

## **Beauty versus tragedy: thanatourism and the memorialization of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide**

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Authors

Mona Friedrich, Tony Johnston

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### **Abstract**

Almost twenty years after the 1994 genocide, Rwanda remains confronted with the complexity of an enduring reconciliation process, a process both enabled and complicated by the arrival and increase of international tourism to the genocide memorials. Drawing on contemporary thanatourism, genocide, heritage and memorialization theory and discourse, this paper critically explores the challenges faced by actors involved in the production and consumption of memorial sites in Rwanda. The paper reveals that the 1994 genocide is becoming increasingly incorporated into the national tourism product, a contested process which is both challenged and facilitated by the guardians of the memorial sites.

### **Keywords**

Rwanda; thanatourism; dark tourism; commodification, historical integrity.

### **Introduction**

For one hundred days following the shooting down of Rwanda's former President Juvenal Habyarimana's aeroplane on April 6th, 1994, the world witnessed one of the most coldblooded attempts to annihilate a people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cook, 2006). Although the exact number of victims remains unknown, the Kigali Memorial Centre (KMC), in partnership with the Aegis Trust (2004), estimates that a combined total of over one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus lost their lives in the tragedy, with bodies being exhumed to the present day.

Today, less than twenty years after the genocide, Rwanda has been described as 'the Switzerland of Africa' (Briggs and Booth, 2009), a 'safe and stable island in the Great Lakes ocean of carnage and political insecurity' (Zorbas, 2004, p. 51). The national tourism authority depicts the country as the African rural idyll; a 'land of a Thousand Hills', 'a green undulating landscape of hills, gardens and tea plantations' (Rwanda Development Board (RDB), 2011). Yet the imprint of conflict remains highly visible; every town and village houses a genocide memorial paying respect to the massacred, highlighting the survivors' determination that such atrocities should neither be forgotten nor be repeated (Briggs and Booth, 2009, p. 10). In particular, in regards to Rwanda's image as a war-torn insecure country, visitors are often struck and surprised by the country's beauty and peaceful atmosphere which stands in contrast to the constant reminder of the tragic events which transpired at countless sites of violence throughout the country, illustrated through thousands of survivor testimonies.

Tourism to the 1994 genocide sites, and particularly the KMC, one of the focal points of the genocide, has become increasingly popular in recent years (KMC, 2012). However, while extensive research has been undertaken on the geography of difficult heritage (Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000, Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996), the memorialisation of atrocity (Ashworth, 2002) and dissonant heritage (Ashworth, 2002), genocide tourism management, commodification and consumption in the Global South has received comparatively little attention, with the majority of genocide tourism research unsurprisingly focussing on the memorialisation of the Holocaust (for examples of some of the most critical work, see Charlesworth and Addis, 2002, Ashworth, 2002 and Macdonald, 2006). This paper will help address the gap in the literature by exploring the memorialisation and commodification of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

The paper has two clear aims:

- 1) The first aim is to explore the purpose and development of the Rwandan 1994 Genocide memorials. In particular with this aim, we wish to explore the intersection between thanatourism, education and politics and any resulting dissonance.

- 2) Secondly, the paper aims to further develop knowledge on the contribution of (or lack of) thanatourism to peace and reconciliation processes in post-conflict settings.

## **Literature review**

### ***Defining thanatourism***

Thanatourism, also termed 'dark tourism' (Foley & Lennon, 1996), 'grief tourism' (Blom, 2000) and 'atrocities heritage' (Ashworth, 2002), is a term used to denote travel to sites motivated by a desire to encounter death or disaster (Seaton, 1996). It is argued to be an increasingly pervasive phenomenon in contemporary society (Stone, 2006), but a form of travel with much older origins (Seaton, 1996). Various theories as an intimation of postmodernity (Lennon & Foley, 2000), a result of a secular society's quest for new moral spaces (Stone, 2009) and as congruent with wider societal interest in death (Seaton, 2009, Walter, 2009), it has blossomed as a field of study in recent years (BBC, 2012), becoming one of the most popular typologies of tourism to study in academia (Hartmann, 2012).

Although 'thanatourism' and 'dark tourism', the most prominent of the various nomenclatures, were both coined for the same special edition of *The International Journal of Heritage Studies*, by Seaton (1996) and Foley and Lennon (1996) respectively, 'dark tourism' has arguably become the more popular of the two, appearing regularly in both academic and popular media publications, albeit often misused in the latter. However, there remains some debate about what each term entails, with Seaton (2009) noting that the label 'dark' is loaded and subjective.

Others have challenged the term; Bowman and Pezzullo (2009: 199), for example, have gone so far as to suggest that it may be 'time to even abandon the term 'dark tourism' insofar as it may present an impediment to detailed and circumstantial analyses of tourist sites and performances in all their mundane or spectacular particularity and ambiguity.' While this appears to be somewhat a semantic debate, it could be argued that misuse of the label 'dark tourism' by the media has helped to create a misunderstanding among stakeholders as to the conceptual underpinnings of such tourism, and particularly whether the term labels site characteristic or visitor motivation. This sentiment became evident in the primary research for this paper; the term 'dark tourism' did not sit comfortably with key informants in field, arguably due to what Seaton (2009: 526) termed its pejorative connotations. On the other hand

however, the various dark tourism lenses proposed by Stone (2006, 2012) are convincing models to interrogate and position the interaction between tourist and death specifically, and society and death more generally. Although thanatourism would equally be subject to some of these same criticisms, it is arguably suffers less with media association and thus is the preferred terminology for this paper.

### ***Thanatourism & genocide***

The production and consumption of genocide tourism landscapes has featured prominently in tourism and thanatourism literature; a prominence which arguably reflects contemporary society's increased interest in death (Virilio, 2006). Although interpretation at genocide landscapes should ideally be more heavily focussed on educational and commemorative aims than on negotiating tourism, many post-genocide sites, both authentic and synthetic, must face the reality of being popular international tourist attractions. High visitor numbers are reported at many prominent sites and have become increasingly popular tourist attractions. Auschwitz-Birkenau, for example, attracted 1.43 million visitors in 2012; almost treble the number of visitors in 2001 (Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, 2013). Negotiating complex history within the expectations of the demanding tourism industry creates many management and interpretation challenges. Thus, a great deal of thanatourism literature focusses on how genocide is (re)produced for tourist consumption.

Genocide tourism literature has arguably focussed more on European events in the WW2 Jewish Holocaust than other acts of genocide, with publications discussing sites and events related to, for example, Nuremberg (Macdonald, 2006), Auschwitz-Birkenau (e.g. Biran *et al*, 2011, Miles, 2002), the United States Holocaust Museum (Lennon & Foley, 1999) and Yad Vashem (Cohen, 2011). More recent events are arguably often overlooked by comparison. The result is that we know significantly less about the production and consumption of genocide tourism sites in the Global South, for example, with a particularly Euro-centric outlook on the phenomenon dominating the literature.

However, although thanatourism research could be criticised for being somewhat narrow in geographical range, the same papers could equally be praised for their intellectual breadth and wide perspective. Research at WW2 sites, for example, has explored a diversity of themes, including, educational value (Charlesworth, 1996), ecological landscapes (Charlesworth, 2004), the mediation of heritage (Macdonald,

2006), the management of dissonance (Ashworth, 2002), tourist motivations and experience (Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011, Cohen, 2011) and semiotics (Siegenthaler, 2002). This work has been complemented by a number of production and consumption conceptual and historical papers, which, for example, examine the consumption of death as a response to secularisation (Stone, 2009) and as a result of the legacy of the Christian Cult of Death (Seaton, 2009).

Following a recent call for less Western-centric thanatourism research (Johnston, 2012) and a desire for a wider volume of empirical data on thanatourism (Seaton, 2009), this paper proposes that genocide tourism in Rwanda represents an ideal location to further develop knowledge of this sensitive and emotionally complex phenomenon. Reasons for choosing Rwanda are many. One, the Rwandan Genocide was a mass slaughter that took place over the course of 100 days in 1994, an event very much in living memory. The death toll from the massacre was estimated at in excess of 1,000,000 people, a figure which includes some 85% of the country's Tutsi population (KMC, 2012). The temporal proximity of the events of 1994 make it a particularly relevant study, given the uncertainty surrounding the memorialisation process. Many of the sites to be discussed in this paper are extremely raw and fluid, operating in a state of flux. Unlike World War 2, the focus of much thanatourism literature, the Rwandan Genocide is a very recent event. Indeed, for most of the participants in this present study, 1994 was well within living memory. What happens to the memorials in the coming years will likely have a significant impact on the survivors, particularly given the country's rapid tourism growth post-war.

Second to the scale and temporal proximity justification, it must be acknowledged that a considerable power emerges from the genocide memorials in Rwanda. Tourists at what may be perceived as still-raw 'scars' and memorials experience shock, horror, confusion and hope (Sharpley, 2012), provoked by encounters with graphic physical artefacts and personal narratives from survivors. The most emotionally challenging artefacts to encounter include those depicting the brutality imposed on women and children, the poignant contrast between bones and the decaying remains of colourful clothes and the dehumanising effect of presentation of multiple skulls. Encountering such artefacts proves a very distressing experience for many tourists (Hohenhaus, 2013), frequently engendering a personal form of thanatopsis; the contemplation of death (Sharpley, 2012).

However, literature on difficult heritage generally acknowledges that great educational potential exists at genocide landscapes beyond the simple shock experienced by tourists. This educational potential can exist at the actual location of genocide acts (e.g. see Charlesworth, 1996 & 2004 or Ashworth, 2002) or 'in populu' sites (Cohen, 2011); sites which offer less locational authenticity due to their synthetic nature but greater societal proximity to the event. Importantly, there appears to be a relationship between emotional involvement and education, with Cohen (2011) writing that at Yad Vashem, there is a strong correlation between emotional involvement and satisfaction; those who find a thanatourism experience most challenging are those who are most satisfied with their tourist experience.

A challenge arises here for the memorialisation of genocide. Lennon and Foley (2000) note the boundary between education and commercialisation has become increasingly blurred at many sites of death and disaster and at such sites, the emphasis on commercialisation can result in a privileging of the inauthentic. Indeed, thanatourism, or travel to so-called 'black spots', has previously been positioned as a post-modern phenomenon (Lennon and Foley, 2000, Rojek (1993), a positioning which seems to have arisen due mainly to the features of a small sample of sites discussed by early authors on the topic. The features of thanatourism used to argue its postmodernist character have variously included; doubts about the project of modernity (Lennon and Foley, 2000), the privileging of the 'visual' over authenticity and aim of universal appeal (Muzaini et al, 2007) and as a type of 'postmodern hyper-reality' in which 'real is made fake' (Tarlow, 2005:53). Yet, thanatourism is not a new phenomenon; travel to sites of death and disaster is a particularly old form of travel (Johnston, 2013); and authors have argued that the post-modern situation of thanatourism is both unhistorical and inaccurate (Casbeard and Booth, 2013).

Conversely, tourism to sites of death and disaster seems to represent a quest for authentic experiences; experiences which are often stimulated by encounters with authentic objects, but equally can be stimulated by recreated objects. Thanatourism, although now heavily commodified at many sites, may at least give the impression of being an authentic experience, offering contact with a back area rarely seen in a society where death has been medicalised out of sight (Stone, 2009). Wang (1999) clarifies that when discussing authenticity in tourism, the toured experience and toured object must be separated. This is particularly relevant in thanatourism, where contact with an inauthentic object may still provoke an existential authenticity. Stone

(2009) offers the example of a dark-fun-factory to illustrate this; a death themed amusement park may have little to do with heritage but may still provoke an existential authenticity, a state of being activated by a tourism encounter. Finally, with reference to examining Rwanda's 1994 Genocide landscape through a thanatourism lens, there exists a clear tension between memorial stakeholders as to how the genocide should be interpreted and presented. Ashworth and Tunbridge (1996) define such a manifestation of tension as 'dissonant heritage'; the present use of the past and its establishment through contemporary circumstances which are not agreed. Visibility of dissonance in Rwanda's memorialisation process is clear, with conflict between victims, perpetrators, governance, private enterprise and international development organisations, among other stakeholders. Genocide memorialisation in Rwanda is a process which is frustrated by practical issues on one hand, such as bone conservation, and political and interpretive issues on the other, such as establishing - and subsequently presenting to tourists - a comprehensible genocide narrative.

## **Study site & method**

### ***Rwanda and the background to the 1994 Genocide***

Even though little about the origins of the Hutu and Tutsi can be scientifically reconstructed, it is certain that the genocide did not develop through long fought tribal detestation (Destexhe, 1995) and was in effect structured, organized and rehearsed well in advance by a small group of the regime's political, military and economic elite who felt threatened by possible political change (Prunier, 2002).

Since the beginning of the genocide, it was generally agreed that its context was complex and that the 'ethnic hatred' had various origins. These included the construction of ethnicity by 'outsiders', class struggles, Rwanda's North-South divide and a series of unprecedented economic shocks, some resulting directly from conditions imposed by the IMF/World Bank (Pottier, 2002). In particular, the RPF invasion, a Tutsi dominated politico military organization made up of members of the refugee diaspora in Uganda, and the resulting war since 1990 unleashed a tremendous response and served as a catalyst for Hutu solidarity and the growing determination of hard-liners within the government to manipulate ethnic hatred for political advantage (Lemarchand, 1995).

Therefore, delivering an accurate, non-bias and all-encompassing presentation of Rwanda's history provides a challenging task. While many attempts to

do so remain contested, one of the most commonly cited, is the account supported by the government and also the Aegis Trust, a UK based NGO that campaigns against crimes against humanity and genocide (Aegis Trust, 2012). The NGO was involved in the construction of the Kigali Memorial Centre in collaboration with the government and other members of Rwandan society, such as survivors, and traces. However, ideas fostering racism and discrimination existed as far back as the Belgian colonizers and German and British explorers, who concluded that the Tutsi originated in the Nile Valley from a superior race more closely related to the Europeans (Smith, 2006). The Belgian authorities formalized this division by introducing identity cards in 1932, identifying 15% as Tutsi, 84% as Hutu and 1% as Twa (Smith, 2006). The death of Rwanda's king and the subsequent election of the Parmehutu political party which was fighting for the emancipation of the Hutu, as well as the country's independence in 1961 turned Rwanda into an extremely centralized, repressive, single party state (Aegis Trust, 2004). Tutsis were increasingly harassed or killed and others were forced into exile. Some refugees joined the Ugandan based Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), an organization led by General Paul Kagame that opposed the oppressive Habyarimana government (Melvern, 2000). On July 18th 1994, the war came to an end with the RPF defeating the last remnants of the former government troops (Melvern, 2000), inheriting the inconceivable task of rebuilding an entirely devastated, destroyed and deeply traumatized country.

Today, Rwanda's landscape integrates over 400 genocide memorials, standing out via banners provided by the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide (CNLG) in the country's mourning colour, purple (see Figure). Four of these are to be considered for UNESCO world heritage status, including the Kigali Memorial Centre, Nyamata, Bisesero and Murambi (de la Croix Tabaro, 2012). The Kigali Memorial Centre, the country's main genocide memorial in the Gisozi district of Kigali, features on a number of tourism packages, such as the 'Rwanda: Culture, Primates & Nature Private Tour', which includes visits to the genocide memorials alongside searching for primates and wild birds (Rainbow Tours, 2013). In 2011, the KMC attracted in excess of 40,000 international visitors, a number that has nearly doubled since 2004 and now outnumbers local visitors (Figure 1) Visitors to the memorials are afforded great spatial proximity to the genocide wounds and scars; including the opportunity to view mass graves, artefacts and human remains. Peace and reconciliation tours further offer tourists the opportunity to meet with both victims and perpetrators. While the



memorial visitor data indicates a strong interest among international tourists to learn about the events of 1994, the presentation and interpretation of the genocide can have deep emotional impacts on visitors, and for many, proves to be a confusing experience (Sharpley, 2012).

| Year | Local Visitors | International Visitors | Total  |
|------|----------------|------------------------|--------|
| 2004 | 46,545         | 27,644                 | 74,189 |
| 2005 | 19,342         | 16,178                 | 35,520 |
| 2006 | 37,227         | 20,519                 | 57,746 |
| 2007 | 44,449         | 27,996                 | 72,445 |
| 2008 | 45,548         | 35,107                 | 80,655 |
| 2009 | 35,840         | 35,060                 | 70,900 |
| 2010 | 17,985         | 36,987                 | 54,972 |
| 2011 | 21,461         | 42,377                 | 63,838 |

*Table 1: KMC visitor statistics 2004-2011, adapted from KMC tourist number records by author, June 2012*



### **Methodology and data collection**

Given the sensitive matter of discussing personal experiences, perceptions and collective meanings of remembrance in an emotionally charged post-conflict environment (Zorbas, 2004), the study was undertaken using a qualitative research methodology which, through its adaptable verbal and observatory methods, is extensively recognized as the best suited to address more in-depth issues in complex cultural, social and political settings (Mason, 2002; Cloke, Cook, Crang, Goodwin, Painter Philo, 2004). Secondly, given the increased desire in the literature for methods that are empathetic to the emotional complexities of thanatourism (see for example

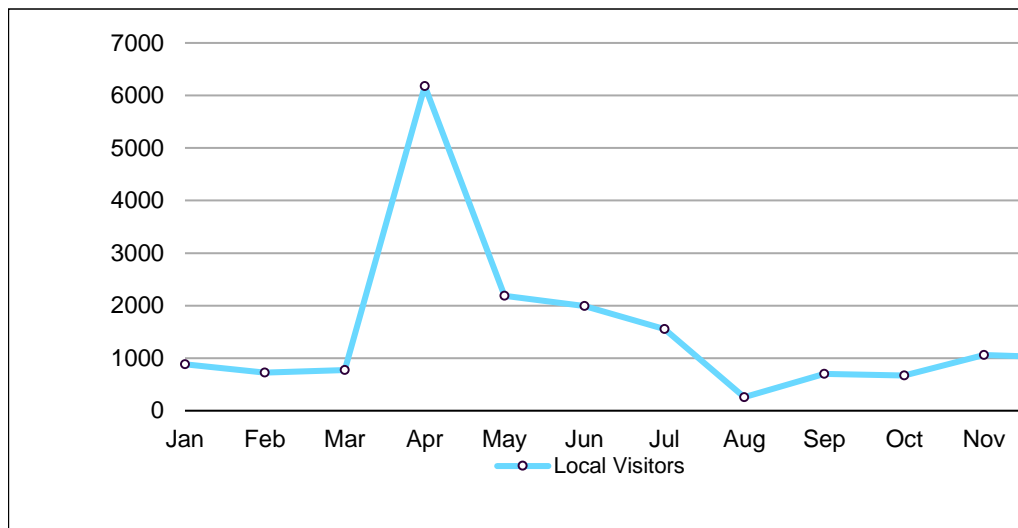
Biran et al, 2011; Dunkley, Morgan & Westwood, 2011 & Iles, 2008), it was acknowledged by the authors that a positivist approach would be invasive and likely yield little useful empirical data. A four-week period of fieldwork was thus conducted in summer 2012 at a selection of the memorials, utilising participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data was additionally obtained for the study, including highly pertinent surveys produced by the KMC and other materials such as maps, DVDs, brochures and leaflets.

However, it is appropriate at this stage to acknowledge that the authors are aware of the limitations of this qualitative research study, particularly in regards to Rwanda's present situation. Certain people in Rwanda have been difficult to access and silenced issues were often not openly discussed. Nevertheless, this study was predominantly aimed at one particular group of individuals, namely those involved in the memorialisation process and its focus was not to discuss controversial political issues. Certainly, the participants had incentives to present their efforts in particular ways, in regards to their past or role in the present, and contributions should therefore be regarded as subjective. Future research will aim to incorporate a more diverse sample frame and will incorporate further fieldwork.

This research project recognizes that the researchers themselves are implicated in the construction of meanings with their participants (Cloke *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, the social, cultural and political conditions in which the interviews are carried out have been considered throughout the analysis. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of the author's voice as a dark tourist and researcher should not be discounted but positively acknowledged since the consideration and examination of experiences and the effect they have on the research outcome will enable a deeper understanding of the topic in question (Crang and Cook, 2007).

Fieldwork was carried out during Rwanda's 18th 100-day commemoration and mourning period; a period held annually from the beginning of April to mid-July to remember the victims of the genocide. Communities and institutions throughout the country, accordingly, organize commemoration events and mourning ceremonies at memorial sites and other places of memory. These ceremonies offered opportunities to interact with community members. The mourning period accounts for the increase

in local visitor numbers at the KMC during the months of April to July, as seen for the year 2011 in Figure 2.



*Figure 2: KMC local visitor trends in 2011*

In total, eleven instances of participant observation were undertaken (see Table 2), alongside forty-three semi-structured interviews (see Table 3). The sample-frame studied included actors from various backgrounds, communities and institutions, including individuals actively involved in producing memory, such as policy makers (RDB/CNLG officials), memorial staff and management, as well as participants using these places, including local community members and domestic and international visitors. In addition, the sample-frame comprised companies and institutions promoting memorial site visits and other related activities, for example, tour operators, hotels/hostels, the Rwandan Tourism Office and the British Council and High Commission. Other interviewees associated with the construction of Rwanda's present and future history included a tourism lecturer, Hôtel des Mille Collines survivors and international as well as national non-governmental organisations engaged in assistance for victims of the genocide and advocacy work on the prevention of future crimes against humanity.

At this point it is appropriate to mention that while the authors are aware of the fact that ethnic distinctions are not publicly made in Rwanda today, with the representative political principles revolving around establishing an all-embracing

'Rwandanness' (Kinzer, 2010), these distinctions are of relevance to this study and are therefore used throughout the paper.

| <b>Participant Observation (Po)</b> | <b>Location</b>                     | <b>Activity</b>               |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Po1                                 | Kigali Memorial Centre              | Guided memorial visit         |
| Po2                                 | Nyamta Genocide Memorial            | Memorial Visit                |
| Po3                                 | Ntarama Genocide Memorial           | Memorial Visit                |
| Po4                                 | Nyamata                             | Peace and Reconciliation Tour |
| Po5                                 | Nyanza Genocide Memorial            | Memorial visit                |
| Po6                                 | Nyanza-Rebero Genocide Memorial     | Memorial visit                |
| Po7                                 | Kabgayi Genocide Memorial           | Memorial visit                |
| Po8                                 | Butare University Genocide Memorial | Memorial visit                |
| Po9                                 | Murambi Genocide Memorial           | Guided memorial visit         |
| Po10                                | Nyarubuye Genocide Memorial         | Memorial visit                |
| Po11                                | Bisesero Genocide Memorial          | Memorial visit                |

*Table 2: Participant observation on genocide memorial tours, Rwanda, June 2012*

| <b>Interview</b> | <b>Location</b> | <b>Participant</b>  | <b>Date</b> |
|------------------|-----------------|---|-------------|
| Int.01           | London          | Aegis Trust <sup>1</sup> member   | 17 May 2012 |
| Int.02           | Kigali          | Canadian tourist  | 28 May 2012 |
| Int.03           | Kigali          | Tour-guide at Camp Kigali Memorial Site Genocide survivor                       | 28 May 2012 |
| Int.04           | Kigali          | Aegis Trust member/Genocide survivor  | 29 May 2012 |
| Int.05           | Kigali          | Kigali Memorial Centre employee & Genocide survivor                             | 29 May 2012 |
| Int.06           | Kigali          | Kigali Memorial Centre management & Genocide survivor                           | 30 May 2012 |
| Int.07           | Kigali          | Tour-guide at Kigali Memorial Centre & Genocide survivor                        | 30 May 2012 |
| Int.08           | Kigali          | Canadian tourist  | 30 May 2012 |
| Int.09           | Kigali          | Official, RDB   | 31 May 2012 |
| Int.10           | Kigali          | Rwandan salesperson at Rwanda tourism office/Tour-guide                         | 31 May 2012 |
| Int.11           | Kigali          | Kigali Memorial Centre employee   | 1 June 2012 |
| Int.12           | Kigali          | Aegis Trust member  | 3 June 2012 |
| Int.13           | Kigali          | Hôtel des Mille Collines receptionist   | 3 June 2012 |
| Int.14           | Kigali          | Discover Rwanda Youth Hostel management   | 3 June 2012 |
| Int.15           | Kigali          | Receptionist at the Hôtel des Mille Collines during the genocide                | 4 June 2012 |
| Int.16           | Kigali          | Hôtel des Mille Collines employee Receptionist at the hotel during the genocide | 4 June 2012 |
| Int.17           | Kibeho          | Tour-guide at Kibeho Memorial Site  | 5 June 2012 |
| Int.18           | Kigali          | Kigali Memorial Centre employee & Genocide survivor                             | 6 June 2012 |
| Int.19           | Kigali          | Tourism student/Genocide survivor   | 6 June 2012 |

<sup>1</sup> NGO that campaigns against crimes against humanity and genocide and runs the Holocaust Memorial and Educational Centre in the UK (Aegis Trust, 2012).

| Interview | Location | Participant   | Date         |
|-----------|----------|---|--------------|
| Int.20    | Kigali   | Local community member/Genocide survivor                                    | 6 June 2012  |
| Int.21    | Kigali   | Tour operator employee  | 6 June 2012  |
| Int.22    | Nyanza   | IBUKA <sup>2</sup> member/Genocide survivor                                 | 7 June 2012  |
| Int.23    | Kigali   | Tour-guide at Kigali Memorial Centre & Genocide survivor                    | 8 June 2012  |
| Int.24    | Kigali   | Lecturer at Rwanda Tourism University College (RTUC)                        | 11 June 2012 |
| Int.25    | Kigali   | Local community member  | 11 June 2012 |
| Int.26    | Kigali   | British Council employee  | 11 June 2012 |
| Int.27    | Kigali   | British High Commission employee  | 11 June 2012 |
| Int.28    | Kigali   | Official, Rwandan National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) | 12 June 2012 |
| Int.29    | Kigali   | Official, CNLG  | 12 June 2012 |
| Int.30    | Kigali   | Association des Veuves du Genocide Agahozo (AVEGA) <sup>3</sup> member      | 12 June 2012 |
| Int.31    | Butare   | Butare University student   | 13 June 2012 |
| Int.32    | Murambi  | Tour-guide at Murambi Memorial Centre Genocide survivor                     | 13 June 2012 |
| Int.33    | Kigali   | IBUKA member  | 14 June 2012 |
| Int.34    | Kigali   | Kigali Memorial Centre management & Genocide survivor                       | 15 June 2012 |
| Int.35    | Kigali   | Aegis Trust member  | 15 June 2012 |
| Int.36    | Kigali   | Intern at RDB/American tourist  | 18 June 2012 |
| Int.37    | Kigali   | Tour operator employee  | 18 June 2012 |
| Int.38    | Kigali   | Official, Ministry of Trade and Industry                                    | 19 June 2012 |
| Int.39    | Kigali   | Tour operator employee  | 20 June 2012 |
| Int.40    | Kigali   | Official, RDB   | 20 June 2012 |
| Int.41    | London   | Aegis Trust member  | 27 July 2012 |
| Int.42    | London   | British tourist/visited Rwanda in 2008                                      | 18 July 2012 |
| Int. 43   | London   | British tourist/visited Rwanda in 2008                                      | 18 July 2012 |

*Table 3: Interviews conducted with genocide tourism stakeholders, Summer 2012*

## Findings

Evidence from the literature and fieldwork suggests that the 1994 genocide is becoming increasingly incorporated into the Rwandan national tourism product, a contested process, both facilitated and challenged by tourism and memorial stakeholders. Two key phenomena affect this process, namely preservation and presentation of authenticity and the complexities of establishing a genocide narrative.

<sup>2</sup> NGO involved in genocide prevention activities, as well as genocide survivor support (Ibuka, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> NGO supporting the empowerment and re-integration of genocide widows into society (AVEGA, nd).

### ***Authenticity***

As noted previously, there has been a rapid increase in the numbers of international tourists to the KMC since 2004, arguably resulting from a combination of improvements in the country's tourism infrastructure Rwanda Development Board (2011) and increased global interest in genocide education (Auschwitz Birkenau Memorial State Museum (ABMSM), 2012). The landscape of Rwanda depicts diverse places of remembrance which have changed both in the public and private sphere since the genocide (Tadjo, 2010), but many of the sites are still under construction, with artefacts openly exposed and no permanent guides or exhibitions in place. Locational authenticity therefore emerged as a theme in the primary research, often framed with discussions related to commodification and the charging of entry fees.

During the interviews, it became apparent that a lack of funding makes progress slow in creating interpretive materials. Since the memorials 'cannot be regarded as revenue generating sites' (Int.24), a member of IBUKA, an independent survivors' group, suggested that 'it is time for the government to establish a policy which requires visitors to pay a certain amount for [their] maintenance' (Int.33). It is possible that such a policy could be implemented in the future; but as outlined by a CNLG official, the memorials are still too raw to require payment (Int.29). Some disagreement surrounding entry fees emerged, with one interviewee stating that 'we do not want people saying that we are selling the blood of our families', (Int.34). While most community members agreed that 'everyone should have the opportunity to visit and learn about what happened in Rwanda' (Int.20); there was a broad acknowledgement that 'charging would limit people to come' (Int.23). However, a tourism student and survivor declared in this context that entry fees could support communities affected by the genocide.

Discussion of potential fees often led to a broader discussion of commercialisation. Although interviewees were reluctant to talk about memorialisation in relation to tourism and thanatourism because of a perceived insensitive commercialisation of death it might imply, there was an acknowledgement of the potential positives which come with tourism; 'it helps us and the world to remember and to learn from our past' (Int.19). However, general discomfort with the term 'dark tourism' emerged, with two Aegis Trust members arguing that:

...dark tourism suggests that we are using an event in history for public consumption, voyeurism and pathological curiosity. I do not think that this

represents the vast majority of our visitors, who see the site primarily as a burial place for victims.

(Int.41)

Despite this rejection by Aegis Trust, interviews were conducted with tour operators who approached genocide memorial visits as a 'product' in various ways. Although there was a reluctance among some to discuss the genocide memorials in a commercial context, one guide indicated that a lot of tourists pass Murambi on their way to Nyungwe Forest National Park, and they generally incorporate a visit to the memorial on the itinerary. While not all the guides offered memorial visits within official packages, they did organize site visits if located on the way to the National Parks or at special request. One company, New Dawn Associates, pioneers of community based tourism in Rwanda, offered a Millennium Village Tour which included a Nyamata Genocide Memorial tour and a visit to a community where perpetrators and victims are rebuilding their lives together. According to one tour-guide, visiting the village has a substantial impact on visitors. 'The most shocking experience for groups is meeting the people who committed genocide. It is hard for them to understand how survivors can forgive and reconstruct communities with perpetrators who killed their family members' (Int.23). This observation was supported by the KMC surveys, which revealed that the memorials evoke strong feelings among visitors (see Table 4). The opportunity to talk directly to victims offered a perceived authentic experience.

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**How did the exhibition make you feel?**

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Of course sad and in some way touched my heart.

Disturbed, upset, very emotional that it even happened and that no one from the outside helped sooner.

It is a tragedy that affected millions but is only known by a few.

The exhibitions are haunting; really bring home the immense scope of the tragedy.

Ashamed of the lack of international intervention but respectful, dignified memorial.

I am deeply shocked but impressed with the resilience of the people of Rwanda in the present day, although they should never forget the past.

Are we humans this cruel by nature? Are we still animals?

*Table 4: How did the exhibition make you feel? At the KMC  
Source: adapted from Aegis Trust visitor surveys held by the KMC*

The opportunity to meet with victims and perpetrators and to view bones appears to deliver a great rawness and authenticity to the genocide narrative for tourists. However, during the fieldwork it was observed that the rawness is negotiated differently by memorial guardians and tourists. Discussing an encounter with highly graphic artefacts for example, a Canadian tourist asserted that, 'No, I don't mind upsetting my sensibilities if it means somehow I can empathize and identify with the victims; we owe them that', (Int.8). However, this emotion was not shared, and a British visitor stated in relation to the two church memorial sites:

The human remains at the churches I felt different about. Those humans were killed without dignity and now they are kept without dignity ... laid out for shock value ... [This experience] did not educate me ... it did not feel right and it did not have the same impact as the memorial centre ... Also the guides were not very animated. They could have put it in a better context.

(Int.42)

Furthermore, an additional controversy was observed in relation to Rwanda's principal memorialisation strategy which entails 'leaving massacre sites intact and displaying bones of the dead - or in the case of ... [Murambi], preserving thousands of corpses in powdered lime', (Guyer, 2009, p. 157). Although excluding certain victims from a dignified burial ceremony may compromise sacredness, identifying bodies is not only particularly costly but might impede the priority of the government to restore control and deliver assistance (Williams, 2007). As a result the remains become 'de-individualized, making them unlikely to become the claim of any particular family or group' (Williams, 2007, p. 45). Nevertheless, although authorities want to depict the accurate extent and atrocity of the genocide, as proof for any appearing doubters, some would rather let them rest in peace (Harper, 2011). One survivor stated that 'people say that the genocide was a civil war... perpetrators still deny that the genocide happened. So the memorials and the remains have to stay [as evidence]' (Int.20). However, a member of the KMC management stated that:

...in our culture someone who dies has to be buried. [However], we have to compromise. Any survivor can be corrupted ... Some don't want to share



their stories; they leave out parts or don't tell the truth. But the bones have a complete message ... our family members need to help us to tell the horrible things that happened to them, but in a respectful way.

(Int.34)

### ***Dissonant heritage and establishing a genocide narrative***

Further to authenticity, the challenges of establishing a clear genocide narrative emerged as an notable challenge for memorial guardians. While inherently attributing ethnic divisions to certain groups such as the Hutu militias, the KMC's general emphasis is put on a shared victimisation of the Rwandan population in the interest of a few main genocide architects (Sodaro, 2011). This aligns with the government's replacement of the ethnic divisions 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' in public discourse with the terms 'genocidaire' and 'victim', reflected in the terminology used throughout the exhibition: 'women and children were a direct target of the genocidaires for murder, rape and mutilation' (KMC, 2004, p. 24).

When the Aegis Trust became involved with the KMC construction, survivors were asked what their priorities for the provided funds were. A majority stated that 'in 1994, we were forgotten by the world and our families were killed; so please ensure that we will never be forgotten again and that the genocide will never happen again' (Int.12). While this statement supports the construction of an archive and interpretive centre, most Rwandans who were in the country during the genocide express no desire to relive the trauma through displayed artefacts or remains, making the design and function of not only the KMC, but also the other memorial sites most relevant to future generations and non-Rwandan visitors (Steele, 2006). This was emphasized by the KMC site counsellor who affirmed that while:

...foreigners visit out of curiosity, locals, who have experienced the horror, come to visit the mass graves. Especially orphaned children and widows relive the trauma when being confronted with the exhibitions. Foreigners in contrast just have simple emotions.

(Int.11)

However, even more contentious than this issue of heritage ownership, is the issue over the commemoration of Hutu killed before, during and after the genocide, in particular by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) (Brandstetter, 2010). The

commemorative sites are considered as burial places for the victims of the Tutsi genocide, but they also include those Hutu in opposition to Habyarimana's government and relatives of Tutsi or Hutu protecting Tutsi (Brandstetter, 2010). A member of the KMC management stated in this context that:

...we have to admit that moderate Hutus were also killed and put in the same graves. We cannot identify people in the mass graves. People say there are no moderate Hutus, where are they buried? But they were thrown in the same pit, together with Congolese and Europeans. People want two separate museums but we cannot identify them now.

(Int.36)

This underlying simmering issue is fuelled by the arguable number of crimes committed by RPF soldiers. While the government affirms that most of the deaths were not civilian casualties but fighters killed in combat, post genocide literature and human rights organisations have questioned this assertion (Des Forges, 1999). However, the government must preclude 'memory' from destroying society in Rwanda and, to this end and controversially, it has banned ethnicity whilst controlling ceremonial memory. Nevertheless, it has recently re-established ethnicity to a degree by officially referring to the genocide as the '1994 Tutsi genocide in Rwanda', accentuating a collective Tutsi victimisation and, consequently, imposing guilt on the Hutu population (Eltringham, 2004). That the overwhelming number of genocide victims were Tutsi is not in dispute; its emphasis could however impede reconciliation (Waldorf, 2009). Although the aim of this paper is not to analyse the political complexities of the Rwandan Genocide itself, it can however be concluded at this point that, even though some can publicly commemorate at official Tutsi genocide memorials, no respectable recognition might prevent others from doing the same (Brandstetter, 2010). While the sites are considered as burial places for the victims of the Tutsi genocide, they should include those Hutu in opposition to Habyarimana's government and relatives of Tutsi or Hutu protecting Tutsi (Brandstetter, 2010). It becomes apparent that memorial creation was negotiated and contested, as all narratives, by a certain group of actors involved, therefore reflecting particular political, personal concerns (Caplan, 2007).

As stated by a member of the Aegis Trust, such debate has 'the potential to cause harm and lead to further violence' (Int.41), particularly through the victimisation

and demonization of certain groups portrayed. Observations at the KMC exhibitions however noted that captions depicting Rwanda before the genocide show unity with, 'We did not choose to be colonised', 'We had lived in peace for many centuries'. Today's official government explanation of the genocide states that ethnic divisions resulted from a combination of 'colonial divide and rule, bad leadership, extremist political parties, a virulently anti-Tutsi ideology, the hate media and an uneducated peasantry that steeped in habits of obedience' (Waldorf, 2009, p. 105).

## **Discussion**

The first finding illustrated that dissonance exists at the memorial sites in a number of forms, a phenomenon enhanced by both the physical and political complexities of the memorialisation process and the arrival and growth of tourism in Rwanda. While the memorials were constructed for victims and their relatives, friends and family members, it is clear they have become more than just burial and remembrance sites. As evolution from wound to scar to memorial to product occurs (or does not occur), a balance must be struck between remembrance for locals and interpretation of the genocide for tourists.

Dissonance emerges in particular around practices of commemorating the dead, with questions such as which elements of the past should be forgotten, interpreted, remembered and funded all creating tensions. How the dead should be commemorated, whether human remains should be exposed at memorial sites (Brandstetter, 2010), and whether Hutus who lost their lives during the civil war and genocide should also be commemorated all also provoked debate. In general, all interviewed participants noted that remembering, commemorating and learning from genocide is vital, at both national and international levels. As stated by a tour-guide and survivor 'if people visit Rwanda, this means that we are recognized on a global level. Maybe the international community will intervene the next time something happens' (Int.7).

While some interviewees argued that genocide memorials should focus solely on commemoration and education for the affected populations, this is easier said than done. Not only does memorialization develop 'under the opportunities, expectations and pressures asserted by the globalized world' (Davis, 2009, p. 261) – in particular the pressures exerted by tourism - dissonance within post-conflict societies where commemoration risks replicating past divisions is challenging and difficult to

negotiate. Although some genocide memorials in Rwanda have indeed become 'attractions', great attempts to provide an educational experience have been made by the KMC in particular. This paper emphasizes that dissonance among stakeholders needs to be overcome if the thanatourism and memorialisation intersection is to produce crucial interchange on global responsibility towards genocide prevention.

However, great variations exist across the seven memorial sites being officially promoted by the CNLG for international tourism in Rwanda, with interpretation ranging from highly produced to very raw. The variations will inevitably lead to greater tourist awareness of the 'most important' sites; such a process may become similar to the relationship held between Auschwitz-Birkenau and other 'forgotten' Nazi extermination camps in Poland if incorrectly managed. It is crucial therefore that future developments of the memorial sites take a holistic approach, funding permitted, to ensure that the genocide does not become synonymous solely with the KMC Gisozi or other easily accessible memorials.

As Hohenhaus (2013) notes, many of the other memorials remain very difficult to access, leading to the majority of tourist understanding of the genocide stemming from one memorial. Nevertheless, apart from the 7 sites promoted for visitors, Rwanda's landscape incorporates hundreds of other local and more private burial places, which are usually less accessible for the public. Their maintenance should be regarded as equally important and while it is crucial for visitors to gain an overview of Rwanda's past through various site visits and interactions with survivors, as well as a dignified preservation of these sites, it should however be acknowledged that 'putting priority on accessibility and infrastructure means that we are expecting the memorials to provide for visitors, which is secondary to why they were constructed, namely as burial places' (Int. 12)'.

A further finding in relation to the memorialisation process, indicated that the prohibition on ethnicity and controlled ritual of memorialization in relation to reconciliation efforts in Rwanda needs to be subjected to further debate, particularly since heritage and memory formation in general should be a constant process of critical reassessment (Tadjo, 2010). When considering Rwanda today, with its clean, organized and quickly developing environment, the determination and dedication with which the country has reconstructed itself is truly inspirational. As President Kagame declared; 'building a nation from nothing?... There is no strategy manual for this. There is nothing that is not a priority, and the priorities are always conflicting'

(Grant, 2010). Even so, for the promise of 'never again' to become more than just a slogan of hope, this paper stresses the increasing need to address complex questions related to the accessibility of the memorials to multiple members affected by the past and whether these spaces of memory incorporate the various needs of Rwanda's society and if so, contribute to on-going peace and reconciliation efforts. Emphasis of this paper was put on stakeholders involved in the memorialization process or Tutsi survivors, consequently bearing the potential for future research to focus on more concealed voices and aspirations for Rwanda's memorial landscape.

In relation to this discord, Steele (2006) argues somewhat radically that the KMC memorial surpasses the victims and society by focusing on humanity and international legal principles. Yet this is not the KMC's stated intention. The KMC is located in a modern setting and in the words of a British visitor, 'it was so well done and laid out, it was like being in a capital city in Europe. It was a really informative and educative useful visit' (Int.42). However, more importantly, the centre offers an opportunity for international visitors to engage and connect with the site and its background, providing a stronger foundation for the future discourse of genocide and conflict prevention, as well as a sense of international responsibility (Davis, 2009). This was affirmed by a British interviewee who stated that 'the exhibition part depicting other genocides in the world still plays with my political reflection because it states that we can't continue to let this happen; we have to intervene; it affects all of us' (Int.42). This statement was mirrored by a Canadian visitor who emphasized that the exhibition made it very clear that this could happen anywhere and should not be excused as African tribal warfare (Int.2).

The KMC attempts to make sense of the senselessness which Rwanda found itself in after the genocide by creating a national and international space of reflection, memory and hopeful 'never agains', as illustrated by the visitor book entries at various memorial sites (Table 5). The comments emphasize that thanatourism should not be dismissed as a 'morbid fascination of gazing upon representations of mass murder' (Sharpley, 2012, p. 109).; The field research in Rwanda has depicted that tourism at the memorial sites may give cathartic effects to tourists, consequently integrating itself what Causevic and Lynch (2010) would likely term, a wider 'phoenix tourism' phenomenon. In this context, catharsis refers to the tourist's personal reflection on life and death post-visit. Whether this type of tourist engagement with sites of

memory has actually played an active part within Rwanda's reconciliation process is yet to be tested.

| Visitor         | Comment  |
|-----------------|--|
| <i>Ntarama</i>  | Impressive and important for the future.<br>It is the youth who have to learn from our past to build a better future.<br>We will never forget, we will tell the truth of what we have seen.<br>We are encouraged by your stories.  |
| <i>Nyamata</i>  | Thank you for sharing this story with us, so that it can never happen again.<br>Never close this memorial, very sad but it is important to remember.<br>Thank you for this respectful way of keeping the memory alive.   |
| <i>Murambi</i>  | Because of places like this we have hope - Never Again.<br>I cannot express what this memorial made me feel like. Never again should anything like this happen.<br>Thank you for remembering.<br>Impressive and overwhelming.<br>Speechless, well documented.<br>This is a terrible place but it must be preserved forever.<br>Beyond description.<br>My heart goes out to every person lost here at Murambi in Rwanda, and in the world to genocide and murder. In my heart, I want to continue to spread this story, encourage others to see the wrong and danger and broadcast the strength and hope each Rwandan possesses. I admire Rwanda and I pledge to make sure NEVER AGAIN. |
| <i>Bisesero</i> | We will bring these stories back home and will ensure that we will never forget.<br>I am very touched by the place, the people and the history. Let's take all efforts everywhere in the world to prevent any similar cruel thing from happening.  |

*Table 5: Visitor Book Entries,  
Collected by author, Rwanda, June 2012*

## Conclusion

Although there is still genocide denial in Rwanda, today emphasis is put on educating the new generation about the past so that they can understand their responsibility in a peaceful future. It is evident that genocide memorials can act as 'places of metamorphosis, where individual and social change can be pursued' (Steele, 2006, p. 5) through certain politics of remembrance (Brandstetter, 2010). Further to this, it becomes apparent that the terms thanatourism, dark tourism and genocide tourism oversimplify not only the interwoven political, cultural and social factors existent at genocide memorials, further categorizing visitors according to simple motivations which do not acknowledge the complex variety of individuals and their experiences

and interactions with disparate sites. Comments from stakeholders further underlined a genocide tourism discourse related to labelling and terminology; by combining visitors' motivations, experiences and backgrounds into one expression which bears a negative connotation of 'sensation-seeking insensitive sightseers' (Iles, 2008, p. 141), participants in Rwanda predominantly indicated that relating 'memorial visits' to 'thanatourism' suggests that 'the remains of our relatives and friends are being sold' (Int.24).

A number of recommendations arise from the paper, particularly concerning the future direction of thanatourism research at genocide sites. The first finding is methodological in nature and concerns use of terminology. While the study of tourism to sites of death and disaster is often concerned with morality and ethics; the term 'dark tourism' appears to be misunderstood in field and for some stakeholders oversimplifies the complexities of the memorialisation process. Future research on stakeholders' understanding of 'dark tourism' (and also 'thanatourism') would shed further light on tensions in field.

Secondly, and more importantly for the Rwandan context, tourism to Rwanda is likely to continue growing in future, in line with global trends on international arrivals. Stakeholders at the memorial sites need to prepare for these arrivals, given that they will doubtless further complicate the memorialisation process. However, the growth of tourists visiting the memorials can be considered in a positive light, given a) the opportunities for fund creation to bring all sites in line in terms of accessibility and b) the opportunity to spread the genocide prevention discourse.

Finally, the authors submit that really very little is known concerning the emotional impact of viewing the horrific remains of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. It has to be acknowledged that the muting shock of the anonymous and impersonal skulls, bones and corpses presently displayed at various memorial sites do not fully recount the complicated narrative of the genocide (Sharpley, 2012) but have the potential to be the dominant object of the tourist gaze. Such objects are arguably more likely to provoke thanatopsis than any ascribed understanding of genocide prevention. Guyer (2009) writes that the traumatic display of skulls and bones alone deprives visitors of speech and sense and provokes misinterpretation of the historic event. This lack of coherent understanding emphasizes the responsibility of putting physical proof into context. Furthermore, it is the 'intensity of human emotion [evoked] at sites of atrocity that renders it so effective as an instrument in the pursuit of ... political or

social goals' (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005, p. 3). It appears therefore, based on visitor comments and guestbook entries, that personal testimonies and the exhibitions at Murambi Genocide Memorial and KMC are thus more effective methods in not only presenting the complexity and horror of the events to the visitor, but also in disseminating the overall message of these places of memory: the causes and consequences of genocide and how a recurrence of such tragedies can be prevented by humanity in future. The inconceivability of the scale and nature of violence in 1994 Rwanda - and that such horrific events transpired while the world was watching – is shocking and traumatic for visitors; yet the critical concern must be for the (potentially serendipitous) tourist experience to extend beyond a traumatic encounter into a clear 'never again' moral philosophy.

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