

# A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions

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## SUMMARY

*Deaths, disasters and atrocities in touristic form are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature within the contemporary tourism landscape, and as such, are ever more providing potential spiritual journeys for the tourist who wishes to gaze upon real and recreated death. As a result, the rather emotive label of 'dark tourism' has entered academic discourse and media parlance, and consequently has generated a significant amount of research interest. However, despite this increasing attention the dark tourism literature remains both eclectic and theoretically fragile. That is, a number of fundamental issues remain, not least whether it is actually possible or justifiable to collectively categorise a diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions that are associated with death and the macabre as 'dark tourism', or whether identifiable degrees or 'shades' of darkness can be attributed to a particular type of dark tourism supplier. This paper argues that certain suppliers may indeed, conceptually at least, share particular product features, perceptions and characteristics, which can then be loosely translated into various 'shades of darkness'. As a result, dark tourism products may lie along a rather 'fluid and dynamic spectrum of intensity', whereby particular sites may be conceivably 'darker' than others, dependant upon various defining characteristics, perceptions and product traits. It is proposed that construction of a firm and comprehensive typological foundation will lead not only to a better understanding of dark tourism supply, but also, and perhaps more importantly, lead to a better understanding of where to locate and explore consumer demand, motivations and experiences.*

### **Keywords:**

*dark tourism; supply; product; death; macabre; framework*

## INTRODUCTION

Deaths, disasters and atrocities in touristic form are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature within the contemporary tourism landscape, and as such, are ever more providing potential spiritual journeys for the tourist who wishes to gaze upon real and recreated death. Indeed, the seemingly macabre within tourism

includes people gazing upon sites of brutality at former battlefields of northern France, to visitors purchasing souvenirs of atrocity at Ground Zero, to tourists sightseeing in the ruins of New Orleans (after Hurricane Katrina), or touring sites of mass murder and tragedy such as Auschwitz-Birkenau or the Killing Fields of

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Cambodia. Consequently, the phenomenon by which people visit, purposefully or as part of a broader recreational itinerary, the diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions which offer a (re)presentation of death and suffering, is ostensibly growing within contemporary society. As a result, the rather emotive label of 'dark tourism', and its awkward, if not more precise sister term of 'thanatourism' has entered academic discourse and media parlance (Foley and Lennon 1996; Lennon and Foley 2000; Seaton 1996). Although the author does not wish to enter into a philosophical debate over the term 'dark', but rather to accept a common-sense meaning, it is fair to suggest that the term 'dark', as applied here, alludes to a sense of apparent disturbing practices and morbid products (and experiences) within the tourism domain. With this in mind, it is suggested that dark tourism may be referred to as the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre. Likewise, Tarlow (2005: 48) identifies dark tourism as 'visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives'.

Thus the concept of dark tourism, in its various manifestations, has generated a significant amount of research and media interest (see for example [www.dark-tourism.org.uk](http://www.dark-tourism.org.uk)). However, despite this increasing attention the dark tourism literature remains both eclectic and theoretically fragile. That is, a number of fundamental issues remain, not least whether it is actually possible or justifiable to collectively categorise a diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions that are associated with death and the macabre as 'dark tourism', or whether identifiable degrees or 'shades' of darkness can be attributed to a particular type of dark tourism supplier (Miles 2002; Strange and Kempa 2003; Sharpley 2005). Evidently, in order to address these questions, it is necessary to possess some understanding of how and why particular 'dark' visitor sites, attractions and exhibitions exist and whether certain 'dark suppliers' share particular attributes and product traits. Therefore, in order to construct a holistic approach to the diverse and fragmented nature of dark tourism supply, this paper argues certain suppliers may indeed, conceptually at least, share particular product features, perceptions and characteristics, which can then be loosely translated into various 'shades of darkness'. As a result, dark tourism products may lie along a rather 'fluid spectrum of intensity' whereby particular sites may be conceivably 'darker' than others, dependant upon various defining characteristics,

perceptions and product features. Consequently, this paper outlines a conceptual framework entitled 'A Dark Tourism Spectrum', where it is argued the task of theoretically measuring the extent of 'darkness' and the multi-hued nature of dark tourism sites, attractions and exhibitions can begin. Ultimately, from this framework, the paper suggests a typology of Seven Dark Suppliers which may be loosely 'plotted' against this 'spectrum of supply'. It is proposed that construction of a firm and comprehensive typological foundation will lead not only to a better understanding of dark tourism supply, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to a better understanding of where to locate and explore dark tourism demand. This should lead to the more fundamental research task of extricating those consumer motives and experiences which are central to fully understanding the dark tourism phenomenon.

## **DARK TOURISM SUPPLY AND DEMAND**

Needless to say, no analysis of dark tourism supply can be complete if tourist behaviour and demand for the dark tourism product are not acknowledged. Indeed, it is crucial to the understanding of this phenomenon that an ability to extract and interrogate the motives of so-called dark tourists exists. This is particularly so within a variety of social, cultural and geographical contexts. It is perhaps this fundamental requirement of 'understanding the underside' and extricating consumer motivation that is propelling the current dark tourism debate (Stone 2005a). Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper is to address, though not necessarily solve, the issue of dark tourism from a supply perspective, which in turn will lay a theoretical underpinning in order to better explore consumer demand. It could be argued of course, that dark tourism is simply a manifestation of consumer demand. As such, Seaton (1996) suggests dark tourism is essentially a behavioural phenomenon, defined by tourist's motives as opposed to particular characteristics of a site or attraction. However, Seaton's view rather restricts dark tourism to a demand orientated phenomenon, whilst overlooking important supply aspects. Consequently, Sharpley (2005) suggests it remains unclear as to whether the dark tourism phenomenon is attraction-supply driven or indeed consumer-demand driven. Thus he argues it is important to consider both demand and supply elements in attempting to construct any framework of this phenomenon.

Whilst the author indeed accepts this notion, complex demand motivators for the dark tourism product are explored elsewhere, especially with regard to consumer experiences of dark tourism and the meaning of death and dying within contemporary society (Stone and Sharpley forthcoming).

Importantly therefore, prior to the more fundamental task of extracting and interrogating consumer demand, the need to appreciate dark tourism supply more fully is evident. As a diverse and fragmented set of dark tourism suppliers exists, so equally diverse are the motives of tourists who visit and consume these products. However, the argument is that before one can systemically address the fundamental question of why people visit such places, a recognised and structured framework of dark tourism supply is required to aid the identification, and subsequent research of potential visitors and their experiences to these dark tourism products. Firstly however, it is necessary, through a brief review of the literature, to draw together extant concepts and knowledge of dark tourism as a basis for subsequent discussions.

## **DARK TOURISM: ATTRACTION OF DEATH, DISASTER AND THE MACABRE**

As mortal finite beings, as we shall live so we shall die. It is this very premise of the human condition that lies at the crux of the dark tourism concept. It could be argued that we have always held a fascination with death, whether our own or others, through a combination of respect and reverence or morbid curiosity and superstition.

However, it is (western) society's apparent contemporary fascination with death, real or fictional, media inspired or otherwise, that is seemingly driving the dark tourism phenomenon. Further to this, Marcel (2004) noted the range and diversity of dark tourism supply when she examined whether 'death makes a holiday', and consequently suggested that dark tourism is the dirty little secret of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, before the democratization of travel dark tourism had a number of precursors, and indeed death has been an element of tourism longer than any other form of tourism supply, often through religious or pilgrimage purposes (Seaton 1996; also see Sharpley and Sundaram 2005).

Early examples of dark tourism may be found in the patronage of Roman gladiatorial games. With death and suffering at the core of the gladiatorial product, and its eager consumption by raucous spectators, the Roman Colosseum may be considered one of the first dark tourist attractions. Other precursors to dark tourism may be seen in the public executions of the medieval period up until the nineteenth century. As public spectacles, executions served as visible reminders of deterrence and retribution. Yet with the advent of more formalised arrangements to accommodate visiting voyeurs, public executions increasingly took on the characteristics of a spectator event. Indeed, execution sites such as Tyburn in London boasted specially erected grandstands to offer better vantage points to see the condemned die. In a similar vein, this fascination with 'Other Death' may be seen in the alleged first guided tour in England, whereby in 1838 a railway excursion in Cornwall took in the hanging of two convicted murderers (Boorstin 1987). Other early examples of dark tourism may be found in the guided morgue tours of the Victorian period, the Chamber of Horrors exhibition of Madame Tussauds, or in 'correction houses' of the nineteenth century where galleries were built to accommodate fee-paying visitors who witnessed flogging as a recreational activity.

However, dark tourism over the last century has become more widespread and varied. Smith (1998) for example, suggests that sites or destinations associated with war probably constitute 'the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world' (also see Henderson 2000). Yet war-related attractions, though themselves diverse, are a subset of the totality of tourist sites associated with death and suffering (Dann 1998).

Additionally, within the literature, reference is frequently made either to specific destinations, such as the Sixth Floor in Dallas, Texas (Foley and Lennon 1996) or to forms of tourism, such as visits to graveyards (Seaton 2002) and celebrity death sites (Alderman 2002), holocaust tourism (Ashworth 1996), prison tourism (Strange and Kempa 2003), or slavery-heritage tourism (Dann and Seaton 2001). Such is the diversity of macabre-related attractions, from fictional death in the 'Dracula Experience' in Whitby, UK, or recreated death in the London Dungeon, UK, to the sites of real 'famous' deaths (James Dean, Buddy Holly, Elvis Presley – see Alderman 2002) or major disasters (Ground Zero and New Orleans), that a full categorisation of supply is complex and multifaceted.

However despite the apparent difficulties, Dann (1998) does offer a comprehensive, if not playfully constructed inventory of dark tourism main forms. In particular, he presents a multitude of examples under five principal categories, namely perilous places, houses of horror, fields of fatality, tours of torments and themed thanatos. Within these principal categories, Dann further lists eleven sub-categories which again reveal the diversity of contemporary sites, attractions and exhibitions that are referred to as dark tourism.

Nevertheless, despite the long history, the varied nature of products, and increasing contemporary evidence of travel to sites or attractions associated with death, it is only relatively recently that academic attention has been focused upon what has been collectively referred to as 'dark tourism'. In particular, a number of attempts have been made to label macabre-related tourism activity, such as the previously mentioned 'thanaturism' (Seaton 1996; also see below), 'morbid tourism' (Blom 2000), 'black-spot tourism' (Rojek 1993) or, as Dann (1994: 61) alliterates, 'milking the macabre'. In particular, these attempts have been to analyse specific examples or manifestations of dark tourism, from battlefields to hyper-real experiences. Attention has also been focused, though to a much lesser extent, on exploring the reasons or purposes underpinning tourists' desire to seek out such sites or experiences, the proposed 'drivers' of dark tourism, which to date are suggested to vary from a simple morbid curiosity or a malicious indulgence in another person's suffering, through *schadenfreude* (Seaton and Lennon 2004), to a collective sense of identity or survival 'in the face of violent disruptions of collective life routines' (Rojek 1997: 110).

Despite the term 'dark tourism' being first coined by Foley and Lennon (1996), their work was not the first to focus upon the relationship between tourism attractions and an interest in death and the macabre. In particular, Rojek (1993:136) considers the concept of 'Black Spots', or 'the commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent death'. Interestingly, Rojek introduces his analysis by making reference to the hordes of sightseers flocking to the sites of disasters, such as the shores of Zeebrugge in 1987 (the capsizing of the ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise*) and Lockerbie, Scotland (the crash site of Pan Am 103) in 1988, before going on to discuss three different examples of Black Spots – the annual pilgrimage to the

place where James Dean died in a car crash in 1955, the annual candlelight vigil in memory of Elvis Presley at Graceland in Tennessee, and the anniversary of JFK's assassination in Dallas, Texas. These he refers to as postmodern spectacles, repeated reconstructions that are dependent on modern audio-visual media for their continued popularity. Other attractions, such as national and metropolitan cemeteries, are categorized as 'nostalgic' sites and it is only later that he goes on to distinguish disaster sites as being 'analytically distinct from Black Spots as sensation sites' (Rojek 1993:63). A similar distinction is made by Blom (2000:26) who defines 'morbid tourism' as, on the one hand, tourism that 'focuses on sudden death and which quickly attracts large numbers of people' and, on the other hand, 'an attraction-focused artificial morbidity-related tourism'. Thus, the concept of dark tourism and its production is immediately rendered more complex by a number of variables, including:

- The immediacy and spontaneity of dark 'sensation' tourism to sites of contemporary death and suffering, compared with premeditated visits to structured and organized attractions or exhibitions which portray recent and /or distant historical occurrences.
- The distinction between purposefully constructed sites, attractions or exhibitions, that interpret or recreate events or acts associated with death and the macabre and so-called 'accidental' or non-purposeful sites. That is, those sites, such as cemeteries, memorials, or disaster sites that have become tourist attractions 'by accident' because of their relationship with turbulent and tragic events.
- The extent to which an 'interest' in death and suffering (to witness the death of others, to dice with death in dangerous places (Pelton 2003), to learn about the death of famous people, and so on) is the dominant reason for visiting dark attractions, and how supply caters for this apparent 'interest'.
- The fundamental reasons why and how dark sites/ experiences are produced or supplied – for example, political reasons, for remembrance purposes, for education, for entertainment or for economic gain.

These issues are considered shortly when the paper discusses a typological framework for dark tourism supply, but firstly to return to the work of Foley and Lennon, their use of the term 'dark tourism' relates

primarily to the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites (1996). This rather broad definition is later refined by their assertion that dark tourism is 'an intimation of postmodernity' (Lennon and Foley 2000:11). That is, firstly, interest in and the interpretation of events associated with death is to a large extent dependent on the ability of global communication technology to instantly report macabre and death-related events and, subsequently, repeat them *ad infinitum* (hence compression of time and space).

Secondly, they claimed that most dark tourism sites challenge the inherent order, rationality and progress of modernity – as does the concept of postmodernity (see Best and Kellner 2001) and, thirdly, at most sites, the boundaries between the message (educational, political) and their commercialisation as tourist products has become increasingly blurred and thus de-differentiated. As a result of these rather strict, self-imposed parameters, sites, attractions and exhibitions based on events that neither took place 'within the memories of those still alive to validate them' (Lennon and Foley 2000:12) nor induce a sense of anxiety about modernity do not qualify as dark tourism. Thus, for these authors, dark tourism is subject to 'chronological distance' (i.e. where people still living can validate 'dark events'), and is primarily a western phenomenon based upon non-purposeful visits due to 'serendipity, the itinerary of tour companies or the merely curious who happen to be in the vicinity' (2000:23). As Reader (2003) suggests in his review of Lennon and Foley's work, this lack of attention to much wider geographical contexts, or to motivation in general and an evident reluctance to accept that tourists may positively desire 'dark' experiences, and thus perhaps allowing supply to develop to cater for demand, overlook essential dimensions of dark tourism studies.

In contrast to Lennon and Foley's somewhat restricted focus, Seaton (1996) argues that dark tourism has a long history, emerging from what he refers to as a 'thanatoptic tradition' (i.e. the contemplation of death) that dates back to the Middle Ages but which intensified during the Romantic period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

He cites a number of attractions, including graves, prisons, and public executions and, in particular, the battlefield of Waterloo to which tourists flocked from 1816 onwards.

He also cites Pompeii, scene of destruction and natural disaster in ancient times as 'the greatest thanatoptic travel destination of the Romantic period' (Seaton 1996). Seaton goes on to argue that dark tourism is the 'travel dimension of thanatopsis' (hence thanatourism), defined as 'travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death' (1996:15).

Based on this behavioural perspective, Seaton suggests five categories of dark travel activities:

- Travel to witness public enactments of death – though public executions now occur in relatively few countries. However Rojek's (1997) sensation tourism at disaster sites may fall under this heading.
- Travel to see the sites of individual or mass deaths after they have occurred. This embraces an enormous variety of sites, from battlefields (e.g. Gallipoli), death camps (e.g. Auschwitz) and sites of genocide (e.g. Cambodia's 'Killing Fields') to places where celebrities died (such as the site of James Dean's death in a car crash referred to above), the sites of publicized murders (e.g. Soham in the UK where two young girls were murdered in 2002), or the homes of infamous murderers (e.g. 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester UK, where Fred West and his wife committed serial murder and sexual crimes).
- Travel to memorials or internment sites, including graveyards, cenotaphs, crypts and war memorials. The reasons for such visits are diverse, from an interest in brass-rubbing or epitaph collection (see Seaton 2002) to pilgrimages, or to the resting place of the (in)famous.
- Travel to see evidence or symbolic representations of death at unconnected sites, such as museums containing weapons of death (e.g. the Royal Armouries in Leeds, UK) or exhibitions that reconstruct specific events or activities. As Dann (1998) notes, these 'morbid museums' may focus on selected themes and thus, be 'less concerned with historical accuracy'.
- Travel for re-enactments or simulation of death. As Seaton (1996) suggests, this originally took the form of plays or festivals with a religious theme though, over the last century, 'secular derivations', such as the re-enactment of famous battles by groups or societies, have become increasingly popular.

Importantly, Seaton (reflecting Lennon and Foley's (2000) position) also suggests that the role of the media has been central to this growth in tourism to sites, attractions and exhibitions associated with death, principally through increasing the geographical specificity of murder and violent death and, more recently, through global communication technology that televises events almost as they happen into people's 'living rooms' around the world (also, Seaton and Lennon 2004).

However, given the complexity in attaching an all-encompassing label to the wide diversity of sites, attractions and exhibitions that have been referred to as 'dark tourism', attempts have been made to clarify and distinguish the different forms or intensities of dark tourism. It is these apparent 'shades of intensities' within the supply of dark tourism that this paper now turns to.

## A DARK TOURISM SPECTRUM

As dark tourism products are multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse in nature, it is perhaps clear that the universal term 'dark' as applied to tourism is too broad and does not readily expose the multi-layers of dark tourism supply. Therefore, it is perhaps prudent to argue for an analysis that accounts for multiple shades of dark tourism, with respect to identifiable product traits, characteristics and perceptions. One such study that has begun this task is Strange and Kempa's (2003) examination of product design of two former penal institutions, and the specific influence of external political bodies upon interpretation within these institutions. In particular they examine the former US prison of Alcatraz, where infamous criminals were once held and where now Hollywood tutored visitors consume a product fondly known as 'the Rock'. In comparison, Strange and Kempa also analyse Robben Island in South Africa, a former penal complex for political prisoners of the Apartheid era (including Nelson Mandela). In essence, they suggest that despite the two former penal institutions having certain design features in common, the political and cultural agendas that surround the two sites, have a profound influence upon 'memory managers' who seek to interpret the sites' dark pasts. Ultimately, they suggest that whilst Alcatraz's presentation is already overshadowed by commercial and entertainment values, Robben Island has yet to succumb to its 'theme park marketing

potential' (Shackley 2001) and possesses a higher degree of political influence in its design and interpretation, and as such promotes a product of remembrance, commemoration and education. Thus, the implication is that Robben Island is perceived a 'shade more serious' in its contemporary representation of penal (in)justice than its Alcatraz counterpart.

Consequently, despite the main draw of these products being a highly emotional and politically charged heritage product – easy to market yet tricky to interpret (Shackley 2001; Strange 2000), some commentators suggest the heritage sector in general is an inappropriate and even immoral vehicle for the presentation of death and human suffering (Hewison 1987; MacCannell 1992; Urry 1995; Walsh 1992). As a result, questions have been raised about the distinction between *authentic* and *inauthentic* history. Indeed, one of the main contentions is how 'dark history sites' (e.g. Auschwitz-Birkenau), with a dominant conservational and commemorative ethic are portrayed as *real*, whilst it is the heritage industry, with a commercial orientation and a tendency to seemingly romanticise and thus distort past dark deeds (e.g. Galleries of Justice, UK), that is often seen as the *guardians of the real*. Macdonald (1997: 156-157) in particular, calls for more attention to be paid 'to the authorial intentions and authenticating devices at work in heritage sites'. However, despite the notion of entertainment and commodification of (dark) history for mass consumption (e.g. spooky tours of the London Dungeon, UK), which often leads to the charge of trivialization and product inauthenticity, it does not preclude the presentation of counter-hegemonic stories, tales of injustice or dark deeds committed in recent or distant memory.

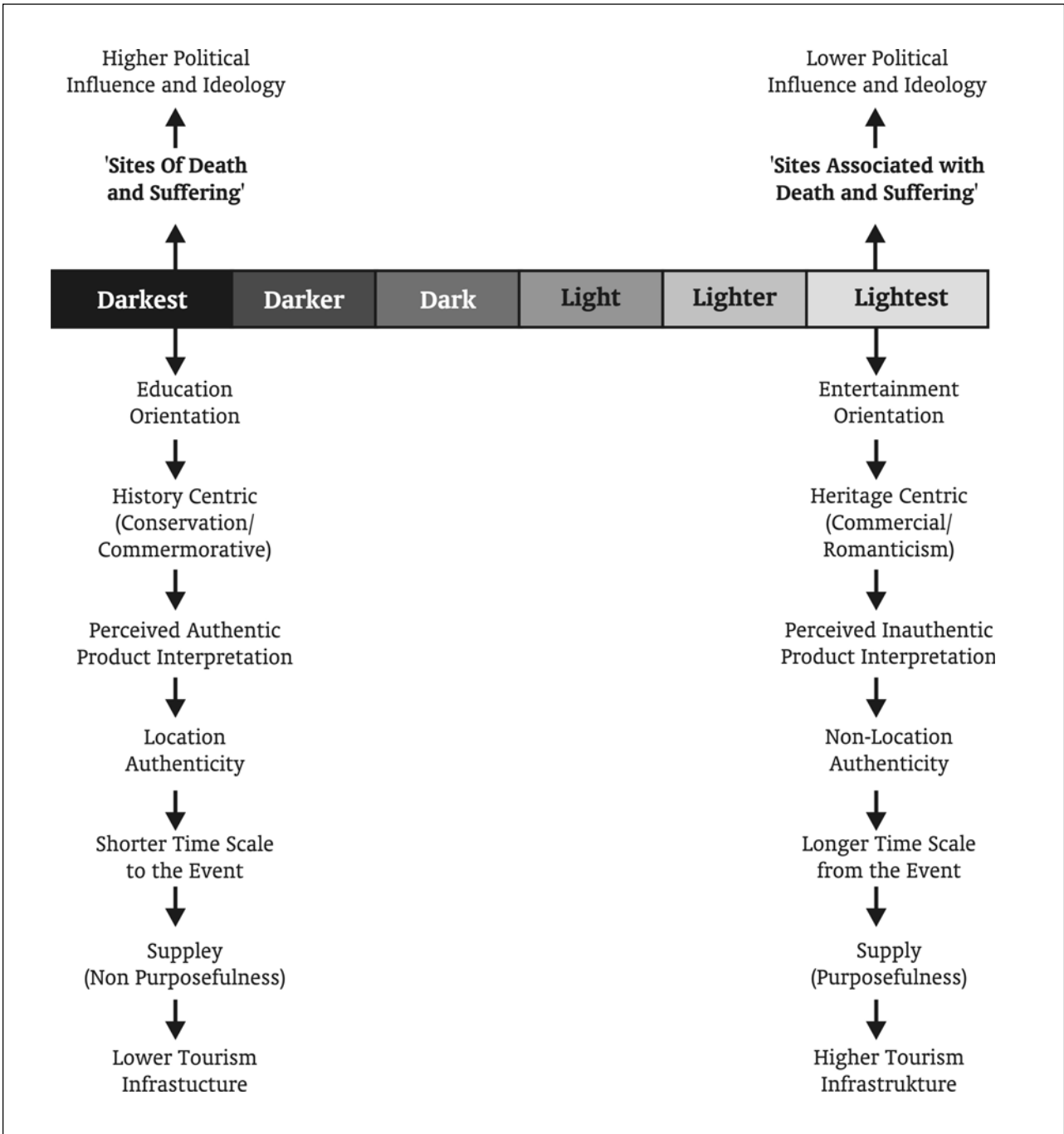
As Seaton (1999) notes, production of the dark and disturbing past is not only driven by consumer tastes, which are often media influenced, and by commercial marketing ploys on behalf of the supplier, but is also subject to changes in the wider political and cultural climate. Therefore, shades of darkness within the dark tourism product can shift as events (such as wars, acts of terrorism, or the fall of a regime) transpire, and as new 'files of representation' (movies, novels, memoirs, etc.) lend moral meanings to sites of death and the macabre (Rojek and Urry 1997).

Further to this notion of a perceived shift of 'darkness' between products, Miles (2002) suggests that a 'darker-lighter tourism paradigm' does indeed exist.

He argues there is a distinction between 'dark' and 'darker' tourism, that is, a greater notion of the macabre and the morose can exist between sites. Based upon the temporal dimension and spatial affinity with a site, Miles proposes there is a crucial difference between sites associated with death and suffering, and sites that

are of death and suffering. Thus, according to Miles, the product (and experience) at the death camp site at Auschwitz-Birkenau is conceivably darker than the one at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

Figure 1  
**A DARK TOURISM SPECTRUM: PERCEIVED PRODUCT FEATURES OF DARK TOURISM WITHIN A 'DARKEST-LIGHTEST' FRAMEWORK OF SUPPLY**



The main contention is that the US Holocaust Memorial Museum is merely *associated* with death, whilst Auschwitz-Birkenau is *of* death and possesses a crucial locational authenticity within its product design. Consequently, he suggests that dark touristic sites must engender a degree of empathy between the sightseer and the past victim (or product). This empathy, as maintained by Miles, is amplified through the spatial affinity in the dark tourism product design. In addition, he advocates the temporal dimension of dark sites will also add to the empathy of visitors, and thus important in how the product is perceived, produced and ultimately consumed. In particular, and supporting the notion of 'chronological distance', as outlined by Lennon and Foley (2000), Miles suggests that recent death and tragic events that may be transported in live memory through survivors or witnesses are perhaps 'darker' than other events that have descended into the distant past. Thus, those dark events which possess a shorter time frame to the present, and therefore can be validated by the living and which evokes a greater sense of empathy, are perhaps products which may be described as 'darker'.

In a similar vein, Sharpley (2005) suggests that, based upon differing intensities of purpose with respect to both the supply of and consumption of dark tourism, then different 'shades' of dark tourism may be identified. That is, dependent on both the degree of interest or fascination in death on the part of the tourist and on the extent to which an attraction or exhibition is developed in order to exploit that interest or fascination, different sites / experiences may be either 'paler' or 'darker'. Thus, accordingly to Sharpley, darkest or black tourism occurs where a fascination with death is provided for by the purposeful supply of experiences intended to satisfy this fascination. He then suggests an example being the \$65 per person 'Flight 93 Tour' to the Pennsylvania crash site of United Airlines 93 – one of the 9/11 hijacked aircraft – established and run by a local farmer (Bly 2003). However, whilst further practical examples of the 'blackest' form of tourism may be difficult to locate, it is suggested that supply which is non-purposeful, that is, the original intent of the site was not to attract visitors and as such provides a comparably limited tourism infrastructure (e.g. the sites of murder such as in Soham, UK) may be considered 'darker' – a notion which supports Miles claim that a sites' spatial affinity and ultimately 'purposefulness' may be correlated to perceived 'darkness' within the product design.

Considering the idea that some sites may now offer a darker product (and experience), depending upon product traits and perceptions, it is possible to begin to formulate a conceptual framework in which to locate various types of 'dark suppliers'. The idea of a 'spectrum', as outlined in Figure 1, takes into account possible shades of darkness, that is, a perceived level of 'macabreness' within a overall dark tourism product. Ranging from 'darkest' through to 'lightest' products, which are characterized by dominating design features, such as whether a product has an educational or commercial ethic, or whether a product has spatial affinity with a site, or whether a higher level of political influence and ideology is apparent within the product purpose and interpretation, and so on, one may be able to locate a product and typify it, albeit, in a rather 'loose' and fluid manner.

Whilst the implications (and limitations) of this 'spectrum of supply' are outlined in the concluding discussions of this paper, it is possible, using the parameters of this conceptual framework, to begin the task of building a typological foundation for dark tourism supply, and it is this that attention is now turned to by outlining 'Seven Dark Suppliers'.

## **SEVEN DARK SUPPLIERS – THE DARK TOURISM PRODUCT**

### **i) Dark Fun Factories**

A Dark Fun Factory alludes to those visitor sites, attractions and tours which predominately have an entertainment focus and commercial ethic, and which present real or fictional death and macabre events. Indeed, these types of products possess a high degree of tourism infrastructure, are purposeful and are in essence 'fun-centric', and may occupy the lightest edges of the 'dark tourism spectrum'. Essentially Dark Fun Factories offer sanitized products in terms of representation and are perhaps perceived as less authentic. For instance, the Dungeon concepts now being rolled out across Europe by Merlin Entertainments Ltd is a classic Dark Fun Factory. Perhaps most famous of the Dungeon attractions, the London Dungeon, has long drawn visitors to its doors with the promise of ghouls and displays of morbidity. With gruesome and highly visual, yet 'family friendly' exhibits portraying less savoury aspects of (past) life, such as the Black Death or Jack the Ripper, the London Dungeon offers a socially acceptable



environment in which to gaze upon simulated death and associated suffering.

Other examples of Dark Fun Factories include the planned venture of 'Dracula Park' in Romania (BBC News 2003), where progress of the proposed visitor attraction has stalled on environmental grounds rather than actual product content. Indeed, this is a project which revolves around the real-life 'Vlad the Impaler', a fifteenth century Transylvanian Count who allegedly tortured his prisoners by impaling them on spikes and then leaving them to die. His subsequent fictional incarnation by Bram Stoker's 1897 novel 'Dracula', in which Stoker popularized the myth of a bloodsucking aristocrat, has fuelled an entire industry ever since.

This aside, 'Dracula Park' in Romania will essentially be an entertainment-based product, with a core product focused upon the macabre, fictional or otherwise. Indeed recent consultation and feasibility studies on the project have suggested:

*'...driven by the need to build a post-communist economy, Romania has moderated its previous rejection of Dracula as a vampire and shifted its focus to leveraging the Transylvanian myth for economic gain. Dracula Park will sport vampires, a Center for Vampirology, a golf course with scary encounters, a Medieval food court, Draculabilia such as stakes, fangs, watches, and visitor portraits drawn with your own blood — all within a Medieval fortress.'* (KLM Management Consultation 2001: 10).

## ii) Dark Exhibitions

Dark Exhibitions refer to those exhibitions and sites which essentially blend the product design to reflect education and potential learning opportunities. With a Dark Fun Factory offering a commercial and more entertainment based product, Dark Exhibitions offer products which revolve around death, suffering or the macabre with an often commemorative, educational and reflective message. Thus, these products are perhaps perceived as more 'serious' and possess a 'darker edge', and thus may be typified towards the darker periphery of the 'dark tourism spectrum'. Yet despite these product types possessing a conservational ethic, they encompass a degree of tourism infrastructure and some commercial focus.

Incorporating both purposeful and non-purposeful elements for dark tourism, Dark Exhibitions are manifested within an eclectic product range and are often located away from the actual site of death or macabre event. Indeed, the multitude of museums which showcase death and associated suffering with an educative or commemorative focus may be classed as Dark Exhibitions. For instance, the Smithsonian Museum of American History recently constructed an exhibit which displayed images and artifacts of the September 11 terrorist attacks, under the conception of capturing history and instilling a sense of veneration for the victims. However, the exhibit, entitled 'September 11: Bearing Witness to History', purposely sanitized the product content with only forty-five objects on show. The scant number of exhibits is intentional with curators draining the emotional content of displays because 'visitors bring their own emotional baggage to the story' (Robinson 2003). Indeed, the Smithsonian package is so hypersensitive to the possibility of emotional overload, that the more grisly and macabre photographs of the dead and dying are omitted. Even the images of the jet approaching the Twin Towers are sequestered from general view. Consequently images of horrified onlookers tell the story, with the product essentially designed to provoke rather than narrate.

This provocative aspect of Dark Exhibitions is taken a stage further with the 'Body Worlds' exhibitions, which have attracted over seventeen million visitors across the world with anatomical displays of real human bodies. The bodies which are preserved through a technique called plastination, allow the visitor to gaze upon preserved corpses under the guise of health education, anatomy and physiology. Naturally, whilst educative elements of the exhibition are undoubted, the commercial machine that now surrounds the show, in addition to the ethical debate about entertainment and the alleged increase in trade of body parts, have perhaps tainted the original exhibit objectives (Searle 2002; Harris and Connolly 2002). Other Dark Exhibitions which trades on this mix of 'macabre education' include the 'Catacombe dei Cappucini' in Palermo, Italy (see de Lanza 2001). The catacombs date back to 1599 when priests mummified a local monk and displayed him on the wall like a three-dimensional cadaver piece of art. Until 1920, when a small child became the last person to use the crypt as a final resting place, hundreds of people are now displayed in some kind of macabre 'human library' whereby corpses, some still in decaying clothes, are preserved for the living.

Indeed many corpses are contrived to give the impression of enjoying a joke with their deceased peers, while others look less cheerful!

### iii) Dark Dungeons

Dark Dungeons refer to those sites and attractions which present bygone penal and justice codes to the present day consumer, and revolve around (former) prisons and courthouses. These product types essentially have a combination of entertainment and education as a main merchandise focus, possess a relatively high degree of commercialism and tourism infrastructure, and occupy sites which were originally non-purposeful for dark tourism. Consequently, it is suggested that Dark Dungeons may occupy the centre-ground of the 'dark tourism spectrum' with a mixture of dark and light elements. For instance, the Galleries of Justice (2005) visitor attraction, based in Nottingham UK, suggests in its marketing literature that it is the 'only site in the country where you could be arrested, sentenced and executed'. Promoted as the 'Family Attraction of the Year' under the rather inauspicious marketing strap-line 'Feel the Fear', the Galleries of Justice site is created from buildings originally used as prisons and courts from the 1780's until as recently as the 1980's. With entertainment and education as core product features, and with harsh penal codes and suspect justice it seeks to represent safely secured in days gone by, the Galleries of Justice invite the visitor to partake in a particular kind of heritage, whilst promoting its historical content. This is well illustrated in the sites' promotional flyer 'Crime and Punishment Tour' which states:

*'Travel with us on an atmospheric tour over three centuries of crime and punishment. Witness a real trial in the original Victorian Courtroom and put your friends and family in the dock, before being sentenced and 'sent down' to the original cells... Prisoners and gaolers will act as your guides as you too become part of the dramatic history of this unique site.'* (Galleries of Justice 2005).

Of course this type of promotion, as with a Dark Fun Factory, raises questions of product representation and authenticity, which are the beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, other examples of Dark Dungeons which present penal codes and justice from a bygone age include the Bodmin Jail Centre in Cornwall UK, whereby visitors are invited to 'dungeons below ground

to find out just some of the crimes and punishment of our unfortunate ancestors' (Bodmin Jail 2003). Similarly, the Old Melbourne Gaol in Australia promotes itself as a 'chilling environment' and as a 'custodian of a grim, yet fascinating collection of prisoner death masks and special exhibitions relating to the art of hanging' (National Trust of Australia 2003).

Whilst Dark Dungeons such as the Bodmin Jail Centre and Melbourne Gaol seek in their product design to represent penal codes from the 'distance' past, other Dark Dungeons exist to represent a more recent past, and consequently have attached a higher level of political influence and ideology. As already discussed with regards to Strange and Kempa's (2003) analysis of 'shades of dark tourism', Robben Island, the former prison of Nelson Mandela located off the Cape Town coast in South Africa, is inextricably linked to the struggle against colonialism, the fight for freedom, democracy and peace in South Africa. With a shorter time period to the actual 'event', in other words the relatively recent incarceration of political prisoners, Robben Island possesses a higher degree of conservatism and commemoration in its product design, and is perhaps perceived as more authentic. Indeed the South African government stated, whilst putting forward Robben Island as a World Heritage Site, that the site should be 'turned around into a source of enlightenment and education on the dangers of myopic philosophies, and social and economic practices whose primary and sole objective is the oppression of one group by another' (Government of South Africa 1999: 4). Therefore with a desire to represent the struggle for social justice, and for Robben Island to act as a symbol of freedom, the fundamental product design of this Dark Dungeon is that of education. Yet as Shackley (2001: 359) notes, 'Robben Island is part theme park, part shrine and part museum... and a location with the potential to make a great deal of money'.

### iv) Dark Resting Places

Dark Resting Places focuses upon the cemetery or grave markers as potential products for dark tourism (Seaton 2002). Consequently, the cemetery within contemporary society is acting as a romanticised, if not rather macabre, urban regeneration tool. In particular, tourism planners often use the cemetery as a mechanism to promote visitation to an area, conserve the structural integrity of landscape and architecture, and sustain the ecology of local environments (see Meyer and Peters

2001). With an increasing infrastructure being built around these Dark Resting Places, mainly through association groups, the use of the internet and dedicated guide tours, the cemetery is fast becoming a place where the living are 'charmed' by the dead, and thus may be plotted within the centre of the 'dark tourism spectrum' with both dark and light elements. Nevertheless, key product features of Dark Resting Places revolve around a history-centric, conservational and commemorative ethic. Thus according to the Association of Significant Cemeteries in Europe (ASCE), cemeteries are an integral component of *cultural heritage and those cemeteries with historical or artistic significance should be conserved* (ASCE 2005).

Indeed, the rationale for the majority of Dark Resting Places is promotion and conservation of Romantic and Gothic architecture and sculpture, through the maintenance of gravestone, tombs and mausoleums. In addition, the sustainability of local ecological landscapes is a primary concern. For instance, the famous cemetery at Père-Lachaise in Paris attracts over two million visitors a year, and beyond its primary function of interment, the cemetery is the largest park in Paris and has evolved into an open-air museum and pantheon garden (Northstar Gallery 1998). On a less grand scale is the development of Waste Cemetery in Salford UK. As part of a wider urban regeneration programme, local tourism planners are attempting to amalgamate history and ecology as distinct product features, and encourage visitation to this Dark Resting Place, with Salford City Council recently stating:

*'Waste Cemetery is primarily a place to respect and commemorate the loved ones we have lost. People also visit cemeteries for exercise and relaxation, and to study nature and local history. It is our aim to offer a fitting environment for the bereaved and also to enhance the life of the community.'* (Salford City Council 2004)

However, whilst Dark Resting Places offer serenity and the opportunity to both commemorate and pay respects to the deceased, this particular classification of Dark Supplier is increasingly beginning to take on a more commercial and entertainment based ethic, to the point where it may 'move' along the spectrum of supply to become a Dark Fun Factory. In particular, products such as the Hollywood based 'Dearly Departed' tours, which are fuelled by internet sites promoting aspects of death and dying, and media interest in celebrity death, allow visitors to be taken

through a journey of 'death, murder and just plain fun' (Michaels 2005), whilst gazing upon graves of the Hollywood elite. Indeed, the product is promoted as 'fun-led' and its promotional literature suggests that the visitor 'will be treated to the most tickling tales of tinsel town tragedies, in the cool comfort of the luxurious Dearly Departed Tomb Buggy', which incidentally resembles a hearse (Michaels 2005).

## v) Dark Shrines

Dark Shrines are those sites which essentially 'trade' on the act of remembrance and respect for the recently deceased. Hence Dark Shrines are often constructed, formally or informally, very close to the site of death and within a very short time period of the death occurring. Thus, it is suggested that Dark Shrines may occupy the darker periphery of the 'dark tourism spectrum'. In addition, these types of events dominate the media agenda for relatively short periods of time, hence attaching a higher level of political awareness and influence to a particular Dark Shrine site during the 'media period'

Quite often, a mass of floral tributes will signify the Dark Shrine site where a death-event has occurred, providing a marker for other 'mourners,' which very often have no direct relationship with the victim, to follow and lay their own flowery symbols of respect. Whilst the media reports these events, and perhaps 'emotionally invigilates' the consumer to react in a particular manner (Walter, Littlewood and Pickering 1995), Dark Shrines often a semi-permanent and tangible focal point for the 'bereaved'. Indeed most Dark Shrines are non-purposeful for tourism and thus possess very little tourism infrastructure due to their temporal nature. For instance, the Dark Shrine which was constructed in the now usual floral edifice around the gates of Kensington Palace at the time Diana, Princess of Wales was killed in 1997, became a focal point for millions of people. Yet within a relatively short period of time, this Dark Shrine had been dismantled and reconstructed elsewhere, namely at the place of Diana's interment at Althorp House. Interestingly, within a few years of her death, the business of remembering Diana is doing well, with tourism infrastructure at Althorp House evolving to include award-winning exhibitions illustrating Diana's death and subsequent tributes (also see Merrin 1999).

This evolution of tourism infrastructure around temporal Dark Shrines, which perhaps allows 'movement' along the dark tourism spectrum to the category of Dark Exhibitions, thereby creating a more permanent presence, is beginning to manifest itself at Ground Zero, a site of atrocity in New York on September 11 2001. Indeed, Blair (2002:1) notes the advent of a formal tourism infrastructure beginning to evolve as the events of September 11 become chronologically distance:

*'Remember when it was just hallowed ground? Ground Zero is now one of the most popular tourism attractions in the city. It is a place where tour guides charge \$15 a head to point out the spot where the firefighters raised the flag. The proud can buy twin-tower T-shirts, the angry can buy toilet paper bearing the face of Osama bin Laden, and the curious can climb up the fence to take the perfect picture of what is now just a big hole. The hustle of commerce hawking to the crush of sightseers has prompted some to call it September 11 World'.*

Increasingly Dark Shrines are being forged for those with a seemingly morbid curiosity. Whilst under the pretext of respect and reverence, Dark Shrines are serving as a focal point whereby rubbernecking is quickly becoming a recreational activity within contemporary society. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the small town of Soham in the UK when it became a temporary tourist destination in the wake of the (highly publicized) murder of two young schoolchildren. Allegedly, coach trippers turned up to gape at reported sites of abduction and murder, whilst visitors to the town were apparently seen eating sandwiches in the local graveyard (O'Neill 2002). However as Seaton and Lennon (2004:65) aptly note, 'there was little follow-up on the story (in the media), and no hard evidence about the scale or duration of Soham's status as a tourist destination'.

## vi) Dark Conflict Sites

Smith (1998) suggests that activities, sites or destinations associated with warfare are a major component of the wider tourist attraction market. Thus this category, termed here Dark Conflict Sites, revolve around war and battlefields and their commodification as potential tourism products. Indeed, Dark Conflict Sites essentially have an educational and commemorative focus, are history-centric and are originally nonpurpo-

seful in the dark tourism context. Debate is often contentious on the discord between memorial, commemoration and the nature of interpretation at Dark Conflict Sites (e.g. Edwards 2000) whereby the notions of 'dissonant heritage' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) and political ideologies are often the root of interpretive concerns. Whilst these are beyond the scope of this paper, it is perhaps worth noting Dark Conflict Sites are increasingly becoming more commercialized and as a result have an increasing tourism infrastructure. For instance, a number of dedicated tour operators now offer trips to various battlefields, either specifically or part of a wider holiday itinerary. These tours which essentially bring organized violence back to life, often focus upon battlefields of the First World War. Indeed, the Western Front Battlefield Tours group offers the discerning visitor an opportunity to tour battle sites such as Ypres and the Somme in small groups complete with trench maps, war diaries and in-depth commentary (Western Front Battlefield Tours 2005). Now with the recent opening of a purpose-built visitor centre near the Memorial of the Missing at Thiepval in northern France, the business of re-membrance has taken on a more structured focus.

Whilst First World War tour products are well established, other Dark Conflict Sites are beginning to realize their dark tourism potential. For example, the area in the Solomon Islands where the Battle of Guadalcanal was fought during the Second World War may become an established site on the holiday itinerary. As Squires (2004: 1) suggests, 'along with stunning paradise beaches, many of the islands and the surrounding seas are still littered with the detritus of war, something the government and local businessmen have realised is a potential tourism goldmine'. Interestingly however, is the difference in product design between those battles which are more recent and those which are chronologically distance. Whilst Dark Conflict Sites throughout the world are numerous, as are the wars which furnish them, those battles which are beyond living memory often take on a more romanticised and 'fun-led' orientation, and thus may occupy the lighter end of the 'dark tourism spectrum'. This is often manifested through real-life battle re-enactments, whereby an entire industry has evolved to bring history to life and make brutal battlefield killing attractive to the living. Ritual events, often against a backdrop of village fetes and rural festivals, such as the Battle of Bosworth Re-enactment Weekend in the UK, serve to make light of bygone battles.

## vii) Dark Camps of Genocide

Dark Camps of Genocide represents those sites and places which have genocide, atrocity and catastrophe as the main thanatological theme, and thus occupy the darkest edges of the 'dark tourism spectrum'. Mercifully, genocide sites are not particularly common, but do exist in places such as Rwanda, Cambodia, and Kosovo. However, those sites which do exist for touristic consumption are macabre in the extreme, despite offering limited site interpretation. Dark Camps of Genocide are produced to provide the ultimate emotional experience whereby visitors 'sightsee in the mansions of the dead' (Keil 2005). With a product design revolving around education and commemoration, and unlike Dark Exhibitions, are located at the actual site of the death-event, Dark Camps of Genocide tell the terrible tales of human suffering and infliction and have a high degree of political ideology attached to them. Thus Dark Camps of Genocide are those sites which mark a concentration of death and atrocity, and a concentration of death is no more apparent than that committed throughout the Holocaust. Hence, Auschwitz-Birkenau, now a visitor site and example of a Dark Camp of Genocide, represents most the Holocaust for the scale of atrocities committed there (Gilbert 1986), and symbolically for the way it haunts contemporary imagination.

Consequently, the manner in which the Holocaust is manifested in product terms is through the rather supercilious and disrespectful label of 'Holocaust tourism', which often dominates the wider dark tourism agenda - especially within the media. Frequently media reports and special features refer to the Holocaust as a key term of reference for the broader dark tourism concept. For instance O'Donoghue (2002: 1), writing about the various sites which make up so-called Holocaust tourism, including visitor sites at Dachau, Treblinka and Auschwitz, explicitly states that '*dark tourism*, as it's been dubbed, is on the increase, as people around the world fight to ensure the sins of the past are not forgotten'. This interchange of the broader term 'dark tourism' and its connections with the Holocaust, and the connotations it entails as a result, perhaps skews the wider meaning of dark tourism and other product subsets it incorporates.

However, the Holocaust as an iniquitous period of history is 'a past that will not pass away (yet)' (Kershaw 2005), and 're-packaged' Dark Camps of Genocide sites

such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau death-camp remain universal symbols of evil. Consequently, the Holocaust and the Nazi doctrine that underscored it is a pervasive feature of the collective consciousness. Whilst there is debate over distorted and selective interpretation and presentation of particular Holocaust sites (see Stone 2005b), memory and experience of the Holocaust has become institutionalised. This is partly through the establishment of Dark Exhibitions suppliers such as the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the permanent Holocaust display in the Imperial War Museum in London, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, in addition to Dark Camps of Genocide such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is these Holocaust based sites and exhibitions that often dominate general dark tourism discussions (e.g. Barton 2001), whilst the mass media exploits the seemingly lurid interest in the Holocaust, which they themselves may have helped create in the first place (Schwabe 2005). Needless to say, when discussing dark tourism generally, Dark Camps of Genocide act as an extreme, are positioned at the 'dar-kest' edge of the 'dark tourism spectrum', and consequently take on the mantle of an anomaly when discussing wider and more diverse facets of dark tourism. Thus, Dark Camps of Genocide (in particular those representing the Holocaust) perhaps anchor the wider dark tourism concept, rightly or wrongly, within the public and media psyche. However, as the Seven Dark Suppliers discussion has illustrated, dark tourism is multi-faceted and multi-tiered, and goes beyond, yet includes Holocaust sites.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to construct a conceptual framework in which the supply of a diverse and fragmented dark tourism product may be located. Taking the idea that dark tourism possesses varying 'degrees' or 'shades' of intensity of darkness, and building upon the work of Strange and Kempa (2003), Miles (2002) and Sharpley (2005), a 'spectrum of supply' was outlined with a subsequent seven type categorisation of dark tourism supplier. Essentially, the Dark Tourism Spectrum is a fluid and dynamic continuum of intensity which is anchored by various, though not necessarily exclusive, product features and characteristics. That is, it would be foolhardy to suggest that all dark tourism products possess all of the defining traits which would allow them to be plotted precisely on this 'spectrum of supply'. Indeed, it is accepted that many products will be multi-layered, and will be perceived

differently amongst different groups of people in different parts of the world. In addition, as noted by Seaton (1999), changes in the micro and macro environments, such as the manipulation of 'dark heritage' for political purposes or the selective interpretation of particular events, may cause 'shifts' in how a product is both supplied and perceived by the consumer, and as a result may cause suppliers to 'move' and 'slide' along the Dark Tourism Spectrum, from darker to lighter, and vice versa. Moreover, many products may display a hybrid of characteristics outlined in this paper, and thus may not fit easily within the overall supply framework and the subsequent product typology.

Nevertheless, it is suggested that the Dark Tourism Spectrum framework, and the Seven Dark Supplier categorisation, does allow much needed clarity and a setting of parameters which may be applied to the eclectic dark tourism product range. Further to this, concern has been expressed on the terminology used by academia and the media to describe diverse facets of dark tourism supply, and the implications this may have upon the wider dark tourism market (Stone 2005b). In particular, those practitioners who supply dark tourism sites, attractions and exhibitions may dislike the actual term 'dark tourism' being applied to them, perhaps because of wider morbidity undertones and morality subtexts. They may even dismiss the view that they belong to the wider tourism industry. Of course further research will clarify this position. The implications of using emotive terminology should be readily apparent. Specifically, if one considers the implications of using terms to describe a particular industry, with some aspects of that industry not readily accepting or fully understanding its meaning and connotations, then dark tourism research and the field exercises it must entail is made all the more difficult. Indeed, Freeman (2005:2) whilst interviewing those who have led the dark tourism debate thus far suggested that 'not even the experts believe it's a case of one size fits all.' Therefore, it is suggested that the parameters of the term 'dark tourism' have been clarified by the framework of supply outlined in this paper.

However, more importantly, this framework of supply allows future research to begin to locate and identify the types of 'dark tourists', within each of these products types, and commence the fundamental task of extracting and interrogating the motives and experiences of dark tourism consumers. It remains to be seen as to the extent and type of experiences that so-called

'dark tourists' feel when they consume dark tourism products. Indeed, it is unclear whether spirituality, in its various forms, and subject of this special journal issue, is a primary experience or motivation for dark tourism consumption. Future empirical research will perhaps, following on from this paper, begin the task of plotting 'shades of spirituality' within the dark tourism experience and note the varying degrees of intensities within dark tourism demand and motivation. It is only when this type of research is underway, shall a fuller understanding of the dark tourism phenomenon be evident.

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