routine leisure cultures, the act of betting becomes *irretrievably entangled* with the individual's identity. Within the context of tourism, this arguably transcends the context of the individual and can be understood within the context of space and place. Take, for example, Las Vegas, the City of Sin, which is inseparable from the notions of American excess and gambling. The city is *irretrievably entangled* with the casino industry and, due to this, a leading tourist destination for hedonists across the globe. Arguably, liminal spaces in which the typical rules of society do not apply, changing the nature of those areas entirely. The obvious example of this are the city centres, whose functions change fundamentally to cater to drinkers and hedonists in the nighttime economy (Hayward and Hobbs, 2007). Las Vegas, centred around hedonism and excess is an obvious and extreme example of how such leisure spaces become embedded within the context of tourism. Within the global south, however, new incarnations of Las Vegas are rapidly developing. Macau has long been a go-to destination for lifestyle gamblers. In recent years though, an African doppelgänger of Las Vegas has been rapidly developing in Lagos (Business Post, 2020). In an effort to boost the Nigerian economy through the tourism industry, Lagos is rapidly being transformed into a liminal destination in which gambling, drinking and partying are embedded and essential to the local infrastructure.

Liminal spaces, however, are no longer limited to the physical. Technology has created new digital spaces (Atkinson and Rodgers, 2015; Atkinson, 2019; Denham, 2023) in which the usual social rules do not apply. As such, another area that can be identified as culturally embedding harms can be found within social media. Just as gambling within its culturally embedded form has demonstrated an ability to become central to the shaping of identity and presentation of self (Raymen and Smith, 2019), social media has taken primacy within this context. The pervading nature of social media to frame social interaction has had an implicit influence on tourism globally. As Large (2019:331) notes, 'in a society of competitive individualists, distinguishing oneself from the masses in a key cultural drive'. As social media has become a more influential and embedded tool that individuals can utilise to do this, its influence on tourism has been substantial. Volunteer tourism has been increasingly utilised to distinguish oneself (ibid.) with the lines between tourism and volunteering increasingly blurred (Woods, 2023). Woods (2023) recognised the growth of 'voluntourism' in Cambodia. He noted those who engage in such tourism are more concerned with the aesthetic of themselves as a

‘hero humanitarian’ on their social media than actually enacting change for the ‘suffering subjects’ next to which they pose.

Gore Capitalism, Thanatophilia and Graze Culture

In her seminal text, Mexican philosopher Sayak Valencia (2018) proposed the term Gore Capitalism. Her thesis proposes the influence of hyper-consumerist neoliberal capitalism on the transformation of violence within Tijuana, Mexico. Within this context, Valencia argues that capitalism has sublimated production as the main accumulation of commodity as Marx famously argued. Rather, within the landscape of gore capitalism, it is the destruction of the body itself that has become the product or commodity. She states that ‘death has become the most profitable business in existence’ (Valencia, 2018:21). Much of the thesis focusses upon the proliferation of extreme violence within the global south, underpinned by the necro-politics enforced by organised crime groups vying for control of the lucrative illicit markets that seek to quench the unquenchable thirst for pharmacoporngraphic driven hedonism within the global north. Here she recognises that the production, trafficking and distribution of legal and illegal drugs are central to contemporary capitalism (pg. 94). The utilisation of Gore Capitalism to describe Valencia’s thesis was inspired by the cinematic genre of gore. It is within this context we can begin to understand how consumerism, violence and dark tourism in the global south intersects utilising the notion of Graze Culture (Kelly *et al.,* 2023).

Building upon Seltzer’s (1998) concept of ‘Wound Culture’, Graze Culture recognises, like Seltzer, that our awareness, understanding and subsequent captivation of serial murder and other forms of physical violence can be attributed to “true crime” accounts and fictional representations of disturbed and unhinged criminals (Kelly et al., 2023) However, Graze Culture advances these discussions by shedding light on the impact such depictions of serial murder accounts can have. Kelly *et al.,* (2023) explain that the prioritisation of brutal violence as a commodity over factually accurate portrayals has resulted in a theorisation of acts such as serial murder that disregard the structural and cultural underpinnings alongside societies consumption of such sublime violence. Ultimately, portrayals of subjective violence, that being one person causing physical damage to another, have provided us with “monsters” in which we “brush up against” to fetishistically disavow (see: Žižek, 2008) the realities of late capitalism. Such realities are fraught with social harms that, whilst not having a clear and

identifiable perpetrator, are violent in nature and arguably much more disruptive in comparison to the aforementioned more identifiable forms of physical violence.

Valencia highlights the thanatophlic nature of contemporary capitalism, underpinned by the demarcation of the civilised global north and uncivilized global south, and the uneven development across the globe post World War One. From this time, she argued, an epistemic break was enacted resulting in a necropolitical approach to both economic and social policies in the global south to increase capital accumulation - accumulation now often underpinned by the illicit economy and enforced with violence. Here though, Graze Culture can offer a deeper understanding of this relationship. Whilst Valencia offers a sound and compelling narrative, she is distracted by 'instances of dismembering and disembowelment, often tied with organised crime' (Valencia, 2018:19-20) in the same way Seltzer (1998) was preoccupied by the 'the torn and open bodies' of serial killer victims. As Hall (2012) details, violence in the contemporary world has fundamentally changed. Whilst some commentators have often argued that violence has declined (Pinker, 2011), it is more accurate to recognise violence has morphed under the influence of the economy (Hall, 2012). Violence has not been pacified, rather the nature of violence has changed to become ever more palatable to the winners of the capitalist system (the global north). Whilst companies will no longer engage in violent and overt colonisation on behalf of governments as Firestone enacted on the USA's behalf in Liberia (Harrison Church,1969; McCoskey, 2014; Patton, 2015; Pailey, 2023), this does not mean that atrocities are no longer routinely and systematically perpetrated in the pursuit of profit (Lynes *et al.*, 2024). Rather, the CEOs of multinational corporations can commit much more harmful acts with the stroke of a pen. Violence is, as Hall (2012) demonstrates, pseudo-pacified.

Utilising the lens of Gore Capitalism with an awareness of the pseudo-pacified nature of contemporary violence, recognising the full breadth of violence (including not only the actuality of violence and structural violence but also symbolic manifestations), we can utilise the four harms outlined by the deviant leisure perspective to understand how tourists engage in a prosumer orientated graze culture. Tourists from the global north are increasingly disenfranchised, and the margins of capital accumulation are ever less collective (Østbø Kuldova *et al.*, 2023). As such, individuals are increasingly aware of their precarity (Winlow and Hall, 2013; Lloyd, 2018) and the multitude of looming crises facing the world whilst also embedded within the democratised leisure class (Veblen, 1965; Raymen and Smith, 2019).

Much as they consume violent media as a way to disavow their realities and brush up against familiar monsters (Kelly *et al.,* 2023), they engage in seemingly de-politicised consumption within the context of tourism.

Conclusion

Often tourists are, like Seltzer (1998) and Valencia (2018), drawn to the sublime violence - thus thanotourism, as we conventionally understand dark tourism. Whilst the recognition of thanophilia as an underpinning element of contemporary consumer capitalism by Valencia (2018) goes some way to recognising the realities of some harms that underpin the current global economy, it also serves to obscure the view of other harms. We focus upon sites of death and destruction and ignore death and destruction that structural and cultural violences enact in the name of tourism and development, such as the decimation of communities and eco-systems to develop vast and exclusive hotel complexes with private beaches or sports stadiums. Within this context, then, it is essential for the deviant leisure perspective and graze culture to be at the fore of theorisation of what constitutes dark tourism. Such theoretical perspectives offer much utility for understanding dark tourism globally. The four harms offer a unique-looking glass from which we can understand how consumption and the presentation of the self-culminate in deeply harmful tourist practices. In doing so, the root causes of Gore Capitalism and Graze Culture can be recognised and challenged.

Hyper-consumerism and perpetual anxiety that is disavowed through the spiral of yet more conspicuous consumption as a means of identity construction serve as the catalyst for the litany of harms perpetuated through tourism. These harms are inflicted most disproportionately and savagely upon the people and communities of the global south. In recognising this, there is a small glimmer of hope that the worst excess can be challenged and (hopefully) curbed. The Darkest nodes of tourism are not the sites of thanotourism as has often been considered. Rather, a litany of harms are lurking behind the curtain of the majority of tourist destinations globally. If we return to the work of Sharpley (2005), who argued that the deliberate classifying of encounters intended to satisfy a wish to consume death is much darker, within the context of the preceding discussion, we instead put forward the case that the inverse is, in fact, true. In order to truly understand dark tourism, it is essential to take a step back and look past the sublime acts of violence that underpin *some* attractions. In doing so, it is viable to analyse the

more mundane, common and harmful practices that underpin the industry as a whole. It is the analysis and recognition of these less tangible forms of violence normalised within the leisure economy from which substantive change can be realised. We must move past a concentration of thano tourism, and transition to analysis based on what we call "zemi-tourism". To shed light on the truly dark matter within the context of dark tourism, a reconceptualisation of dark tourism is needed.

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