

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narrating atrocity: Genocide memorials, dark tourism, and the politics of memory

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Abstract

After a genocide, leaders compete to fill the postwar power vacuum and establish their preferred story of the past. Memorialisation, including through building memorials, provides a cornerstone of political power. The dominant public narrative determines the plotline; it labels victims and perpetrators, interprets history, assigns meaning to suffering, and sets the post-atrocity political agenda. Therefore, ownership of the past, in terms of the public account, is deeply contested. Although many factors affect the emergence of a dominant atrocity narrative, this article highlights the role of international interactions with genocide memorials, particularly how Western visitors, funders, and consultants influence the government's narrative. Western consumption of memorials often reinforces aspects of dark tourism that dehumanise victims and discourage adequate context for the uninformed visitor. Funding and consultation provided by Western states and organisations – while offering distinct benefits – tends to encourage a homogenised atrocity narrative, which reflects the values of the global human rights regime and existing standards of memorial design rather than privileging the local particularities of the atrocity experience. As shown in the cases of Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia, Western involvement in public memory projects often strengthens the power of government narratives, which control the present by controlling the past.

Keywords: Genocide; Public Memory; Dark Tourism; Atrocity Narrative; Memorial; Memorialisation; Rwanda; Cambodia; Bosnia; Srebrenica

Introduction

'Everyone has a story of suffering.' She paused, 'Everyone.' As a Rwandan who survived the 1994 genocide, Josephine should know. Working as a reconciliation expert for an American non-governmental organisation based in Rwanda, Josephine observed that sharing stories of suffering could bring together survivors and perpetrators when they realised that 'pain is pain and suffering is suffering'.¹ She had listened to hundreds of those stories, each with its own particular details of agony, degradation, and horror. Add to the Rwandan narratives the individual stories from the dozens of other genocides, mass killings, and human rights atrocities perpetrated in contemporary history: the Holocaust, Cambodia, Congo, Guatemala, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Syria, and on and on. Each person, each traumatised group, each devastated country has a story, each of which contributes to the contentious public discourse about remembrance of atrocities.

Social anthropologists explain that 'Story-telling in itself, as a way for individuals and communities to remember, bear witness, or seek to restore continuity and identity, can be a symbolic resource enlisted to alleviate suffering and change their situation.'² Some trauma survivors find

¹Interview with the author, Kigali, Rwanda, 24 April 2009.

²Marita Eastmond, 'Stories as lived experience: Narratives in forced migration research', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20:2 (2007), p. 251.

healing by sharing their stories in a supportive environment; the necessary conditions for that include the power to speak and the gift of being heard. More ominously, though, storytelling can be used to minimise or deny past suffering. Sociologist Barbara Misztal reminds us that ‘remembering is more than just a personal act and the nature of political power can influence the content of our memories’.³ To begin recovery after genocide, a ravaged society requires the restoration of political order; would-be leaders compete to fill the postwar power vacuum and establish control. Filling the narrative vacuum, and solidifying the story of the genocide, provides a cornerstone of political power. The dominant public narrative determines the plotline; it labels victims and perpetrators, interprets history, assigns meaning to suffering, and sets the post-atrocity political agenda.⁴ Therefore, ownership of the past, in terms of the public account, is deeply contested, even to the point of resuming violence. The storyteller becomes the power-broker in environments of abuse and atrocity. Commemoration and remembrance, including through memorials, are essential tools for the postwar government.⁵ Political power deeply affects memorial planning about site location, display of objects, and the accompanying contextual narrative.

Although many factors affect the emergence of a dominant atrocity narrative, my research highlights the role of international influences on memorialisation, particularly how Western visitors, funders, and consultants interact with the postconflict government’s narrative. Based on field research in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia, I make two related arguments about how Western interaction with memorials affects dominant government narratives. First, I argue that Western visitors’ consumption of genocide memorials reinforces the dehumanising aspects of tourism that prioritise an exclusionary version of the past.⁶ Second, I find that funding and consultation by Western organisations – while offering distinct benefits in preserving memory and evidence of the genocide – tends to encourage a homogenised atrocity narrative that reflects the values of the global human rights regime and existing standards of memorial design rather than privileging the local particularities of the atrocity experience.

The effect of international tourism on atrocity narratives has gained strength over recent decades as foreign visitors increasingly interact directly with the genocide story through international tour groups, mission trips, study abroad programmes, eco-travel, and academic conferences. Historian Jay Winter observes how a rise in disposable income, in tandem with education levels, has encouraged ‘the industry of culture’. He explains, ‘Affluence has helped turn identity into a commodity, to be consumed by everyone during her (increasingly ample) leisure time.’⁷ The visitors pay admission, purchase souvenirs, post photos, blog, and review their experiences on travel sites, thus enticing more visitors from abroad. Critical International Relations scholar Debbie Lisle writes about the interaction between war and tourism, noting that tourists play the role

³Barbara Misztal, ‘Memory experience: the forms and functions of memory’, in Sheila Watson (ed.), *Museums and Their Communities* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 381.

⁴I rely on the definition of narrative proposed by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman: ‘discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience, and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it’. See Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (eds), *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. xv.

⁵I use the term ‘memorial’ to refer both to museums and sites that commemorate atrocity. See Paul Williams for a detailed discussion of the distinctions between monuments, memorials, and museums. Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), pp. 8, 20ff.

⁶By Western, I refer to Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, and Western-dominated international organisations and NGOs; those are the states and groups that control most international funding and generate the most tourists. The international human rights regime is supported by liberal Western norms about individual rights and the international economy is dominated by Western institutions and practices of capitalism. This delineation allows for comparison in the case of Cambodia, which has received much funding and consultation from Asian sources.

⁷Jay Winter, ‘Notes on the memory boom: War, remembrance and the uses of the past’, in Duncan Bell (ed.), *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship Between Past and Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 68.

of coloniser 'at the expense of local subjects whose rich, multiple, and varied lives are preemptively reduced to either enemies or exotic Others'.⁸ Narrative preferences based on Western cultural values and the problematic consumption of exotic suffering indirectly encourage an easily digestible and oversimplified narrative.⁹ In general, the most popular stories include easily identifiable good and bad guys; innocence violated, particularly that of children; and explicit displays of evil such as human remains and graphic photos. Through tourism to atrocity sites, visitors are able to 'write or rewrite the history of people's lives and deaths, or to provide particular (political) interpretations of past events'.¹⁰ Financial dependence on international visitors can lead to a memorial narrative shaped to their tastes, rather than the preferences of the survivors.

The concept of dark tourism describes the extent to which such visitors are motivated by a fascination with the death and suffering of distant others.¹¹ Lisle's critique of the dark tourism literature advances the idea that tourism and conflict are not mutually exclusive in the post-Cold War security situation. Drawing on critical International Relations theory, she argues that many scholars analyse dark tourism using the outdated template of Cold War geopolitics, rather than the current transnational configuration of global politics. Lisle maintains that tourists nowadays have a strong interest in 'encountering the remnants of recent conflict', even during volatile times of postconflict transitions.¹² Lisle's critique points out the weaknesses in tourism studies literature, and refocuses attention on the political power relationships inherent in memorialisation pointing out that 'monuments, memorials, exhibits and installations about conflict always project backwards into the time they are commemorating, but their construction is determined largely by *present-tense* geopolitical concerns'.¹³

My research takes Lisle's analysis further by moving from her global-level evaluation of international interaction with sites of tragedy to a ground-level investigation of the power mechanisms that shape the specific messages produced at specific sites – by asking who has actually produced the narratives and for what purpose. Her *Holidays in the Danger Zone* primarily analyses 'the global nature of the structures shaping war-tourism encounters' and deconstructs the dominant narrative that tourism acts as a tool for peace and reconciliation.¹⁴ For example, in Lisle's example of Robben Island in South Africa, she discusses the unremitting message of reconciliation, forgiveness, and the righteous innocence of the ANC prisoners that assails tourists to the prison. I want to know the internal process by which reconciliation, unity, and innocence became the government's official story. What political struggles silenced both the ANC's opponents and the South Africans who have more interest in justice than reconciliation? How has memorialisation become a tool in the fight for narrative dominance? What international influences strengthened the South African government's position? I build on Lisle's finding that foreign tourism affects global and domestic power relations in problematic ways, often entrenching the supremacy of Westerners' culture and knowledge.¹⁵ Then, moving beyond the theoretical model of interaction, I gather evidence through observations at numerous memorials, archival research, and talking with genocide survivors, NGO workers, exhibit curators, perpetrators, international visitors, government allies, and local residents. From this, I draw a detailed picture of how postconflict narratives remain central to political power and legitimacy in the current day.

⁸Debbie Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 4.

⁹On consuming distant suffering, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003).

¹⁰Richard Sharpley, 'Shedding light on dark tourism: an introduction', in Richard Sharpley and Phillip Stone (eds), *The Darker Side of Travel* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2009), p. 8.

¹¹A. V. Seaton, 'Guided by the dark: From thanatopsis to thanatourism', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2:4 (1996), p. 240.

¹²Debbie Lisle, 'Defending voyeurism: Dark tourism and the problem of global security', in Peter M. Burns and Marina Novelli (eds), *Tourism and Politics: Global Frameworks and Local Realities* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 333.

¹³Lisle, 'Defending voyeurism', p. 340, emphasis in original.

¹⁴Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, pp. 6–7.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 11–17.

Unlike the relatively well-studied dark tourism phenomenon, the second strand of my argument focuses on the international organisations that provide essential resources to contain and display the past, although I argue that they also impose Western structures and values on the atrocity narrative. An example of such an organisation is the British charity Aegis Trust, which plays a critical role in designing and running the main Rwandan memorial in Kigali. Fewer scholars have looked specifically at the role of these foreign interactions. A major strand of research on transnational advocacy networks is that of Kathryn Sikkink and Margaret Keck, who point to the positive effects of international human rights groups.¹⁶

In the specific case of genocide memorials, however, the globalised approach of groups like Aegis Trust leads to less conciliatory outcomes. Commenting specifically on transnational networks and memorialisation, anthropologist Lea David points out that the global human rights regime mandates ‘normative standards that de-historicize and de-contextualize local knowledge that not only disables different patterns of dealing with a traumatic past but also perpetuates societal divisions on the ground’.¹⁷ Often the external organisations want to emphasise the framework of the Western-inspired human rights regime so that the memorial speaks to the larger issue of worldwide atrocities, reconciliation, and healing. Such emphases are not intrinsically harmful, unless they silence or contradict the local narratives. For example, the Rwandan government narrative centres around the concepts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and the erasure of ethnic identity – all very enticing to potential funders. Outsiders may not realise that the government narrative contradicts and imposes on local narratives by publicly pressuring survivors to declare themselves reconciled with often unrepentant perpetrators.¹⁸ Such patterns are self-reinforcing; narrative power accrues with the result of silencing or discrediting alternative voices.

Studies of narrative and memory have proliferated in recent years, with scholars from multiple disciplines recognising the political importance of how we speak about past events in the public square. My research draws on those literatures, applying them specifically to the politicisation of remembrance in postgenocide societies. Unlike most studies, however, I delve deeply into the role of foreigners in the development of a dominant atrocity narrative. This allows a much closer analysis of the combined influences of Western visitors and funders, as well as the interaction between foreign and domestic factors in postgenocide politics.

The role of societal trauma is integral to understanding public memory after atrocity. My argument both draws on and departs from existing literature on trauma and remembrance such as Emma Hutchison’s discussion of ‘how traumatic events can constitute forms of community in world politics’.¹⁹ In examining how individual experiences of trauma acquire larger social and political significance, Hutchison concentrates on the role of emotions in constructing meaning, arguing that collective representations of trauma can form ‘affective communities’ in which trauma survivors come together through shared emotional understandings.²⁰ Contrary to the conventional wisdom that trauma remains a private, individual experience, she argues that events as disparate as the 2002 Bali bombing of Australian citizens, the 2004 Southeast Asian tsunami, China’s history of colonial domination, and the legacy of apartheid in South Africa occurred in specific social and political contexts, which have the potential to promote community bonding and healing.²¹ From her analysis, Hutchison concludes that under conducive circumstances,

¹⁶Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Transnational advocacy networks in international and regional politics’, *International Social Science Journal*, 51 (1999), pp. 89–101; Kathryn Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope: Making Human Rights Work in the 21st Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁷Lea David, ‘Against standardization of memory’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 39 (2017), p. 298.

¹⁸On narrative dominance in Rwanda, see Susan Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), pp. 107–26.

¹⁹Emma Hutchison, *Affective Communities in World Politics: Collective Emotions after Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 2.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

²¹*Ibid.*, ‘Introduction’.

such as empathetic acceptance of public grieving, traumatic events can strengthen community bonds. Her research expands the frontiers of international relations beyond traditional rational-actor realist models by integrating the role of emotion in shaping political communities.

My argument and findings branch off from Hutchison's analysis due to my more narrow focus on human rights atrocities committed within a state. With the exception of the case study on South Africa, her case studies examine very different types of trauma – mostly external shocks to the nation rather than internally inflicted trauma. The dynamics of various types of trauma require more specialised frameworks for understanding. Consider, for example, the different patterns of trauma experienced by a child if an armed burglar attacks the family compared to if her parents are abusive alcoholics. Family dynamics and healing processes look vastly different for those two harrowing scenarios and, I would argue, the longstanding domestic abuse has a much lower chance of transitioning to a healthy family community. The trauma of genocide and mass killing among people who are expected to continue living together scales up the abusive family scenario and makes it far less likely that Hutchison's conditions for a positive outcome will hold. Thus, my more minimal goal seeks to minimise the potentially toxic domestic rifts that continue long after the genocidal violence has ended by developing inclusive stories of the past.

The remainder of this article draws on my field research in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia to assess the creation of atrocity narratives expressed through genocide memorials and how international interactions shape those stories. In the following section, I explore the development of a dominant genocide narrative and the contributions of visitors, consultants, and funders in creating public memory. Moving specifically to memorial construction, I analyse how memorials reflect the dominant government narrative and also shape it through choices in location, display, and context. In particular, I pay attention to the impact on the narrative of visitors, especially those engaged in dark tourism, and the states and organisations that fund and help design the memorials. The following sections evaluate my arguments in the cases of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. The findings confirm the importance of public memory in consolidating political power after genocide and the potential negative effects on the narrative due to Western interaction with genocide memorials.

Constructing public memory

I, Chea Sophon, Khmer immigrant from Canada, visited detention center and saw the victims tortured under the genocidal regime. We are so shocked that we cannot write more.

Visitor comment book, Tuol Sleng memorial, 30 November 1989²²

Across all cultures, remembering and retelling plays a central role in shaping the identity of a society. The ubiquity and importance of memory, however, has not led to a universally accepted definition of the concept. Jay Winter, whose work is central to theorising the current 'memory boom', acknowledges 'there is one certainty on which we can all agree: no two people invoking the term "memory" use it in the same way'.²³ Considering the complexity of individual memories, it is no surprise that so-called collective memory offers even greater challenges. Merely naming the phenomenon creates controversy: terms include collective memory, public memory, public remembrance, and historical memory.²⁴ Sociologist Victor Roudometof concisely explains the points of divergence: 'Rival conceptualizations center on whether memory should be conceived as a primarily psychological or individual property or whether social or collective memory should

²²Comment books from the archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Chea Sophon comment translated from Khmer by Hourn Sen, November 2012.

²³Winter, 'Notes on the memory boom', p. 56.

²⁴Maurice Halbwachs describes collective memory as 'knowledge about the past [that] is shared, mutually acknowledged, and reinforced by collectivities'. Quoted in Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicole Fox, 'Narrating genocide: Time, memory, and blame', *Sociological Forum*, 32:1 (March 2017), p. 117. See also Misztal, 'Memory experience', pp. 382–3.

be conceptualized as a group property.²⁵ Following Winter's understanding of memory as individual rather than social, I use the term public memory to describe the public story of the past that emerges from individual memories and experiences. Memory, discourse, and power coalesce to create public memory, generally expressed as a dominant narrative. We see that narrative shaped by and reflected in memorials, government discourse, educational curricula, mainstream media, and public speech. A major purpose of public memory is to instill a narrative in people who never actually experienced the past atrocities, such as children and outsiders.

In terms of gathering and acknowledging stories of the past, creating public memory after genocide ranges on a scale of inclusivity to exclusivity. Consensual public memory occurs when individual memories converge on a jointly agreed upon version of the past that then dominates public discourse. Hutchinson articulates the ideal outcome where political power works to strengthen traumatised communities: 'Recognizing the political power and potential of representations and narratives is, therefore, key to understanding how traumatic events can pave the way for the restoration or reconstruction of social cohesion and community.'²⁶ Too often, however, the powerful impose public memory in the form of government-sponsored narratives that dictate the preferred story. Analysing the negative potential of government involvement, Jenny Edkins observes, 'The modern state ... is a contradictory institution: a promise of safety, security and meaning alongside a reality of abuse, control and coercion.'²⁷ A forcefully imposed state narrative can result in social ostracism or even imprisonment of individuals who contradict the public narrative. Memory projects that exclude or distort individual stories create resentment, although as Dacia Viejo-Rose notes, they 'rarely manage to impose amnesia'.²⁸ An exclusionary dominant narrative can quickly displace the truth and silence the traumatised.

Remnants of suffering

A memorial tells the atrocity narrative through choices designers make about site location, objects displayed, and contextual information provided. The first choice is where to locate the memorial, either the actual site where the atrocity occurred or a new space constructed elsewhere. Using the atrocity site has the benefit of silencing doubters and heightening emotional impact. If one can view the bullet holes, bloodstains, and even bones, one can less credibly deny the genocide. Alternatively, construction of new space can indicate government attention and willingness to devote resources to remembrance. Williams observes, 'Centrality and marginalization are related through the relative attribution of space.'²⁹ In contrast, the absence of a memorial often signifies the powerlessness of the victimised group.

Memorials rely primarily on inanimate objects to tell the story of atrocity. In effect, the objects speak for the dead – collectively and individually. The chosen item, whether a torture implement, bone fragment, identity card, or a more mundane article such as a hairbrush or child's toy, gains meaning from its surroundings rather than its intrinsic value. Relying on things to tell the story – bloodstained clothes in Rwanda, a battered cigarette lighter in Bosnia, rusty shackles in Cambodia – means that the living interpret the signifiers of genocide. The voices of the dead remain cryptic and symbolic, increasing the risks that their stories get manipulated or misinterpreted.

The display of human remains provides the starkest example of the narrative tension between shock and sacredness. Memorials displaying human remains provoke strong emotional reactions: standing six inches from a pile of skulls, including tiny child-size ones, prompts an unfocused but

²⁵Victor Roudometof, 'Collective memory and cultural politics: an introduction', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 35:1 (summer 2007), pp. 2–3.

²⁶Hutchinson, *Affective Communities in World Politics*, p. 121.

²⁷Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 6.

²⁸Dacia Viejo-Rose, 'Memorial functions: Intent, impact and the right to remember', *Memory Studies*, 4:4 (2011), p. 473.

²⁹Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 77.

burning desire to *do something*. A carefully constructed memorial can harness that emotional reaction, channelling the response against whoever is labelled a perpetrator. One commentator notes, ‘The current Rwandan government, for example, does not shrink away from exploiting the strong empathy of genocide tourists.’³⁰ Despite their strong impact, human rights advocates worry that such displays depersonalise the victims, even as they convey horror to the observers.

The presentation of photographs creates another source of emotional impact for memorial visitors.³¹ Such photos raise moral dilemmas about invasion of privacy, voyeurism, and respect for the dead.³² Susan Sontag critiques the ethical double standard often applied to atrocity images: ‘The more remote or exotic the place, the more likely we are to have full frontal views of the dead and dying ... these sights carry a double message. They show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing which happens in that place.’³³ Rather than creating empathy among viewers, photos can create distancing. Susie Linfield theorises that photographs bring us close to ‘experiences of suffering’, yet at the same time, they also ‘illuminate the unbridgeable chasm that separates ordinary life from extraordinary experiences of political trauma’.³⁴ In terms of photos, Debbie Lisle argues that they ‘must be understood within a wider context of production (i.e., who is the photographer and who or what is the subject? Who or what is in the frame and who or what is outside it? What are the power relations generated by this field of vision?’³⁵ In the case of Cambodia, we will see that the iconic headshots displayed at Tuol Sleng were taken by Khmer Rouge cadres at the moment the prisoner had her blindfold whipped off. The ubiquity of photo displays, especially in memorial museums, demonstrates the presumed power of images to shape viewer response.

The narrative that surrounds the display tells an official story and imprints that story on the visitor. Overall, providing accurate historical context for a display encourages engagement that supports an inclusive narrative and provides previously uninformed visitors with a deeper understanding. Displays that rely purely on emotional impact more easily manipulate the observer’s reaction (and are also less likely to encourage sustained engagement). Memorials may encourage empathy through the depiction of suffering but they often lack accurate historical and political context. In 1994, apocalyptic photos of the postgenocide Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire moved many Westerners to donate; they were under the impression (as were some of the camp’s aid workers) that the refugees were Tutsi genocide survivors, not the Hutu civilians forced by their genocidal leaders to flee the country. In such cases, observers of horrific images motivated to help may lack sufficient background information for effective action. In the worst case, biased contextual information misleads visitors and stokes local divisions.

The modern ‘memory boom’ has spawned a slew of memorialisation policies and templates created by Western governments, the United Nations and human rights NGOs.³⁶ Lea David warns that such generalised policies become problematic when they ‘compel states with difficult pasts to adhere to the prescribed standards of memory’ and presume that ‘nations are like individuals, and need to face the past in order to “heal” or “work through” their traumatic experiences’.³⁷ Such homogenisation leads to a shallow, two-dimensional understanding of both victims and perpetrators, which can serve to ‘depoliticize victims and define them as ahistorical,

³⁰Dominik J. Schaller, ‘From the Editors: Genocide tourism – educational value or voyeurism’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 9:4 (December 2007), pp. 513–15.

³¹Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

³²Debbie Lisle, ‘The surprising detritus of leisure: Encountering the late photography of war’, *Society and Space*, 29:5 (2011), pp. 873–90.

³³Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 71.

³⁴Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, p. xv.

³⁵Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, p. 18.

³⁶Farida Shaheed, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights on Memorialization Processes’, United Nations Human Rights Council (23 January 2014).

³⁷David, ‘Against standardization of memory’, p. 309.

universal humanitarian subjects'.³⁸ Paradoxically, the well-intentioned human rights-centred approach can silence individual stories, just as authoritarian rulers employ their own strategy of silencing. Brigitte Sion, researcher on cultural history concurs, 'Just as tourism is available to the masses, memory and memorialization are becoming globalized, inspiring the same emotions, standardizing architecture, and curatorial practices, and blurring the uniqueness and specific historical context of each tragedy.'³⁹ Tourism studies scholar Sabine Marschall emphasises the social and political implications of international interaction with memory sites. She argues that the images on display: 'can also have far-reaching impacts on potential investors, funding agencies, or international political decision-makers ... and it is no co-incidence that a visit to symbolic historical sites is often the standard protocol for touring diplomats and political officials'.⁴⁰

Dark tourism

It's a balancing act for memorial sites: How to teach the cruel facts of tragedy to an audience that is often on vacation.

Katia Hetter, CNN⁴¹

One result of international publicity is the phenomenon known as death tourism or dark tourism.⁴² Most visitors would recoil from labelling their travel as thanatourism, defined by A.V. Seaton 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'.⁴³ Philip Stone, founder of the Institute for Dark Tourism Research at the University of Central Lancashire, offers his perspective on those attitudes: 'Dark tourism simply provides a modern means in which the death of others can be consumed at a distance and in safe and socially sanctioned environments. This, combined with increasing academic and media spotlights on the commercialization of death, is why dark tourism might be so popular.'⁴⁴ Some critics speak of this rapidly rising trend, labelled 'dark tourism' or 'thanatourism', as a morally disturbing consumption of distant pain.⁴⁵ Debbie Lisle suggests that scholars of dark tourism fall short by ignoring the global power relations that fuel the phenomenon of exploitation and commodification of suffering, reproducing the problematic relationship of enlightened Western society and the backward, violent societies that need guidance.⁴⁶

As the global tourism industry increasingly caters to middle-class Americans and Europeans, travellers find that their destinations seem less and less authentic; iconic places such as Venice's Grand Canal now resemble theme parks from which local residents have fled. Discerning travellers want to boast of their intrepid encounters with the 'real' as a way to set themselves apart from the touristic masses swarming off their cruise ships. In postconflict countries, wealthy foreigners seek

³⁸Ibid., p. 315.

³⁹Brigitte Sion, 'Conflicting sites of memory in post-genocide Cambodia', *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 2:1 (spring 2011), p. 6.

⁴⁰Sabine Marschall, "Personal memory tourism" and a wider exploration of the tourism-memory nexus', *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 10:4 (2012), p. 326.

⁴¹Katia Hetter, 'Dark tourism bears witness to tragedy', *CNN* (24 April 2012), available at: {http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/24/travel/memorial-tourism/index.html?hpt=hp_c3}.

⁴²Sharpley and Stone (eds), *The Darker Side of Travel*; John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism* (London: Thomson, 2007); Seaton, 'Guided by the dark', pp. 234–44.

⁴³Seaton, 'Guided by the dark', p. 240.

⁴⁴Quoted in Hetter, 'Dark tourism bears witness to tragedy'.

⁴⁵Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2001); Wendy S. Hesford, 'Documenting violations: Rhetorical witnessing and the spectacle of distant suffering', *Biography*, 27:1 (2004), pp. 104–44; Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

⁴⁶Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, pp. 27–8, 194.

to demonstrate their social conscience and travel savvy through visits to recent war zones, killing fields, genocide memorials, and other scenes of suffering.⁴⁷ The dark tourists in search of an authentic, unmediated encounter with past suffering will remain unfulfilled, however. Ironically, many visitors do not realise that the 'real killing fields', for example, have been carefully curated and publicised to promote the chosen government narrative. The authenticity of human bones is not in dispute. Foreigners may find it difficult to honour the authenticity of piles of human bones while simultaneously questioning the authenticity of the surrounding narrative.

Critics of commercialised marketing schemes, including genocide survivors, express concern that the objectification of human suffering oversimplifies the atrocity narrative and reduces empathy for the victims. For example, numerous publications on Rwanda feature photos of the skulls ranged on shelves in Ntarama church; most serve as shocking attention-grabbers rather than reverent remembrances.⁴⁸ And surely a deficit of empathy afflicts the visitor to Cambodia's Tuol Sleng torture centre, who purchases in the museum shop the t-shirt emblazoned with an image of the sign used to alert Cambodians to landmines: 'Danger Mines!' complete with skull and crossbones.⁴⁹ Back home, in absolutely no danger of encountering a landmine, this tourist boasts of an exotic encounter with death in a country with the highest per capita number of amputees.

Among Westerners, in particular, one observes a paradoxical attitude towards death. Seaton's comments on Britain also apply to the United States:

[Britain] has tended to conceal death and to regard any dwelling on it as morbid and even pathological. Yet death continues to exert a fascination and motivate travel in ways which are rarely openly admitted. The central paradox of Dark Tourism is that, like much popular journalism, it addresses desires and interests which are not supposed to have a legitimate existence within the secular, moral discourse of the 20th century.⁵⁰

Paul Williams adds that 'foreign tourists appear especially fascinated by events where the state has inflicted harm on its own citizens'.⁵¹ Local residents may prefer to focus on their daily lives and the future, however, they also rely on the economic benefits of tourism, which continually replays past atrocities. Visitors imprint their own version of the narrative and locals may accept it (on the surface) as a way to profit from the foreign consumption of local misery. Seaton suggests providing further context and information as a remedy since 'the more differentiated and comprehensive the traveler's knowledge of the dead, the weaker is the purely thanatouristic element'.⁵² Dark tourism certainly proliferates in Cambodia, where the authoritarian government encourages commercialisation of its gruesome past.

Cambodia: That was then, this is now

When you run out of story, it is the time for execution.

Cambodian genocide survivor Youk Chhang⁵³

I am terribly sad Auschwitz came to Cambodia. I hope it never returns.

Jacques S., Visitor comment book, Tuol Sleng memorial, 12 November 1979⁵⁴

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 192–3.

⁴⁸Since my visit in 2009, the Rwandan government has strictly enforced a ban on photography at memorial sites. Dark Tourism website, available at: {<http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual-chapters/525-murambi-genocide-memorial-rwanda>}.

⁴⁹Author's observation, Tuol Sleng memorial, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 6 November 2012.

⁵⁰Seaton, 'Guided by the dark', pp. 243–4.

⁵¹Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 142.

⁵²Seaton, 'Guided by the dark', p. 240.

⁵³As recorded on the audio guide for Choeung Ek memorial, accessed 6 November 2012.

⁵⁴Comment books from the archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, accessed November 2012.

In the mid-1970s, as Western nations lost interest in Southeast Asia, the murderous Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia attempted to outdo Mao in its Maoist zeal. The result transformed the country into a vast slave labour camp and torture centre. Around 20 per cent of the population died in the 1975–9 period of Khmer Rouge rule. In recent years, the number of foreign visitors has increased dramatically and many explore the two main genocide memorials in the capital Phnom Penh. The Cambodian government, corrupt and oppressive, continues to rely on the evils of the Khmer Rouge narrative as a distraction from current problems.

Public memory in Cambodia is limited to officially sanctioned narratives. One Cambodian scholar explained that the government publicly commemorates the past on holy days such as the inauguration of a pagoda. At that time the government reminds people of the evils of the past in comparison to the so-called ‘glorious present’.⁵⁵ This does not mean that individuals are literally silenced; many survivors share their stories of suffering under the Khmer Rouge. It is rather that those personal stories are disconnected from the official story. A recent observer noted, ‘Cambodia is still struggling to deal with its history, where personal memory is politicized and the specter of the Khmer Rouge is ever-present but often willfully ignored.’⁵⁶ Discussing the current government’s activities, Helen Jessup, Director of the Friends of Khmer Culture, finds that ‘memory is being manipulated’ by top-level leaders and the government is rewriting history to indoctrinate Cambodians born after 1979 (about 60 per cent of the population).⁵⁷ The joint United Nations-Cambodian hybrid tribunal (known as the Extraordinary Chamber of the Courts of Cambodia) – at great expense of time and money – conducted trials of perpetrators, however President Hun Sen (himself a former lower-level Khmer Rouge cadre) restricted the number of prosecutions to a mere handful of Khmer Rouge top leaders. International pressure and funding did induce some semblance of accountability in the trials, although it reinforced the narrative of elite responsibility for the genocide.⁵⁸ For decades, Cambodian schools did not have a curriculum that dealt with the Khmer Rouge period. In 2007, the independent, non-partisan Documentation Center of Cambodia published the first textbook on the period, which is reportedly widely used around the country and offers a more nuanced narrative than official propaganda. Schoolchildren were bussed in daily to observe the tribunal as well, although they had no personal memory of the events which preceded it.⁵⁹

Public narratives of the Khmer Rouge period concur on the crimes perpetrated by the revolutionary regime. The narrative ambiguity emerges with the problematic use of the past as a shield for current leaders, a strategy similar to the abuse of memory begun by the Vietnamese occupiers in 1979. Practically before the blood had dried on the floor, the occupiers developed the Tuol Sleng prison as a memorial, displaying genocide in situ. With an eye towards posterity, the Vietnamese invaders meticulously photographed the tortured and bloated corpses found in the prison. The intended message was that the foreign occupiers, however unpopular, presented a vast improvement on the defeated Cambodian regime. Rachel Hughes observes, ‘The central aim of commemoration was to activate memories of the genocide, precisely to invigorate popular support for the war against the Khmer Rouge perpetrators still threatening the nation.’⁶⁰ Thirty years after the Khmer Rouge declared Year Zero, and over two decades since the UN-sponsored

⁵⁵Interview with the author, Phnom Penh, 18 November 2012.

⁵⁶Harriet Fitch Little, ‘Forty years after genocide Cambodia finds complicated truth hard to bear’, *The Guardian* (16 April 2015).

⁵⁷Author’s interview with Helen Jessup, Director of the Friends of Khmer Culture, 28 September 2012.

⁵⁸Seth Mydans, ‘11 years, \$300 million and 3 convictions: Was the Khmer Rouge tribunal worth it?’, *The New York Times* (10 April 2017).

⁵⁹Author’s observation, Extraordinary Chamber of the Courts of Cambodia, November 2012.

⁶⁰Rachel Hughes, ‘Memory and sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia: Choeung Ek and local genocide memorials’, in Susan E. Cook (ed.), *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda: New Perspectives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), p. 269.

attempt at a democratic transition, the government continues to support atrocity stories that sequester current politics from the horrors of the past.

What is the impact of this artificial and imposed historical cut-off point? It separates the sorry state of current politics from the timeline of modern Cambodian history while avoiding hard questions about justice and inequality. Tourists come away with an experience of two distinct historical periods: the glory of the ancient Angkor civilisation and the nightmare of the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s. Casual visitors are often unaware of the current government's vast corruption and injustice related to land rights and natural resources. Although memory seems unrelated to the issues that grip present-day Cambodians, 'memorialization stands at the center of conflicted interests – the government's politics of reconciliation, Buddhist beliefs in karma, economic development, mass tourism opportunities, international law, and national historic narratives'.⁶¹ The government of the longstanding dictator Hun Sen has continued, in effect, the implied message sent by the Vietnamese military: any government should be considered an improvement when compared to the Khmer Rouge.

A few days in Phnom Penh allows international visitors to access the two major genocide memorials, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Genocidal Center (aka 'the killing fields'), before heading 300 kilometres north to the magnificent ancient temples of Angkor Wat.⁶² Tuol Sleng functioned as a school before the Khmer Rouge commandeered it as Security Prison 21 (S-21), a torture centre from which fewer than a dozen of the 14,000 prisoners survived. Similar to the churches turned slaughterhouses in Rwanda, part of the revulsion stems from a safe and benign place being perverted for evil. Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, a nondescript tree-shaded area formerly used as an orchard, lies about 12 kilometres south of Tuol Sleng; the location served as the execution centre and burial ground for thousands of Tuol Sleng prisoners, including infants. As visitors wander the uncurated dusty grounds, small wood signs implore: 'please don't walk through the mass grave!'⁶³

Gruesome displays also await the visitors to Tuol Sleng Genocide Memorial, as I quickly realised upon entering the former schoolyard for the first time. As I stood before a high wooden structure, consisting of two tall vertical beams and a cross beam, the tour guide explained that when it was a school, this structure had swings or bars for exercise. In the prison, it functioned as a torture device. Pointing out the large clay pots near the base of the gallows, the guide noted that when the prisoner fainted from pain, he or she was doused headfirst in one of the water jars to be revived for further abuse. Various rusty torture implements scattered the bloodstained floors of the former detention cells, just as they were found in 1979.⁶⁴

At Tuol Sleng the exhibits include descriptions or photos of atrocities, with little accompanying text. An exception is the film *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy*, directed by the award-winning Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh in 1996. At the time of my visit, the film was shown twice per day. *Bophana* tells the story of a couple, Bophana and her husband Sitha, who were imprisoned at Tuol Sleng and then executed. The narration is in English and the filmmaker included English subtitles when an interviewee speaks Khmer. *Bophana* uses footage from the Khmer Rouge period, interviews with Bophana's mother and other survivors, and letters written by Bophana and Sitha. In this way, the film gives the dead a voice, humanising the victims and showing Bophana's acts of resistance to the Khmer Rouge. One jarring note is the chairs in the movie room, formerly a mass detention cell. Each chair has been donated by the travel agency emblazoned on the chair back.⁶⁵

⁶¹Sion, 'Conflicting sites of memory in post-genocide Cambodia', p. 1.

⁶²More than eighty smaller memorials are scattered across Cambodia.

⁶³Author's observation, Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, Cambodia, 6 November 2012.

⁶⁴Author's observation, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 6 November 2012.

⁶⁵Author's observation, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 16 November 2012.

Human remains form an essential part of the display at Cambodian memorials, including the 'killing fields' memorial at Choeung Ek. At the centre of Choeung Ek rises a glass stupa, described by the audio guide as a 'magnificent memorial structure' built by the Cambodian government in 1988. There are 17 levels of bones, including 9,000 skulls, arranged in categories and labelled by gender and age.⁶⁶ The visitors stand inches away from the skulls, craning their necks at the tower of bones. Rachel Hughes critiques the stupa as a tourist-oriented display which violates Cambodian customs of cremation, claiming that 'Cambodians consider Choeung Ek a highly dangerous place and refuse to visit the Memorial.'⁶⁷ A survey of foreign visitors revealed perhaps the most thanatouristic experience possible: 'A few respondents said their guides dug up bone fragments or teeth and gave them as grim mementos.'⁶⁸

Unlike the tourist-oriented memorials, the many smaller memorials I visited in the countryside were unattended and unlabelled collections of bones.⁶⁹ A sugarcane seller at Wat Chapuh Ka-Ek explained that monks gathered up the bones after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge and performed the traditional prayers and rituals for the dead. A Cambodian scholar confirmed that the performance of Buddhist rituals held more importance than the bones themselves.⁷⁰

In general, Cambodian attitudes towards the display of human remains at genocide memorials varies. The role of Buddhist monks in maintaining some sacredness for the victims is important, and most memorials are located on monastery grounds. At a beautifully elaborate pagoda, an elderly man explained that he came to the remote place in 1982, after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. The man, a lay member of the religious community, gathered the bones which are now displayed in the open-air memorial.⁷¹ A guide at the Siem Reap genocide memorial, which includes a small glass stupa filled with bones and clothing, explained that if bones are not cremated the deceased cannot rest at peace and move on.⁷² At a fancy pagoda funded by President Hun Sen, a Cambodian man expressed minimal concern about the ramshackle memorial with bones piled haphazardly behind cracked glass: 'The memorial is not as important as the way we were killed.' Regarding the weeds and litter around the stupa, he stated that the memorial and its upkeep was the responsibility of the government, not the local Cambodians.⁷³ He implied that the people already have too much to worry about in their daily lives.

The touristic gaze is the obvious audience at both Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek. Paul Williams contends that: 'At present, Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek are arguably more closely tied to Cambodia's nascent tourist industry than to its hesitant reconciliation.'⁷⁴ At Choeung Ek I benefited from the recent addition of an audio guide (available in 15 languages), which gives survivors a voice and also explains the political history relating to the location.⁷⁵ A survey of English-speaking visitors in 2007 reveals that prior to the audio guide most respondents 'felt disoriented and lost within the site'.⁷⁶ Brigitte Sion condemns Choeung Ek as the 'commodification of genocide'.⁷⁷ Indeed, in 2005 the government sold the site to a Japanese company, which

⁶⁶ Author's observation, Choeung Ek, 6 November 2012.

⁶⁷ Hughes, 'Memory and sovereignty in post-1979 Cambodia', p. 263.

⁶⁸ Louis Bickford, *Transforming a Legacy of Genocide: Pedagogy and Tourism at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek* (International Center for Transitional Justice, February 2009), p. 9.

⁶⁹ For example, Wat Baseth Traey Troeng in Kandal province; Wat Chapuh Ka-Ek in Kandal province; a memorial and monastery in Siem Reap (October to November 2012).

⁷⁰ Interviews with the author, Wat Champuh Ka-Ek in Kandal province, 10 November 2012.

⁷¹ Author's interview with the *achar* at the wat Baseth Traey Troeng in Kandal province, 9 November 2012).

⁷² Interview with the author, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 31 October 2012.

⁷³ Author's interview with Hourn Sen, Wat Champuh Ka-Ek, Kandal province, 10 November 2012.

⁷⁴ Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 112.

⁷⁵ Author's observation, Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, 6 November 2012.

⁷⁶ Most respondents were American and European. Bickford, *Transforming a Legacy of Genocide*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Sion, 'Conflicting sites of memory in post-genocide Cambodia', p. 8.

partners with the government to run the memorial. This transaction ensured that the ‘killing fields are a source of profit whose beneficiaries are neither survivors nor relatives of victims’.⁷⁸ At the gift shop at Choeng Ek, the visitor can purchase a child-sized Khmer Rouge costume and t-shirts pictured with landmines, or bones superimposed on a Cambodian map. Savvy taxi drivers cash in on foreigners’ fascination with atrocity; the constant refrain of tuk tuk drivers is ‘You see killing fields? I take you to killing fields.’⁷⁹

In Cambodia, many memorials created strong emotions without offering a visitor much context for processing those feelings. A content analysis of TripAdvisor reviews of Tuol Sleng revealed that Western tourists’ most frequent comments included terms related to ‘horror, sadness, shock, depression, terror and fear’.⁸⁰ The analysis by Isaac and Çakmak also showed that many Western visitors considered Tuol Sleng memorial as their essential (and sometimes only) source for recent Cambodian history. At the exit of Choeng Ek, English-speaking survey respondents used words such as ‘shocking’, ‘disturbing’, and ‘raw’ to describe their experiences.⁸¹ They did not report feelings of compassion, empathy, outrage, or anger – emotions that tend to spur action.

The effect of international funding and consultation differs in the Cambodia case from Rwanda and Bosnia, who received primary assistance from Western nations, although Cambodia’s Vietnamese and Japanese funders have also fostered globalised atrocity narratives. Tuol Sleng was developed by the Vietnamese invaders in 1979, in particular by Mai Lam, a Vietnamese colonel who was an expert in museology. His prior experience included organising the Museum of American War Crimes (now called the War Remnants Museum) in Ho Chi Minh City. Mai Lam wanted Tuol Sleng to serve the needs of the new Vietnam-backed government in Cambodia, which included encouraging visitors to make a connection between Tuol Sleng and Auschwitz, with the implicit connection between the Khmer Rouge and the Nazis. In service of this globalised narrative, Mai Lam travelled to France, the USSR, and Eastern Europe to visit Holocaust memorials.⁸² At Choeng-Ek, the memorial is run by a Cambodian government partnership with a Japanese firm as a for-profit enterprise. Without the recent contributions from the non-profit Documentation Center of Cambodia, especially the audio tour, foreign visitors would leave the memorial horrified, sickened, and not much more informed than when they entered.

Cambodia’s dominant narrative of the past serves many purposes – none of which seems to be healing, justice, or reconciliation. As we will see when compared with Rwanda and Bosnia, the two main Cambodian memorials are the most oriented towards international visitors and commercial profit. The blatant gruesomeness of bloody floors, bone fragments, and rusting chains creates an atmosphere conducive to dark tourism. The lack of context and continuity in the displays reinforce the government narrative of the Khmer Rouge period as a long-past aberration. Much of the Western funding has come through contributions to the international tribunal rather than specific memorialisation projects. By far, the most positive contribution to an inclusive narrative comes from the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) which began as a project of Yale University. In 1997 DC-Cam became an independent Cambodian NGO, giving it the independence and the ability to modify globalised templates to fit local needs and circumstances. That has not often been the case with international funding in Rwanda.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁹Author’s observation, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, November 2012.

⁸⁰Rami K. Isaac and Erdiç Çakmak, ‘Understanding the motivations and emotions of visitors at Tuol Sleng Genocide Prison Museum (S-21) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia’, *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 2:3 (2016), p. 242.

⁸¹Bickford, *Transforming a Legacy of Genocide*, p. 8.

⁸²David Chandler, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot’s Secret Prison* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 4–6.

Rwanda: Remembering ‘the genocide against the Tutsi’

Possibly the darkest, starkest, grimmest, most shocking site it is possible to visit as a dark tourist on planet Earth.

Review of Murambi memorial in Rwanda by www.dark-tourism.com⁸³

Fifteen years after the Cambodian genocide ended, and a continent away, Rwandan Hutu soldiers, militias, and citizens murdered up to 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu during a 100-day period in 1994. The killing ended with the victory of a Tutsi exile-based army led by the current president Paul Kagame. Kagame’s regime tightly controls public discussion of the past, repressing any dissenting stories. Sociologists Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicole Fox find that ‘the government of Rwanda is invested in the memory of the atrocity and thus engages in numerous efforts to shape this memory’.⁸⁴ The state established multiple memorials, many at massacre sites such as churches, which have stirred controversy with exhibits of human remains. Part of the government efforts included the 2007 ‘formation of the National Commission for the Fight against Genocide to centralize memorial construction and maintenance throughout Rwanda’.⁸⁵ Susan Thomson finds that ‘the policy of national unity and reconciliation is built on a bedrock of structural violence and economic equality’.⁸⁶ Western visitors and donors, dazzled by Rwanda’s economic recovery, generally encourage the propagation of the dominant narrative told by the government, even while ordinary Rwandans remain terrified of the near-totalitarian power of the state.⁸⁷

Western governments and NGOs are deeply involved in the memorialisation projects and foreign visitors seem continually fascinated by the tales of slaughter and rape. The postgenocide period has seen dozens of memoirs, novels, commercial movies, and documentaries that appeal to Western publics in levels disproportionate to any strategic or cultural relationship with Rwanda.⁸⁸ Most people have no idea that the invading Rwandan Patriotic Front, made up of Tutsi exiles, displaced and murdered thousands of Hutu civilians.⁸⁹ Part of the government’s dominant narrative suggests that giving voice to any other perspective makes one guilty of diminishing the evil of the genocide and committing the error of moral equivalence. When confronted with these nuances of ethnic identity, many Westerners dismiss them since they do not fit into the template of evil Hutu killers, innocent Tutsi victims, and salvation through the military victory of the Tutsi-led government.

Although the government forbids any discussion of ethnicity, the official term for the genocide is ‘genocide against the Tutsi’. The first annual genocide commemoration in April 1995 ‘promoted the ideology of national unity through its representation of both Tutsi and Hutu as victims of the genocide’.⁹⁰ This representation quickly changed; by 1996 the commemoration graphically legitimised the Tutsi as victims and Hutu as perpetrators. The ceremony took place in Murambi with the highlight being the exhumation of thousands of bodies, some of which were ‘petrified in lime as a permanent display of Tutsi agony’.⁹¹ This deliberate exclusion of the thousands of Hutu

⁸³See blog at: <http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual-chapters/525-murambi-genocide-memorial-rwanda>.

⁸⁴Hollie Nyseth Brehm and Nicole Fox, ‘Narrating genocide: Time, memory, and blame’, *Sociological Forum*, 32:1 (March 2017), p. 131.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁶Susan Thomson, *Whispering Truth to Power* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), p. 7.

⁸⁷Susan Thomson repeatedly cites the fear and anxiety expressed by Rwandans who secretly share their life stories. For example, see *ibid.*, p. 128.

⁸⁸For example, the shop at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC offers five books on Cambodia, nine on Bosnia, and 25 on Rwanda, plus four DVDs. Author’s observation, 14 March 2013.

⁸⁹Human Rights Watch, ‘Leave None to Tell the Story’ (March 1999), available at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/rwanda/Geno15-8-03.htm>.

⁹⁰Jennie E. Burnet, ‘Whose genocide? Whose truth?’, in Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O’Neill (eds), *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 87.

⁹¹Burnet, ‘Whose genocide?’, p. 97.

moderates that perished makes clear that only Tutsi belong in the category of victim. The role left for Hutu citizens is perpetrator.

A major strand of the government narrative is the Gisozi Genocide Memorial Centre, a modern structure located in Kigali, which sits on a hill overlooking the capital city. The memorial begins in a garden where a flame burns to commemorate the 100 days of the genocide (April to July). Shallow steps lead to the mass graves of the murdered Tutsi, unremarkable large slabs of concrete surrounded by the garden. I experienced the memorial in April 2009, during the commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the genocide. As I stood among those unimposing graves, about fifty or sixty Rwandans passed by me, all dressed formally, some carried flowers, others pinned purple ribbons on their chests. Most of the women wore traditional African dress. I assumed it was some sort of special VIP tour group. Then down another walkway I saw a young man carrying a cross and behind him six other men carrying a coffin draped in a purple cloth. More people followed the coffin. They were heading down some steps towards a wide dirt field. My own story of visiting the memorial includes witnessing a mass grave in progress.

The Rwandan government, through its policy of reintering genocide victims' remains at the central memorial, has created a site of pilgrimage as well as a museum to educate tourists and school children. The government has imposed its narrative, even over the voices of survivors and family members of the deceased. The day after my visit to the memorial, a UN organisation staffer informed me that the government, aware of the impact of the mass graves, strongly encouraged people to disinter their loved ones, buried in their home villages, and reinter them in the mass graves in Kigali.⁹²

Similar to memorial structures in Cambodia, foreigners attracted by death tourism will find plenty of dark experiences; most memorials in Rwanda are situated at actual killing sites, often displaying the exposed remains of victims. I visited Ntarama church about thirty miles south of Kigali, where the battered sign out front announced that Hutu killers had massacred around five thousand Tutsi. People had flocked to the Catholic church for sanctuary but their killers had not respected that time-honoured tradition. The small church offered grim testimony to the carnage. Inside, light dimly filtered in through small, high windows, illuminating the bloodstained, tattered clothes of the victims that hung on the walls. Ranged on shelves were their bones – rows and rows of skulls predominated. Above the bones, a purple banner in Kinyarwanda read 'If you knew me, and you knew yourself, you would not kill me.'⁹³ Household implements, cooking pots, and blankets signified genocide by their proximity to human remains and bloodied garments. The space lacked interpretive signs and the guide spoke little English. My companion translated my many questions, yet the answers were brief and gave little context to the scene. The main effect of Ntarama church, at least on this foreigner, was to invoke a perpetual primal horror at the crimes committed. A visceral emotional reaction predominated, which short-circuited context and analysis.

In both Cambodia and Rwanda, using atrocity sites as memorials creates a powerful emotional experience for the visitor. A place like Ntarama church, as I experienced it, conveys the profane horror of the genocide. At the same time it depersonalises the perpetrators as simply 'Hutu'; arguably, it also depersonalises the victims as unidentified 'Tutsi'. For the local community, which continues to suppress deep ethnic divisions and tensions, the numerous sites like Ntarama keep alive the reality of the genocide in a way that fosters blame rather than reconciliation. Preliminary research by the Harvard University project 'Through a Glass Darkly', suggests that small informal memorials 'may often be more meaningful to Tutsi survivors than the centralized,

⁹²Interview with the author, Kigali, Rwanda, April 2009.

⁹³The Ntarama memorial has evolved over the years and no longer permits photography. The various changes demonstrate the fluidity of the narrative and the individualised experience of each visitor.

formal structures because they are more easily accessible to them'.⁹⁴ Local Rwandans may prefer to avoid the centralised narrative of the main state-sponsored memorials.

In Rwanda, the most gruesome memorial commemorates the massacre at Murambi, a town approximately two hours south of Kigali. A survivor whose family perished in the massacre told his story, explaining that as the genocide began, the government requested Tutsi villagers to congregate at the Murambi Technical School for protection. During the night of 21 April 1994 the military, supported by Hutu locals, attacked the school with guns and grenades. All who tried to escape were hacked to death. According to the Rwandan government, 27,000 Tutsi were murdered. The following day, the government brought in bulldozers to pile up the bodies and bury them, a cleanup operation that created a mountain of corpses, most of which were left basically intact. The Murambi Genocide Memorial Centre, located in the vacated school, has preserved 800 of the bodies with lime, keeping them untouched in the exact position in which they died – for example, warding off a blow.⁹⁵

The Murambi memorial exhibits the dead in all their shocking vulnerability, creating an anonymous tableau of death. Susan Cook remarks on the 'monotony of room after room filled with the bodies of now faceless, nameless victims, as well as the enormity of the simultaneous deaths of so many innocent people'.⁹⁶ That anonymity is reinforced by 'the lack of a coherent narrative about the events that took place at Murambi, whether in a booklet or on a plaque or just a coherent guided tour'.⁹⁷ Many groups have found this display controversial, including survivors' organisations.⁹⁸ Jennie Burnet explains that 'by tradition Rwandans are horrified by cadavers' and that 'for many Rwandans the absence of religious consecration constituted further violence against the dead'.⁹⁹ Observers have noted that the orientation of the two memorials with the most international visitors – in Kigali and Murambi – have a target audience that is 'beyond doubt international'.¹⁰⁰ Recent additions to Murambi memorial include increased contextual material planned and funded by the British organisation Aegis Trust.

Gruesome displays at other genocide memorials have also proved divisive. During interviews with Rwandan genocide survivors in 2006, Rachel Ibreck found that many expressed unease with the display of bones at the Ntarama church memorial, particularly with the way the remains were strewn around the church. Survivors told Ibreck that unburied bodies of relatives could haunt the living.¹⁰¹ She quotes Vidal's critique that the government adds 'to the past horror through the voyeurism of the corpses'.¹⁰² Three years later, in 2009, the Ntarama display had been changed; bones were sorted and stacked on open shelving in the church. The attendant encouraged me to take photographs, a practice later strictly prohibited at most Rwandan memorials. Additionally, a few improvements were made since then including a protective roof over the church paid for by the British.¹⁰³ Extensive changes drawn up by a London landscape architecture firm in 2004,

⁹⁴Harvard University's 'Through a Glass Darkly: Rwandan Genocide Memorials 1994–Present' project offers an enormous trove of documents and over seven thousand images, with a particular focus on unofficial and informal memorials. Jens Meierhenrich, principal investigator. See {<http://maps.cga.harvard.edu/rwanda/home.html>}.

⁹⁵Author's interview with Michel, the director of the NGO 'Christian Movement for Evangelism, Counseling, and Reconciliation', Kigali, April 2009.

⁹⁶Susan E. Cook, 'The politics of preservation in Rwanda', in Cook (ed.), *Genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda*, p. 288.

⁹⁷Cook, 'The politics of preservation in Rwanda', p. 290.

⁹⁸Jessica Aughter, *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 66.

⁹⁹Burnet, 'Whose genocide?', pp. 98–9.

¹⁰⁰Jens Meierhenrich, principal investigator for 'Through a Glass Darkly', project at Harvard University. Available at: {<http://maps.cga.harvard.edu/rwanda/murambi.html>}.

¹⁰¹Rachel Ibreck, 'The politics of mourning: Survivor contributions to memorials in post-genocide Rwanda', *Memory Studies*, 3:4 (2010), pp. 335–6.

¹⁰²Vidal quoted in *ibid.*, p. 337.

¹⁰³'Through a Glass Darkly', available at: {<http://maps.cga.harvard.edu/rwanda/ntarama.html>}.

including a prayer chapel on the grounds, have not been implemented, leaving the site open to environmental decay.¹⁰⁴

Unlike the walls plastered with nameless headshots of the soon-to-be killed at Tuol Sleng, the Children's Room at the central Rwandan memorial museum uses photos in a way that humanises the subject, closing the emotional distance between viewer and victim. As Linfield notes, 'the ability of photographs to conjure deep emotion is one of their great strengths. But this power – precisely because it is divorced from narrative, political context, and analysis – is equally a danger'.¹⁰⁵ Entering the Children's Room one observes large colour photos of around a dozen children, with the child's name above his or her photo. These are clearly family photos of happy toddlers and schoolchildren. Each one lists some identifying details, obviously provided by relatives. For example – Agathe, age five, favourite food: chocolate; best friend: her older sister; last memory: seeing her mother killed; method of death: hacked to death. They are all heart-rending. Some of the victims are siblings who died together, for example, killed by a 'grenade thrown in their shower' where they were hiding. With the inclusion of normalising details, the Children's Room seems more likely to evoke empathy rather than the shock and nausea induced by the display of nameless dismembered skeletons.¹⁰⁶ Photos of the suffering and death of anonymous victims provokes painful feelings – Susan Sontag described seeing the Tuol Sleng photos as a 'sickening' experience – but the viewer finds little to identify with in the image of a mutilated corpse.¹⁰⁷

Many of the Rwandan genocide memorials lack adequate information about the political and historical context of the atrocities, although this is slowly changing over time.¹⁰⁸ Scott Straus observes that 'the authorities have collected, cleaned, and disinfected the skulls and skeletons of the dead, and arranged the bones in neat rows on tables and on floors. Such are Rwanda's primary memorials of the genocide: carefully collected and organized bones'.¹⁰⁹ He aptly notes that those memorials 'scare and haunt those who would enter them. They do not stimulate reflection; they purvey shock and horror and thus paralyze thought. So do the standard images of genocide: pictures of corpses, machetes, and suffering survivors do not encourage their viewers to think'.¹¹⁰ Straus's analysis was borne out by my experience of the memorials; the bones haunted my sleep, but did not clarify my questions. Overall, much like the Cambodian memorials, Rwandan sites emphasise the disconnect between past atrocities and present-day politics.

Dark tourism is on the rise in Rwanda, in tandem with 'regular' tourism. Encouraged by publicity, international visitors to Rwanda target the memorials at Ntarama and Nyamata churches, as a 'must-see'. One tour company even offers a 'genocide package', which promises visits to the memorial sites followed by a gorilla-tracking safari. According to the website, the highlight of the experience promises to be Ntarama:

Ntarama Memorial Site contains a church where most brutal killings of the 1994 Rwandan genocide took place. The floor of the Church at Ntarama has not been completely cleaned since the massacre. There are more bones, intermingled with bits of clothing, shoes, pots, wallets and Identity Cards among others. The low pew-benches are used to avoid stepping on the bones and detritus. One can easily identify parts of skeletons: vertebrae, mandibles, fibulas, and ribs.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴Auchter, *The Politics of Haunting and Memory in International Relations*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁵Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁶Author's observation, Gisozi genocide memorial, Kigali, Rwanda, April 2009.

¹⁰⁷Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁸Much of this work occurred in partnership with the British organisation Aegis Trust. See [https://www.aegitrust.org/].

¹⁰⁹Robert Lyons and Scott Strauss, *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), p. 15.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

¹¹¹Interestingly, the guide's description of Ntarama church has remained the same for years, despite changes at the memorial. The bones and 'detritus' described were removed from the church floor more than a decade ago. Rwanda

The tour company has apparently calculated that dramatic references to scattered ‘bones and detritus’ will appeal to customers. A website promoting dark tourism describes the Murambi memorial in Rwanda as ‘Possibly the darkest, starkest, grimmest, most shocking site it is possible to visit as a dark tourist on planet Earth ... The experience is heart-stopping, gut-wrenching but awesome at the same time.’¹¹²

Another type of international engagement comes through external funding for memorial design and construction. Western governments and foundations poured money into the Kigali national memorial. This was likely partly as a guilt offering for past inaction; the Belgian government gave over a million dollars and the Clinton Foundation donated \$250,000.¹¹³ In addition to cash, international organisations provide consulting services, which greatly influence the narrative told by the memorial. Although there is already much documentation about the positive aspects of international funding and consulting for genocide memorials, my research highlights the more problematic effects, such as a Western-oriented narrative and a focus on creating a welcoming environment for tourists at the expense of locals affected by the genocide.¹¹⁴

The British NGO Aegis Trust constructed the Kigali memorial with the aim ‘to create links between local politicians, aid workers dealing with the social and psychological consequences of genocide, academics that document and analyze it, and members of the public who seek answers’.¹¹⁵ In its stated effort to become ‘a site of learning highly relevant to the international community’, the Kigali memorial offers more information than Ntarama or Murambi, such as a comparative exhibit on genocide through history. Aegis has also delved into what it calls ‘social enterprise’, and website visitors can now book a room at its Discover Rwanda youth hostel near the memorial; the website brags about the hostel’s high ratings on TripAdvisor and that it has now been country winner of the annual Hostelworld ‘Hoscars’ three times in a row’.¹¹⁶ Perhaps Aegis is a forerunner for non-profit ventures that attempt to combine local genocide narratives, international human rights advocacy, and fundraising from dark tourism, all while staying in the good graces of an authoritarian regime. Responding to concerns about the Rwandan government’s politicised, and exclusive, genocide narrative, Williams optimistically asserts that Aegis Trust is able to function in a political space free from government domination.¹¹⁷ Even so, when leaders impose a preferred narrative that ignores or contradicts the experiences of ordinary people, outside organisations and funders can get pulled into supporting an exclusionary version of the past.

The case of Rwanda demonstrates the complexity and dilemmas of international interaction with a rigidly controlled government narrative. Unlike Cambodia’s government, which doesn’t have the inclination or capability to police its citizens’ every utterance, Paul Kagame’s Rwanda follows a more totalitarian model of governance. Citizens and visitors alike risk consequences for questioning the government’s genocide narrative.¹¹⁸ The remarkable success of Kagame’s efforts is evidenced by the widespread foreign reliance on the government narrative, and the

Gorilla Tours, available at: {<http://www.rwandagorillatour.com/rwandan-culture-genocide-memorial-sites.html>} accessed 28 June 2011 and 28 March 2018.

¹¹²The blog also noted that in 2011 a museum part of the site was opened. Like the Kigali memorial, the British organisation Aegis Trust assisted with the updated Murambi plans. See {<http://www.dark-tourism.com/index.php/15-countries/individual-chapters/525-murambi-genocide-memorial-rwanda>} accessed 7 June 2017.

¹¹³The Belgian government (\$1,060,000); the Swedish government (\$400,000), and the Clinton Wasserman Foundation (\$250,000). See Williams, *Memorial Museums*, pp. 110–11.

¹¹⁴On the positive aspects, see Sikkink, *Evidence for Hope*.

¹¹⁵Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 110.

¹¹⁶Aegis Trust website, quotes found at: {<https://www.aegistrust.org/what-we-do/activities/kigali-genocide-memorial/>} and {<https://www.aegistrust.org/what-we-do/activities/social-enterprise/>}.

¹¹⁷Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 111.

¹¹⁸I spoke with foreign researchers who found themselves or their local assistants detained by government forces. I was warned to safeguard my notes extremely carefully and some of my interlocutors spoke only on the condition that I put away my pen and notebook.

willingness to overlook stories that contradict it. Such totalitarian narrative authority is not found in Bosnia, where survivors' versions of the past greatly inform the dominant narrative.

Bosnia: Srebrenica's women speak

Never forget. Isn't that what you say?

Museum guide, Potočari memorial in Srebrenica¹¹⁹

The Rwandan violence was not the only genocide clamouring for global attention in the early 1990s; the Bosnian civil war raged from 1991 to 1995. A hallmark of the violence was ethnic cleansing among Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (formerly called Bosnian Muslims), with the Bosniaks suffering the greatest amount of death and displacement. The particular case of the Srebrenica genocide occurred over a period of days in July 1995. After four years of conflict, the United Nations had established Srebrenica town as a civilian safe area, protected by an under-armed Dutch peacekeeping battalion. As the Bosnian Serb forces slowly closed in on the panicked inhabitants, the peacekeepers frantically, and fruitlessly, radioed for NATO airstrikes against the Serbs. Once the Dutch soldiers relinquished control of the enclave, the Bosnian Serb fighters systematically killed eight thousand men and boys, pursuing escapees deep into the forests. This slaughter finally prompted more effective intervention from the West. Currently, Srebrenica is a Serb-controlled town in which minority Bosniaks struggle to ensure their story defines public memory. A memorial to the genocide opened in 2003, inaugurated by former US President Bill Clinton, which includes a cemetery, wall of names, and exhibits in the old factory where the peacekeepers were stationed.¹²⁰

Overall, the Bosnian government's narrative of Srebrenica dovetails significantly with the survivors' narratives. The Serbs had committed an unprovoked, brutal massacre of innocent Bosniak civilians; a genocidal act that attempted to eliminate the Muslims by exterminating men and boys.¹²¹ The narratives place guilt on NATO forces, the UN peacekeepers, and the EU for a failure to intervene as Srebrenica was overrun by Bosnian Serb militants. All parties, including Westerners, agree that the massacre represented a turning point in international intervention that led to much more robust NATO action and, later that year, the Dayton Peace Accords.

More than survivors in Rwanda or Cambodia, the mothers, sisters, and wives of the massacred men have managed to command narrative authority in the decades after the genocide. Klejda Mulaj notes, 'Ever since the occurrence of the genocide, victims have demanded recognition of their ordeal. They have engaged in acts of commemorations – most prominently those at the Memorial and Cemetery Centre at Potočari, the Peace March (Marš Mira), and mass burials – acts that exert public recognition of war and suffering, and enhance collective memory and national identity.'¹²² It was survivors who demanded the burial of the victims and their identification, if possible. In addition to a place for mourning, the memorial functions in the political realm. Craig Evan Pollack quotes a local Bosniak official who admits, 'I will tell you now as a politician, we have no intention just to rebury these people down there in Srebrenica and

¹¹⁹ Author's observation, 7 June 2012.

¹²⁰ Clinton had earlier reaped scorn for his 'apology' to Rwandans for US inaction during the genocide; the visit was so short that the pilot of Air Force One didn't even turn off the engine at the Kigali airport.

¹²¹ Article II of the 'Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide' defines genocide as the attempt to destroy 'in whole or in part an national, ethnical, religious, or racial group'. Treaty available at: {<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>}. For a discussion of the legal arguments about whether Srebrenica should be defined as a genocide, see Klejda Mulaj, 'Genocide and the ending of war: Meaning, remembrance and denial in Srebrenica, Bosnia', *Crime, Law and Social Change; Dordrecht*, 68:1–2 (September 2017), pp. 133–5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Potočari. We are trying to use this situation with the burial in Srebrenica to somehow get special status for Srebrenica already decided by the resolutions of the United Nations.¹²³

Perhaps for those reasons, the memorial, officially called the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide, appears oriented more towards Bosniaks than international tourists. It is not an easy journey from Sarajevo to the small town in Republika Srpska. Any visitors who arrive have made an effort, rather than sandwiching in a visit between other attractions. The museum guest book is filled with signatures, the vast majority Bosnian names. Many student groups across the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina make field trips to the memorial.¹²⁴

Entering the memorial the visitor overlooks a vista of identical rows of grave markers spread over a grassy plain. Despite the seemingly endless rows of markers, the memorial is far from complete: as of 2018, DNA testing has identified 6,940 victims out of over 8,000 missing persons.¹²⁵ Like the mass graves in Kigali, this memorial is a work in progress. In front of the cemetery, one can read the names of the dead carved into a curving expanse of smooth granite. The variety of birth dates indicate that the victims ranged from old men to young teenagers; all the death dates are July 1995. An open-air mosque sits to the left of the main entrance. During my visit, two men entered the covered area, removed their shoes and knelt in prayer, prostrating then rising, over and over. In the distance, a woman in a hijab walked among the graves.¹²⁶ Across the road from the cemetery stands the old car-battery factory where the UN Dutch Battalion stationed itself. As the Serbs approached in summer 1995, the warehouse became a shelter for nearly five thousand Bosniak refugees. Acquiescing to the demands of the Bosnian Serb leader Ratko Mladik, the Dutch expelled the refugees, watching as Serb soldiers gathered the men and boys. Nearly two decades later, the site seems haunted – dank and dirty with broken ducts hanging from the ceiling. The echoing factory stands as a monument of shame to the United Nations. The latest stage of construction for the museum centre is funded by the Dutch government and plans to recreate the exact look of the factory in 1995 when it served as the Dutch battalion HQ.¹²⁷ Using the site of the genocide for the memorial provides an effective emotional jolt to international visitors, and a place of pilgrimage for others.

Remembering the commodification of the Cambodian memorials, I experience some trepidation as I approach the hut that sells ‘souvenirs’. It is not as bad as I feared. The shop is privately run by an elderly woman who lost her husband and son in the massacre. She wears the hijab and cheerfully invites us in. Most items for sale are clearly meant for a local audience: books written in Bosnian, a few in English, prayer beads, scarves crocheted by survivors, cigarette lighters, video cassettes, a few t-shirts with Bosnian writing.

The Western gaze is less overt at the Potočari memorial than at Rwandan and Cambodian memorials. A small plaque at the entrance credits the Imperial War Museum in London as the historical consultant. International donors paid over \$5 million towards the costs of construction.¹²⁸ As in Rwanda, guilt and culpability likely motivated the largesse. Unlike the haphazard display of human remains in Rwanda and Cambodia, remains of Srebrenica’s victims receive painstakingly reverent treatment. A display at the memorial explains that forensic testing helps identify the victims and that relatives are consulted about the process. Each year newly found

¹²³Craig Evan Pollack, ‘Intentions of burial: Mourning, politics, and memorials following the massacre at Srebrenica’, *Death Studies*, 27:2 (2 March 2003), pp. 133–4.

¹²⁴Author’s observation, Potočari memorial, June 2012.

¹²⁵ICMP (International Commission on Missing Persons), ‘ICMP: The Facts Surrounding Srebrenica Are Not Disputable’, ICMP Press Release (August 2018), available at: {<https://www.icmp.int/press-releases/icmp-the-facts-surrounding-srebrenica-are-not-disputable/>}.

¹²⁶Author’s observation, Potočari memorial, June 2012.

¹²⁷See the official memorial website for updated construction plans for the Dutch batalion museum, available at: {<http://www.potocarimc.org/index.php/component/k2/item/115-nastavak-projekta-izgradnje-ii-faze-memorijalnog-centra>}.

¹²⁸The United States donated US \$1 million.

remains are buried in caskets at the memorial, with appropriate religious ceremony, as well as a contingent of media and politicians.

Some Bosniaks argue that the government has over-politicised remembrance of Srebrenica. During the annual remembrance on 11 July, the cortège of recently found remains winds through Sarajevo and there is heavy news coverage. Scholars claim that ‘the framing of Srebrenica is conditioned not only by the tragedy and suffering incurred in the past but also by current internal power relations and political circumstances of the present’.¹²⁹ Critics argue that this publicity keeps ethnic divisions from healing by a constant reiteration of the victim status of the Bosniaks. Defenders of the memorialisation note that maintaining the narrative in the public sphere becomes even more important as some Serb leaders continue to deny the genocide occurred.

Upon taking office as Serbia’s President in May 2012, Tomislav Nikolić contradicted multiple international findings and declared that there was no genocide in Srebrenica. The president of Republika Srpska Milorad Dodik echoed the leaders in Belgrade.¹³⁰ Such statements cause shock and anger among Bosniaks, but the genocide denial narrative gets no wider traction beyond nationalist Serbs (and sympathetic Russian leaders). Responding to continuing genocide denials by Serbian politicians, the European Parliament in November 2018 adopted a resolution that states that it ‘regrets the reiterated denial of genocide in Srebrenica by some Serbian officials’.¹³¹

Are there additional explanations for the more respectful treatment of the Srebrenica victims by Western funders and tourists? Perhaps this reverence is simply more feasible due to the number of the dead – 8,000 as opposed to 800,000. Additional research could examine how the differences in ethnicity and culture affect those interactions. Western stereotyping likely seeps into the response to the genocide narrative, for example increasing the tendency to dehumanise non-white victims. There is little doubt that racism influences levels of humanitarian aid provided in a crisis. For example, ‘the European Community (ECHO) spent more money in 1999 on humanitarian assistance in Kosovo than on the rest of the world put together’.¹³² Although it is outside the scope of this article, one can make a plausible argument that Western bystanders feel greater empathy for European genocide victims, rather than viewing their suffering as exotic or barbaric.

Conclusion

The ability to communicate a convincing story to a broad audience – and to stifle dissenting storytellers – is a foundation of political power. Public narratives of past atrocity rely on memorialisation as an integral part of the storytelling process. Memorials outlast the lives of the survivors and perpetrators, affecting the way new generations will interpret the past. For a postgenocide government a great deal of legitimacy rests on claiming the identity of either ‘victim’ or ‘liberator’ – and avoiding the label of ‘perpetrator’. Thus, owning the dominant narrative offers the benefit of entrenching power at home and increasing legitimacy on the international stage.

Authoritarian leaders use numerous tools to control, and manipulate, the accepted version of past atrocities, including developing a story that appeals to Western audiences. I have argued that Western visitors’ consumption of genocide memorials reinforces the dehumanising aspects of tourism that prioritise an exclusionary version of the past. And that funding and consultation by Western organisations – while offering distinct benefits in preserving memory and evidence of the genocide – tends to encourage a homogenised atrocity narrative that reflects the values of the global human rights regime and existing standards of memorial design rather than privileging

¹²⁹Mulaj, ‘Genocide and the ending of war’, p. 137.

¹³⁰Ibid., pp. 138–9.

¹³¹Maja Zivanovic, ‘Euro MPs criticise Serbia for Srebrenica genocide denial’, *Balkan Insight* (28 November 2018), available at: {<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-warned-about-srebrenica-genocide-denial-11-29-2018/>}.

¹³²Toby Porter, ‘The partiality of humanitarian assistance – Kosovo in comparative perspective’, *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (17 June 2000), available at: {<https://sites.tufts.edu/jha/archives/150>}.

the local particularities of the atrocity experience. Paul Williams warns that ‘memorial museums can only support reconciliation if they operate under political conditions that lead to understanding rather than ongoing recrimination and conflict’.¹³³ Sabine Marschall finds that ‘globalization has ... led to the international sharing and transportability of memory’.¹³⁴ The resulting overarching conflict narratives – reinforced, created, accepted by international audiences – may unintentionally support a postconflict power structure that disregards reconciliation.

In Rwanda and Cambodia the dominant, government-sponsored narratives have excluded many voices, even as they gained international support. In Rwanda, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) emerged with political power after its exile army defeated the genocidal Hutu forces. Under President Paul Kagame, the RPF solidified the victim (and victor) identity of the Tutsi in public narratives, to the extent of silencing even the smallest point of difference. The memorials are tightly scripted and include horrifying exhibits such as petrified corpses that have been hailed as the apex of the dark tourism experience. International funders have made possible the preservation of genocide evidence, yet they usually uncritically accept the biased government narrative. The official story excludes or obliterates many individual memories of suffering, creating deep resentments and divisions that impede peacebuilding.

Unlike the Rwandan government’s unrelenting narrative of the genocide, the Cambodian government has selective amnesia regarding the Khmer Rouge period, and confines the atrocity narrative to the decades before President Hun Sen took power. This amnesia conveniently excludes the complicity of many current officials in the Khmer Rouge regime. Most international visitors have little background knowledge about Cambodian history and politics; they consume the gory stories told by the memorials without understanding the larger context or current relevance. The outcomes in Cambodia and Rwanda illustrate the multilayered interaction between political power, atrocity narratives, and international audiences.

The construction of public memory around the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia developed in a less exclusive manner than either Cambodia or Rwanda. The official narrative of Bosniak victimhood was willingly adopted by the survivors of mass killing and ethnic killing. Additionally, international organisations, media, and governments embraced and perpetuated that narrative.¹³⁵ The portrayal of victimhood at Srebrenica differs from the Tutsi in Rwanda because it is able to humanise the Bosniaks through forensic testing and individual grave markers, whereas many Rwandan memorials offer an anonymous portrait of genocide. Overall, the survivors of Srebrenica organised themselves and successfully influenced the political process of memorialisation.

As shown in the cases of Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia, Western involvement in public memory projects – as funders, designers, and visitors – often strengthens the power of government narratives, which control the present by controlling the past. The problems highlighted here will not be solved by a blanket condemnation of international involvement in memorialisation, however. As Debbie Lisle reminds us, ‘the reconstruction, preservation, and display of sites of atrocity and conflict is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is incredibly lucrative for local communities. So the question is not whether tourism *should* be present in the aftermath of atrocity ... but rather how and in what form tourism can operate sensitively, ethically, and reflexively in sites with a contentious past’.¹³⁶ Based on her research in Rwanda, Erin Jessee cautions outsiders to be ‘mindful about eliciting and reproducing dominant narratives that, while seemingly innocuous, are constructed in a manner that furthers political or ideological agendas, particularly those

¹³³Williams, *Memorial Museums*, p. 111.

¹³⁴Marschall, “Personal memory tourism”, p. 332.

¹³⁵Peter Andreas, *Blue Helmets and Black Markets: The Business of Survival in the Siege of Sarajevo* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹³⁶Lisle, *Holidays in the Danger Zone*, p. 196.

that might enhance divisions within a population, for example'.¹³⁷ On a less cautionary note, Emma Hutchinson discusses the community-building potential inherent in trauma recovery and suggests 'that the process of representing trauma can help to constitute new, possibly more inclusive communities'.¹³⁸ The manipulative effect of power is not a foregone conclusion in memory projects such as memorials. My analysis of memorialisation provides an interpretation of existing structures and suggests ways to humanise and include all members of society. Peace, reconciliation, and social healing cannot occur when the powerful silence the weak. Although a tenuous stability may prevail, it is dangerous to mistake a lack of violence for the presence of peace.

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¹³⁷Erin Jessee, 'The danger of a single story: Iconic stories in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide', *Memory Studies*, 10:2 (2017), p. 145.

¹³⁸Hutchinson, *Affective Communities in World Politics*, p. 112.