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## Progress in Tourism Management

# Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism



Duncan Light

Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Bournemouth University, Fern Barrow, Bournemouth, Dorset BH12 5BB, United Kingdom

### H I G H L I G H T S

- This paper reviews 2 decades of academic research into dark tourism and thanatourism.
- It evaluates and critiques progress in six principle research themes.
- It identifies future directions and challenges for research.
- Clearly differentiating dark tourism and thanatourism from heritage tourism is problematic.

### A R T I C L E I N F O

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### A B S T R A C T

This paper reviews academic research into dark tourism and thanatourism over the 1996–2016 period. The aims of this paper are threefold. First, it reviews the evolution of the concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism, highlighting similarities and differences between them. Second it evaluates progress in 6 key themes and debates. These are: issues of the definition and scope of the concepts; ethical issues associated with such forms of tourism; the political and ideological dimensions of dark tourism and thanatourism; the nature of demand for places of death and suffering; the management of such places; and the methods of research used for investigating such tourism. Third, research gaps and issues that demand fuller scrutiny are identified. The paper argues that two decades of research have not convincingly demonstrated that dark tourism and thanatourism are distinct forms of tourism, and in many ways they appear to be little different from heritage tourism.

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E-mail address: [dlight@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:dlight@bournemouth.ac.uk).

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## 1. Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: an uneasy relationship with heritage tourism

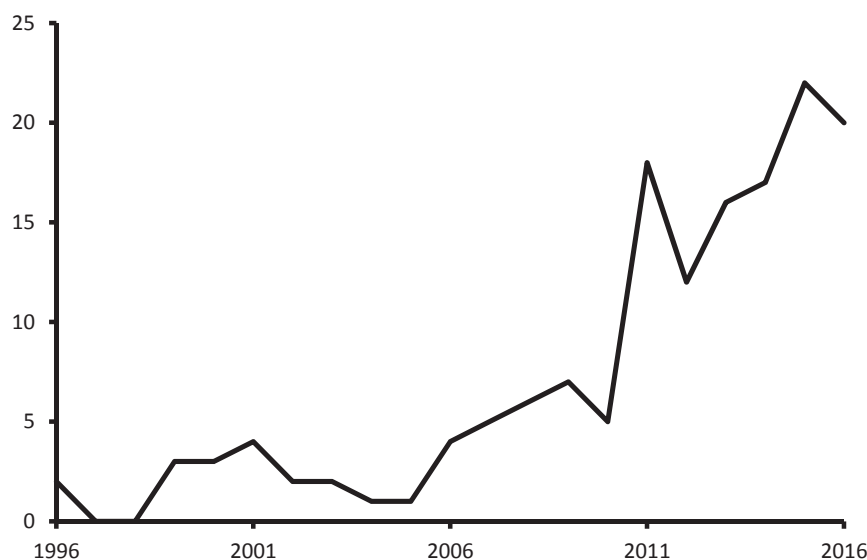
Two decades have passed since a collection of papers in the nascent *International Journal of Heritage Studies* proposed the closely-related concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism. Initially a marginal and rather off-beat curiosity pursued by a small number of dedicated scholars, the relationship between tourism and death has now become a mainstream research topic within tourism studies and tourism management. This is apparent in the steady increase in the number of papers in peer reviewed journals about dark tourism and, to a lesser extent, thanatourism (see Fig. 1). There has been a particular growth of interest since 2011. The tourism-death relationship is an increasingly popular theme for conferences, edited collections and monographs. It has also attracted the attention of scholars in a wide range of disciplines and fields beyond tourism studies/tourism management. Furthermore, dark tourism is firmly established in undergraduate and postgraduate curricula and is consequently a popular subject for student dissertations. It is also attracting a growing number of PhD researchers. An Institute for Dark Tourism Research has been established at the University of Central Lancashire (UK).

Dark tourism (although not thanatourism) also enjoys a high profile outside the academic environment. The topic has caught the attention of the media (Lennon, 2010; Seaton & Lennon, 2004) in a

way few other forms of tourism have achieved, and is a regular subject for newspaper/magazine articles and television programmes. Dark tourism also enjoys a substantial internet presence: a Google search for 'dark tourism' in December 2016 produced almost four million hits (although only 18,600 for 'thanatourism'). These include encyclopedia entries; guides to dark tourism places and destinations; blogs and commentaries about dark tourism in general (or about specific sites); and holidays themed around dark attractions and experiences. More broadly, dark tourism has also been the focus of a work of popular travel writing (Joly, 2011). While the tourism industry itself has been slower to embrace the term, some attractions and destinations have started to use it in their promotion (Lennon, 2010).

### 1.1. Aims and scope of this paper

Given the prominence that dark tourism (less so thanatourism) now enjoys within tourism studies/tourism management this is an opportune moment to evaluate progress over the past two decades of research. This is not the first paper to review research in dark tourism or thanatourism (see for example Ashworth & Isaac, 2015; Carrigan, 2014; Hartmann, 2014; Roberts & Stone, 2014; Seaton, 2009a; Sharpley, 2009a; Stone, 2013a; Wight, 2006). However this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive and critical review of dark tourism and thanatourism research over the 1996–2016



Note: includes only papers published in English-language peer-reviewed journals which engage (even if critically) with dark tourism or thanatourism

Fig. 1. Number of papers about dark tourism and thanatourism published annually (1996–2016).

period (including some papers that were published online in 2015 and 2016). At this point it is necessary to clarify the relationship between dark tourism and thanatourism. While these terms are frequently used interchangeably, this review follows other scholars in arguing that there are important distinctions between them (at least as they were originally conceived). Dark tourism tends to be used as an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy or crime. As originally formulated, it is a phenomenon rooted in the circumstances of the late twentieth century. Thanatourism is a more specific concept and is about long-standing practices of travel motivated by a specific desire for an encounter with death. This review treats dark tourism and thanatourism as distinct, but parallel (and closely-related) ways of considering the relationship between tourism/tourists and places of death or suffering. Since the two concepts are so closely linked, it is not possible to review one without also considering the other.

The aims of this review paper are threefold. First, it reviews the evolution of the concepts of both dark tourism and thanatourism, highlighting the similarities and differences between them as they were originally proposed, along with their relationships with heritage tourism. Second, it evaluates progress in academic research into dark tourism and thanatourism over the 1996–2016 period, focusing on six principal themes and debates (see below). Third, it considers some of the future prospects and challenges for dark tourism and thanatourism research, highlighting research gaps and issues that demand fuller scrutiny. The central argument of this paper is that two decades of research have not convincingly demonstrated that dark tourism or thanatourism can be identified as discrete forms of (special interest) tourism. Instead, in many ways dark tourism and thanatourism appear to be little different from heritage tourism. Much of the debate about tourism at places of death and suffering derives from (and parallels) similar debates within heritage studies. Furthermore, after two decades of research

there is increasingly a return to heritage to conceptualise tourism at such places.

Over the past two decades, dark tourism and thanatourism research has focused on a broad range of themes (see [Table 1](#)), although the priority given to individual themes has shifted over time. In order to summarise this diverse multidisciplinary scholarship with clarity, this paper is organised around six principal themes: 1) a concern with definitions and typologies of dark tourism and thanatourism; 2) ethical debates regarding the presentation of places of death and suffering to tourists; 3) the broader political roles of such places which overlaps with their role as tourist attractions; 4) the nature of demand for such places (particularly the motivations and experiences of visitors); 5) the management, interpretation and marketing of places of death and suffering for tourism and tourists; 6) the research methods used to understand dark tourism and thanatourism.

Underpinning this thematic structure is an analysis of the chronological development of dark tourism and thanatourism research. Two broad stages are identified (see [Table 1](#)), each lasting approximately a decade. The first stage was characterised by attempts by a relatively small number of scholars to identify and clarify the relationships between tourism and death, and to refine the concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism. This stage was dominated by case study research in which debate about issues of commodification and authenticity was prominent. The second stage was characterised by increasing interdisciplinary engagement with the concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism. This produced an extensive critique of the concepts themselves (particularly dark tourism); more critical attention to the motivations and experiences of tourists who visit places of death and suffering; and efforts to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between tourism/tourists and death.

This paper presents no empirical data and is instead framed as a piece of conceptual research. In particular, it addresses the

**Table 1**  
Key issues and themes in dark tourism and thanatourism research, 1996–2016.

Issue/Theme	Research priority	
	First decade (1996–2005)	Second decade (2006–2016)
<i>Relating to the concepts themselves</i>		
Definitions and scope	**	***
Development of typologies	**	*
Relationships with postmodernism	***	*
Historical precedents	*	**
<i>Ethical debates</i>		
Commodification and authenticity	***	**
Ethical debates	***	*
<i>Political dimensions</i>		
Relationship between individual/collective identity	*	***
Relationship with collective memory	*	***
Role in post-conflict reconciliation	*	**
<i>Nature of demand</i>		
Motives for visiting	*	***
Pilgrimage	**	**
Experiences and performances of visitors	*	***
Emotional dimensions of visiting	*	***
Relationships between the living and the dead	*	***
Negotiating morality	*	**
<i>Management</i>		
Management of places of death for tourism	**	**
Interpretation of places of death for tourism	*	**
Influences of different stakeholders	*	***
Marketing	*	*
<i>Methodology</i>		
Methods of research	*	*

Research priority (based on the number of publications on each theme, and broader prominence of the theme in debate): \*, lowest; \*\*\*, highest (after [Buckley, 2012](#)).

following forms of conceptual research identified by [Xin, Tribe, and Chambers \(2013\)](#). First, this paper focuses on the definitions of concepts (dark tourism and thanatourism) and evaluates and critiques these definitions. Second, it seeks to compare concepts (dark tourism and thanatourism), linking them, where appropriate, to related concepts (such as dissonant heritage). Third, it undertakes a historical analysis of concepts, and focusses on the origins and evolution of dark tourism and thanatourism as frameworks for understanding a particular form of tourism production and consumption. Fourth, this review maps the scope of the concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism, and identifies both the increasingly unclear boundaries between them, and the overlaps with heritage tourism. Fifth, it seeks to synthesise concepts by reviewing a diverse and multidisciplinary literature that has considered tourism at places of death and suffering. Finally, it seeks to identify conceptual gaps, both by identifying those themes that have attracted the most attention and by highlighting issues which are poorly understood or which merit further research. The principal methods of this review are therefore comparison, historical analysis, reflection, scoping, synthesising, and identifying research gaps. This review seeks to adhere to the protocols for conceptual research outlined by [Xin et al. \(2013:71\)](#), namely “a commitment to academic openness, good scholarship and judgement” (see also [Tribe & Liburd, 2016](#)).

Finally, while this paper focuses on dark tourism, it does not consider in detail the issue of ‘dark leisure’ ([Rojek, 2000](#)). This is partly for reasons of space: there is a considerable body of research into dark leisure (itself a contested concept). It is also because ‘dark’ in the context of dark tourism and dark leisure is usually understood in different ways. Dark tourism is a way of conceptualising visits to places associated with death, disaster and human suffering, whereas dark leisure is defined as “a form of leisure that is liminal and transgressive” ([Spracklen, 2013](#), p. 204) with a particular focus on activities and practices that are deviant and/or taboo. This is not to say that there is no relationship between dark tourism and dark leisure, and where scholars have sought to engage with dark leisure (e.g. [Biran & Poria, 2012](#); [Stone & Sharpley, 2014](#)) they are considered in this review.

## 2. The concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism: antecedents, proposal and critique

The concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism did not appear from nowhere and a number of antecedents can be identified. Visiting places associated with death is nothing new and academics (largely working in the field of heritage tourism) had produced a substantial body of research into tourism at battlefields and sites associated with war. However, during the early 1990s a number of scholars drew attention to the increasingly close relationship between tourism and places of death or suffering ([Dann, 1994](#); [Prentice, 1993](#)). Other work approached this relationship from the perspective of leisure sociology: [Rojek \(1993\)](#) explored the growing popularity among tourists of graves and places associated with the death of celebrities, and labelled such places ‘black spots’. He interpreted this trend from the perspective of postmodernism, particularly the role of spectacle and the blurring of distinctions between the real and imaginary. [Rojek \(1997\)](#) later proposed ‘sensation sights’ (sites of violent death) and argued that they were social spaces for reaffirming individual and collective identities in the face of events which disrupted everyday life routines.

Another significant antecedent ([Ashworth & Isaac, 2015](#); [Dann & Seaton, 2001](#); [Hartmann, 2014](#); [Sharpley, 2005](#)) was an established body of research into ‘dissonant heritage’ ([Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996](#)). This concept proposes that heritage resources have differing significance for different groups so that heritage is,

by its nature, dissonant. The selection and promotion of particular heritage resources for tourism inevitably disinherits groups within society who do not identify with that heritage. One of the themes considered by Tunbridge and Ashworth was the “heritage of atrocity” (p.94) and, with reference to a range of (mostly European) examples, they examined the dilemmas of managing and interpreting such a heritage so as to satisfy competing demands for both remembering and forgetting. However they had little to say about why tourists might be interested in visiting such heritage.

Dark tourism and thanatourism were first proposed to an academic audience in 1996 in a themed edition of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*. The edition contained one paper about dark tourism ([Foley & Lennon, 1996](#)), one about thanatourism ([Seaton, 1996](#)) and two other papers, neither of which used either term. For Foley and Lennon, dark (or “tragic”) tourism was defined as “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (p.198). They argued (following [Rojek](#)) that dark tourism was a postmodern phenomenon due to its emphasis on spectacle and reproduction, and examined the issues around presenting and interpreting places associated with death through a case study of sites associated with the death of President Kennedy. However, [Seaton \(1996\)](#) defined thanatourism in a different way: “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death” (p.240). This exclusive focus on death means that thanatourism is narrower in scope than dark tourism. Seaton conceptualised thanatourism as a form of heritage tourism (see also [Dann & Seaton, 2001](#); [Seaton, 2001](#)). He recognised that thanatourism was not an absolute form but varied in intensity depending on whether it was a tourist’s single motivation or existed alongside other motivations. At one end of the thanatourism continuum was travel motivated entirely by a fascination with death in itself (regardless of whose death); while at the opposite end was travel to sites associated with death where the dead are known and valued by the visitor. Seaton also identified five forms of thanatourism involving different forms of encounter between the tourist and death/the dead.

There were important (if often overlooked) differences between dark tourism and thanatourism as they were originally conceived ([Hartmann, 2014](#); [Johnston, 2011](#); [Seaton, 2009a](#)). [Foley and Lennon \(1996\)](#) focused on the ‘supply’ dimension of dark tourism and the ways in which places of death or suffering are presented to, and interpreted for visitors (with particular emphasis on issues of ethics, commodification and appropriateness). Their arguments were underpinned by the assumption that any site that is associated with death is essentially dark. Conversely, [Seaton’s](#) account of thanatourism was behavioural rather than essentialist and he focused on the motivations of tourists to visit places associated with death. He was less concerned about the ways in which such places were presented to their visitors. These differences are not insignificant, although many researchers subsequently tended to treat dark tourism and thanatourism as the same thing.

[Lennon and Foley \(2000\)](#) developed their ideas in an influential monograph entitled *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. They conceptualised dark tourism as a subset of cultural tourism and as something distinct from heritage tourism ([Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010](#)). In many ways their understanding of dark tourism was narrower than is often recognised since it is explicitly identified as a phenomenon of the twentieth century, a claim which stemmed from their interpretation of dark tourism as a product of postmodernity. They argued that the objects of dark tourism introduce senses of “anxiety and doubt” (p.11) which challenge the certainty and optimism of modernity. As such they defined dark tourism as involving incidences of death, disaster and atrocity that have taken place within living memory. They identified a major

shift in the way that death and the dead are treated by the tourism industry, with death being increasingly commodified and commercialised. Communications technologies and the news media (particularly within Western societies) were identified as playing a central role in raising public awareness of instances of death and disaster (see also Lennon & Foley, 1999). Through a range of (mostly European) case studies they focused on how places of death are presented and interpreted to their visitors, highlighting the consequent ethical issues, and considering implications for management. Their argument implicitly assumed that dark tourism is a form of mass tourism (although they did not develop this claim in any detail) among mostly Western tourists (see also Dann, 1998). However they had little to say about the motives, expectations and experiences of such tourists.

*Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* has been an influential and foundational text in the academic study of dark tourism but it has also attracted a vigorous critique for its limited theorization of the phenomenon (Ashworth, 2002a; Carrigan, 2014; Lisle, 2007; Stone, 2011a), eclectic choice of case studies (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015), and claim that dark tourism is restricted to events within living memory (Casbeard & Booth, 2012). The contention that dark tourism is a contemporary phenomenon rooted in the postmodern world has attracted particular scrutiny. Casbeard and Booth (2012:2) argue that this approach is underpinned by a belief in the “exceptionalism of the present” which assumes that post-modernity can be identified as a distinct historical epoch which is discontinuous with earlier periods of history. It is often claimed that interest among tourists in visiting places associated with death and suffering appears to have increased in recent decades (Dann, 2005; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Sharpley, 2009a; Stone, 2006), but this is not a recent phenomenon and Seaton (1996; 2009a) has persuasively demonstrated that the link between travel and death has a long history which is rooted in established practices of “thanatopsis” (contemplation of death). There are many instances of touristic interest in death which pre-date the late twentieth century (Casbeard & Booth, 2012; Casella & Fennelly, 2016; Coughlin, 2014; Gibson, 2006; Johnston, 2013; Murphy, 2015; Schäfer, 2016; Seaton, 1999) leading Bowman and Pezzullo (2010:190) to argue that “it is possible that people are no more interested in touring sites associated with death than they have always been” (see also Sharpley, 2009a). However, this debate highlights a further distinction between dark tourism and thanatourism: the former (as conceived by Foley and Lennon) is regarded as a contemporary phenomenon, whereas thanatourism has a much longer historical lineage.

The value of postmodernism as a framework for understanding dark tourism has been questioned in other ways. Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) contend that anxiety about modernity (whether as a motive for visiting or a consequence of such visits) remains uninvestigated and unproven. Moreover, anxiety and uncertainty about the contemporary world are not exclusive to the postmodern period, but instead can be identified in the early nineteenth century (Casbeard & Booth, 2012). Furthermore, a postmodern framework neglects the individual psychological issues of why tourists are interested in visiting places associated with death (Dunkley, Morgan, & Westwood, 2007). While some researchers followed Lennon and Foley in treating dark tourism as a form of postmodern tourism (Blom, 2000; Dann, 1998, 2005, pp. 233–252; Dann & Potter, 2001; Goatcher & Brunnsden, 2011; Korstanje & George, 2015; Muzaini, Teo, & Yeoh, 2007; Tarlow, 2005; Toussaint & Decrop, 2013), most have not embraced postmodernism as an explanatory framework. To some extent this is a reflection of postmodernism itself falling out of fashion (although post-structuralist approaches are increasingly influential in tourism studies). Furthermore, a postmodern framework is of limited use in

understanding the motivations and experiences of tourists who visit places of death, or the management of such places.

A broader critique focused on the term ‘dark tourism’ itself, particularly its associations with “disturbing practices and morbid products (and experiences) within the tourism domain” (Stone, 2006, p. 146). Seaton (2009a:525) argues that the use of the term ‘dark’ is underpinned by an implicit contrast with a form of tourism that is ‘light’ so that dark tourism is constructed as something “transgressive, morally suspect, and pathological”. In turn, this perpetuates long-standing stereotypes of tourists as driven by shallow and superficial motives (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010). Certainly the media has tended to regard dark tourism as deviant and troubling and, in some cases, a source of moral panic (Seaton & Lennon, 2004). Others argue that ‘darkness’ is not objective fact but, instead, is socially constructed (Jamal & Lelo, 2011) in different ways in different contexts, so that attributing the label ‘dark’ to something is “a complicated matter of perspective and privilege” (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010, p. 191). Furthermore, ‘dark tourism’ is a term which has been applied without the consent of the tourism industry itself (Wight, 2009) so that many professionals responsible for managing places of death or suffering for tourism do not embrace the term (see Baldwin & Sharpley, 2009; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Seaton, North, & Gajda, 2015). In this context, even two of the leading advocates of dark tourism have acknowledged that the term is “unhelpful” (Sharpley & Stone, 2009a, p. 249).

Moreover, dark tourism and thanatourism have not found universal acceptance. Instead, there is a substantial body of research into tourism at places of death or suffering which eschews either concept. For example, as Table 2 indicates, the most common research focus is places of war and conflict but dark tourism or thanatourism do not enjoy a ‘monopoly’ on the study of war sites since there is a substantial body of research into such places that makes no reference to either concept. For example, most chapters in edited volumes on battlefield tourism (Ryan, 2007) and tourism and war (Butler & Suntikul, 2013a) avoid dark tourism or thanatourism as explanatory frameworks. Similarly, the study of tourism at other types of places associated with death often makes no reference to dark tourism or thanatourism. Consequently there is no domain of study that is the exclusive or unique focus of dark tourism or thanatourism research. Instead, dark tourism or thanatourism are just two possible frameworks for understanding tourism at places associated with death.

Furthermore some researchers are unconvinced that dark tourism or thanatourism are sufficiently distinct from heritage tourism to warrant their adoption as explanatory frameworks. Ashworth is dismissive of dark tourism (see Ashworth & Isaac, 2015) and, developing his previous work on dissonant heritage, advocates the terms ‘atrocities tourism’ or ‘atrocities heritage’ (Ashworth, 1996, 2004; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a). Logan and Reeves (2009) adopt the term ‘difficult heritage’ and none of the chapters in their edited volume makes any reference to dark tourism, despite focusing on the types of site that have been extensively examined by dark tourism researchers (see Roberts & Stone, 2014). Indeed, some scholars have sought to redefine dark tourism in terms of particular types of heritage (see Section 3.2). In short, for all the interest in dark tourism and thanatourism over the past two decades, many scholars are sceptical about (and, in some cases, dismissive of) the concepts.

### 3. Changing conceptions of dark tourism and thanatourism

#### 3.1. Clarifying and refining the concepts

Following the publication of *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of*

**Table 2**  
The range of sites that are the focus of dark tourism and thanatourism research, 1996–2016.

Type of site	Number of studies	Authors
Sites associated with war/conflict (including battlefields and war cemeteries)	48	Baldwin and Sharpley (2009); Bigley, Lee, Chon, and Yoon (2010); Bird (2013); Boyd (2013); Braithwaite and Leiper (2010); Carr (2010); Cheal and Griffin (2013); Chronis (2012); Clarke and McAuley (2016); Du, Littlejohn, and Lennon (2013); Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011); Eades and Cooper (2013); Fallon and Robinson (2017); Farmaki (2013); Frew (2013); Hall, Basarin, and Lockstone-Binney (2010); Iles (2012); Johnston (2011); Johnston (2016); Kamber, Karafotias, and Tsitoura (2016); Knox (2006); Kokkranikal, Yang, Powell, and Booth (2016); Le and Pearce (2011); Lemelin et al. (2013); MacCarthy and Willson (2015); MacCarthy (2016); Miles (2014); Murphy (2015); Muzaini et al. (2007); Naef (2014); Nagle (2012); Osbaldiston and Petray (2011); Seaton (1999, 2000); Schäfer (2016); Simone-Charteris, Boyd, and Burns (2013); Skinner (2016); Slade (2003); Volcic, Erjavec, and Peak (2014); Willard, Lade, and Frost (2013); Winter (2009, 2011a, b); Wu, Funck, and Hayashi (2014); Yink, Seyitoğu, and Çakar (2016); Yoshida, Bui, and Lee (2016); Zhang, Yang, Zheng, and Zhang (2016); Zheng, Zhang, Zhang, and Qian (2017)
Sites associated with the Holocaust (including concentration camps, transit camps and Holocaust memorials)	17	Allar (2013); Beech (2000); Biran, Poria, and Oren (2011); Busby and Devereux (2015); Cohen (2011); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Kaelber (2007); Keil (2005); Kidron (2013); Lennon and Foley (1999); Magee and Gilmore (2015); Miles (2002); Nawijn, Isaac, Gridnevskiy, and van Liempt (2015); Nawijn, Isaac, van Liempt, and Gridnevskiy (2016); Oren and Shani (2012); Podoshen and Hunt (2011); Thurnell-Read (2009)
Prisons/incarceration sites (including detention centres and prisoner of war camps)	13	Barton and Brown (2012); Best (2007); Brook (2009); Casella and Fennelly (2016); Dehoorne and Jolliffe (2013); Gould (2014); Kang and Lee (2013); Levey (2014); Preece and Price (2005); Strange and Kempa (2003); Walby and Piché (2011); Wilson (2004); Wilson (2008); Beech (2009); Friedrich and Johnston (2013); Hohenhaus (2013); Hughes (2008); Isaac and Çakmak (2016); Koletch (2014); Lennon (2009); Moffat (2012); Simic (2009); Sion (2014a); Sharpley (2012)
Genocide sites (in Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia)	11	Austin (2002); Beech (2001); Dann and Potter (2001); Dann and Seaton (2001); Forsdick (2014); Jamal and Lelo (2011); Lelo and Jamal (2013); Mowatt and Chancellor (2011); Rice (2009); Seaton (2001); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015a)
Places associated with slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade (in West Africa, the USA and Europe)	11	Buda (2015a, b); Buda and McIntosh (2013); Buda and Shim (2015); Buda, d'Hauteserre, and Johnston (2014); Connell (2017); Hepburn (2012); Isaac (2014); Isaac and Ashworth (2011); Mansfeld and Korman (2015); Warner (1999)
Contemporary conflict zones/dangerous places	11	Biran, Liu, Li, and Eichhorn (2014); Pezzullo (2009); Rittichainuwat (2008); Robbie (2008); Ryan and Kohli (2006); Smith and Croy (2005); Wright and Sharpley (2016); Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, and Guo (2016)
Sites of natural disasters	8	Brown (2016); Laws (2013); Leevit (2012); Raine (2013); Seaton (2002); Seaton et al. (2015); Toussaint and Decrop (2013)
Cemeteries/burial sites (excluding war cemeteries)	7	Frew (2012); Gibson (2006); González-Tennant (2013); Kim and Butler (2015); Morales (2013); Rofe (2013)
Sites of individual/mass murder (in a non-war context)	6	Frank (2016); Light (2000a, b); McKenzie (2013)
Communism in East-Central Europe and its legacy	4	Potts (2012); Sather-Wagstaff (2011); Stone (2012a)
Ground Zero, New York	3	Goatcher and Brunsden (2011); Stone (2013b); Yankovska and Hannam (2014)
Chernobyl	3	Best (2013); Foley and Lennon (1996)
Sites of the death of famous people	2	Garcia (2012); Heidelberg (2014)
Ghost tours/walks	2	Goulding, Saren, and Lindridge (2013); Stone (2011b)
'Body Worlds' exhibitions	2	Powell and Iankova (2016); Stone (2009c)
Entertainment-based dark tourism sites	2	Bittner (2011); Dalton (2014); Heuermann and Chhabra (2014); Krisjanous (2016); Knudsen (2011); Lennon (2010); Lennon and Foley (2000); Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski, and Jin (2015); Tinson, Saren, and Roth (2015); White (2013); Wight and Lennon (2007); Cooke (2012); Coughlin (2014); Freeman (2014); Kang, Scott, Lee, and Ballantyne (2012); Korstanje (2011); Lee, Bendie, Yoon, and Kim (2012); Miller and Gonzalez (2013); Podoshen (2013); Powell and Kennell (2016); Sharma (2014)
Multiple types of site	11	
Other types of site (each the focus of a single study)	10	

Note: Includes only studies that have engaged (even if critically) with dark tourism/thanatourism as explanatory frameworks. Includes some papers published online in 2015/2016.

*Death and Disaster* (Lennon & Foley, 2000) the concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism attracted increasing academic attention. The result was a steady output of papers and chapters focusing on the relationship between tourism and death in a wide range of contexts and locations (see Table 2) although particular types of site – those associated with war and conflict, the Holocaust, places of detention, genocide and slavery – have attracted the most attention. Most researchers embraced the concept of dark tourism rather than thanatourism, and initially most followed Lennon and Foley (2000) in focusing on case study research, characterised by “supply-side comment and analysis” (Seaton & Lennon, 2004, p. 81). However, there was little attention to understanding the people who visited places associated with death and suffering.

From an early stage researchers sought to engage with the highly heterogeneous nature of both dark tourism and thanatourism (Sharpley, 2009a; Sharpley & Stone, 2009a). Seaton (1996:240)

had specifically argued that thanatourism did not involve a single form of motivation but instead existed “across a continuum of intensity”. However Lennon and Foley (2000) had not identified a similar differentiation for dark tourism which left the concept open to the charge that it failed to distinguish between very different types of places offering very different experiences for visitors (e.g. Hughes, 2008; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Consequently, some scholars sought to refine the concept of dark tourism to engage with the diversity of places and experiences involved. An early paper argued that some sites are darker than others (based on their authentic location) and proposed a distinction between ‘dark’, ‘darker’ and ‘darkest’ tourism (Miles, 2002). Strange and Kempa (2003) extended this argument by proposing multiple ‘shades’ of dark tourism.

Other researchers proposed typologies of dark tourism or thanatourism, although they have approached this in different ways.

Some typologies focused on categories of dark tourism or thanatourism sites (Dann, 1998; Dunkley et al., 2007; Sharpley, 2005; Stone, 2006), while others classified motives for visiting such places (Dann, 1998; Raine, 2013; Seaton, 1996; Sharpley, 2005). The most influential typology is the spectrum of dark tourism supply (Stone, 2006). This positions sites of death and suffering (termed the 'darkest' form of dark tourism) at one end of a continuum, and sites associated with death and suffering (the 'lightest' form) at the other end. The extremes of the spectrum comprised various binaries: education/entertainment; history/heritage; authentic/inauthentic location; shorter/longer time scale since the event; and higher/lower political/ideological significance. This typology reproduced long-standing debates within heritage tourism (particularly the authentic/inauthentic and education/entertainment binaries) but was important in clarifying the differentiated nature of dark tourism supply. Subsequent work has sought to refine or extend this typology (Heuermann & Chhabra, 2014; Raine, 2013). On the other hand, Yoshida et al. (2016) argue that a spectrum based on an education/entertainment binary is an inappropriate model for dark tourism in Asian contexts. This claim illustrates how dark tourism is essentially a 'Western' concept that has been applied (often with little reflection or critique) to non-Western contexts in which the relationships between the living and the dead can take very different forms.

While most typologies focussed on either supply of, or demand for, dark tourism or thanatourism, Sharpley (2005) sought to integrate both supply and demand. He argued that four shades of dark tourism could be identified, ranging from 'black tourism' (tourists with an intense interest in death, visiting places intended to cater for this interest) to 'pale tourism' (involving tourists with a minimal interest in death visiting places not intended to be visitor attractions). The typology also included two forms of 'grey tourism', one involving tourists with a defined interest in death visiting places not intended to be tourist attractions, the other involving sites intentionally established to exploit death but attracting tourists for whom an interest in death was not their primary motive. Sharpley's model was important for engaging with the heterogeneity of dark tourism supply and demand, and for recognising that not all so-called dark tourism attractions are intended to be so, and not all tourists who visit them are strongly interested in death.

For all the interest in producing typologies none has found universal acceptance and the endeavour itself has been subject to a vigorous critique. Dale and Robinson (2011) argue that such typologies are ultimately subjective and the methodologies used in their construction are rarely explained. Moreover, Ashworth and Isaac (2015:318) contend that the approach is unending (and ultimately futile) since an "almost infinite number of overlapping taxonomies can be conceived and imposed upon the diverse realities of tourism sites". The epistemological foundations of such work have also been questioned. Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) argue that typologies are underpinned by a positivist concern to categorise and classify that has long been commonplace with tourism studies/management (Golańska, 2015; Lisle, 2007). Others argue that such typologies largely miss the point since sites or places are not intrinsically (or objectively) dark (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015; Jamal & Lelo, 2011; Seaton, 2009a). Instead, each visitor will experience a site in different ways so that 'dark' places will have a multitude of different meanings for different visitors (see also Walby & Piché, 2011).

Alongside the development of typologies has been a concern to identify sub-forms of dark tourism. These include "penal/prison tourism" (Strange & Kempa, 2003, p. 388); "fright tourism" (Bristow & Newman, 2005); "genocide tourism" (Beech, 2009; Dunkley et al., 2007, p. 9); "grief tourism" (Dunkley et al., 2007, p. 8); "disaster tourism" (Robbie, 2008); "favela tourism" (Robb,

2009, p. 52); "pagan tourism" (Laws, 2013); "suicide tourism" (Miller & Gonzalez, 2013, p. 293); "atomic tourism" (Freeman, 2014); "conflict heritage tourism" (Mansfeld & Korman, 2015); and "dystopian dark tourism" (Podoshen, Venkatesh et al., 2015). Other, closely related forms of niche tourism include "poverty tourism" (Rolfes, 2010; see also Carrigan, 2014) and "gothic tourism" (McEvoy, 2016). This development reflects another long-standing concern within tourism studies/management to identify particular forms of niche tourism (each of which is assumed to be broadly homogeneous in terms of production and consumption). That this is so prevalent in dark tourism research suggests unease about the use of the term 'dark', but also dissatisfaction with the overarching concept for its weakness in differentiating between different types of sites and their visitors. While the proposal of sub-forms of dark tourism may have been intended to bring clarity it also had the effect of diluting the core concept itself.

### 3.2. Broadening the scope of dark tourism and thanatourism

Whilst some have sought to refine the concepts of dark tourism or thanatourism, others have proposed wider or more inclusive conceptions. Stone (2006:146) proposed a model of dark tourism which embraced the "seemingly macabre" in addition to death and suffering (see Table 3). This seems to have been an attempt to bring exhibitions such as Gunther von Hagens' "Body Worlds", along with entertainment-based museums of torture under the umbrella of dark tourism. However the macabre is problematic since it is essentially a normative judgment and what is 'macabre' will mean different things to different people in different contexts. Others have argued for broader conceptualisations that include violence (Robb, 2009), crime (Dalton, 2014; Lennon, 2010) and segregation (Jamal & Lelo, 2011). Consequently, as the scope of dark tourism has become increasingly wide any association, however weak, with death or suffering is now labelled dark tourism (Biran & Poria, 2012).

Furthermore, some conceptualisations of dark tourism do not involve death at all. Biran and Poria (2012) propose that dark tourism should be defined in terms of deviance (specifically "negative deviance"), that is, participation in activities which are shameful or socially condemned. This approach effectively equates dark tourism with dark leisure (see also Yan et al., 2016), but also implies that dark tourism need not have any association with death. Another conceptualisation draws on the notion of "tourism in darkness" (Hepburn, 2012, p. 122) to argue that places of "socio-political danger" represent dark (or forbidden destinations) so that visits to such places constitute a form of dark tourism (Buda & McIntosh, 2013, p. 217). Similarly Buda and Shim (2015:4) argue that tourists visit North Korea from a desire for "dark, forbidden and possibly dangerous activities and locations". However, Connell (2017) disputes this claim, arguing that visits to North Korea represent a form of "moral political tourism" (p.6) (see also the response of Buda & Shim, 2017). This exchange is important for illustrating the contested scope of dark tourism (particularly the need for such tourism to involve death). There is a growing body of work that considers visits to dangerous places and conflict zones from the perspective of dark tourism (Buda, 2015a, b; Buda et al., 2014; Isaac & Ashworth, 2011; Mansfeld & Korman, 2015) which means that the boundaries between dark tourism and adventure tourism are increasingly blurred. That said, most scholars continue to place mortality at the centre of dark tourism (Stone, 2011c).

Table 3 presents changing definitions of both dark tourism and thanatourism and illustrates the fluidity of both concepts. Most definitions treat it as a particular type of tourism (something distinct from heritage tourism) or a form of touristic practice (that is, the act of visiting), although these definitions differ about which

**Table 3**  
Changing definitions of dark tourism and thanatourism.

<b>Definitions based on practices (the act of visiting particular types of place)</b>	
Dark tourism: “the visitation to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment”	Foley and Lennon (1997:155)
Dark tourism: “visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives”	Tarlow (2005:48)
Dark tourism: “travel to sites associated with death, disaster, acts of violence, tragedy, scenes of death and crimes against humanity”	Preece and Price (2005:192)
Dark tourism: “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre”	Stone (2006:146)
Dark tourism “involves visiting destinations at which violence is the main attraction”	Robb (2009:51)
Thanatourism: “a form of travel where tourists encounter places associated with death, disaster and the macabre”	Johnston (2015:20)
<b>Definitions based on tourism at particular types of place</b>	
Dark tourism: “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites”	Foley and Lennon (1996:198)
Dark tourism: “Tourism associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity”	Lennon and Foley (1999: 46)
Thanatourism: “tourism to globally recognised places of commemoration”	Knudsen (2011:57)
Thanatourism: “a form of tourism where tourists visit sites primarily associated with death and disaster”	Johnston and Mandelartz (2016: v)
<b>Definitions based on motivations</b>	
Thanatourism: “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death”	Seaton (1996:240)
“Thanatourism...refers to individuals who are motivated primarily to experience the death and suffering of others for the purpose of enjoyment, pleasure and satisfaction”	Best (2007:38)
<b>Definitions based on a form of experience</b>	
“Dark tourism...is where the tourist’s experience is essentially composed of ‘dark’ emotions such as pain, death, horror or sadness, many of which result from the infliction of violence that are not usually associated with a voluntary entertainment experience”	Ashworth (2008:234)
“Dark tourism is concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living”	Stone (2016:23)
<b>Definitions based on heritage</b>	
Thanatourism: “heritage staged around attractions and sites associated with death, acts of violence, scenes of disaster and crimes against humanity”	Dann and Seaton (2001:24)

categories of site should be included. Fewer definitions focus specifically on tourists themselves and their motivations or experiences. The table also shows how definitions have broadened over time so that many researchers no longer embrace the rather narrow focus of dark tourism proposed by Lennon and Foley (2000). Instead, dark tourism has become a generic term for any form of tourism that is associated with death, disaster, suffering the macabre, or anything unpleasant. Consequently, as Sharpley (2009a:6) acknowledges, “the term has become increasingly diluted and fuzzy”.

Given the lack of consensus over what constitutes dark tourism, some scholars have proposed alternative terms including “morbid tourism” (Blom, 2000), “trauma tourism” (Clark, 2009, 2014) “grief tourism” (Lewis, 2008), “death tourism” (Sion, 2014b, p. 3) and “thanatological tourism” (Yan et al., 2016, p. 110). Others situate dark tourism within a broader phenomenon of “dark travel” (Clarke, Dutton, & Johnston, 2014) or ‘the dark side of travel’ (Skinner, 2012). Some have returned to heritage in the search for a more useful label. Such terms include “dark heritage” (Roberts & Stone, 2014; Sharpley, 2009b, p. 151; Thomas, Seitsonen, & Herva, 2016; Wight & Lennon, 2007, p. 519); “dark heritage tourism” (Kamber et al., 2016; Simone-Charteris et al., 2013, p. 60); “difficult heritage” (Knudsen, 2011, p. 55; Logan & Reeves, 2009); “heritage that hurts” (Sather-Wagstaff (2011) and “sensitive heritage” (Magee & Gilmore, 2015, p. 898). Alternative labels for the places of dark tourism include “sites of darkness” (Jamal & Lelo, 2011, p. 40), “places with dark associations” (Miles, 2014, p. 137), and “sites associated with death and suffering” (Isaac & Çakmak, 2014, p. 174; see also; Biran et al., 2014). None of these alternative names has yet found widespread acceptance and the term dark tourism remains firmly established and widely used.

Table 3 also illustrates that many definitions of thanatourism have drifted from the behavioural focus proposed by Seaton (1996). As such, the distinction between dark tourism and thanatourism as they were initially formulated has become blurred. Many researchers now elide the two concepts and use the terms dark tourism and thanatourism interchangeably (Yankholmes &

McKercher, 2015a). Some researchers treat thanatourism as the ‘technical’ name for dark tourism (Tarlow, 2005) or as a more ‘precise’ term for dark tourism (Stone, 2006). Some prefer the term thanatourism since it is more neutral and less value-laden than dark tourism (Dunkley et al., 2007; Johnston, 2015); because it does not have the negative media associations of dark tourism (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013); or because it is regarded as a somehow more acceptable (or academic) label than dark tourism (see Buda, 2015b).

#### 4. Ethical debates

The identification of dark tourism and thanatourism was accompanied by extensive commentary and debate about the ethical dimensions of such tourism (Potts, 2012; Stone, 2009b). This debate was particularly prominent in the first decade of research. For some scholars, tourism at places of death and suffering raised issues about the acceptability and propriety of presenting places associated with death for tourism (Clark, 2014; Dale & Robinson, 2011; Lennon, 2010; Lennon & Foley, 2000), and the broader question of whether it is acceptable to profit from death or the macabre (Garcia, 2012; Seaton, 2009b). This debate has also been prominent outside the academy (particularly within the print media) where it has sometimes attained the status of moral panic (Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Sharpley, 2009a).

Other debate focused on visitors themselves: Ashworth and Hartmann (2005a:12) rehearse the argument that atrocity tourism “may anaesthetize rather than sensitize visitors, and increased contact with horror and suffering may make it more normal or acceptable, rather than shocking and unacceptable” (see also Ashworth, 2004, 2008; Robb, 2009). There was a tendency to be critical of visitors to dark places, assuming them to be ill-informed, likely to see such places as little more than entertainment, or likely to behave inappropriately or disrespectfully (Beech, 2001; Braithwaite & Leiper, 2010; Clark, 2014; Frew, 2012; Gould, 2014; Krisjanous, 2016; Lennon & Mitchell, 2007; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). This approach is illustrated by Tarlow’s contention that “the visit rarely goes beyond the banal” (2005:52).



However, such claims are founded on particular stereotypes of tourists that are rarely supported by empirical research with visitors. Indeed, while some instances of inappropriate behaviour have attracted widespread media coverage, recent research indicates that many visitors are deeply engaged with the places of death and suffering that they visit (see Section 6).

A more substantive ethical debate focused on how places associated with death and suffering are presented to their visitors. Early accounts of dark tourism (Foley & Lennon, 1996, 1997; Lennon & Foley, 1999, 2000) contended that the process of commodification frequently sanitised, distorted, or otherwise misrepresented tragic historical events. Furthermore, the educational role of places of death was compromised by an emphasis on spectacle and entertainment (something termed “dark edutainment” (Sharpley & Stone, 2009b, p. 111) or ‘dertainment’ (Dale & Robinson, 2011, p. 213)). Foley and Lennon also raised concerns about authenticity, both in terms of what was presented to tourists at dark tourism attractions and the location of some of those attractions themselves. They interpreted these issues through the lens of post-modernism with its emphasis on spectacle, simulation and replication in cultural production.

This was not a new argument and neither was it something specific to dark tourism. Instead, within heritage studies, debate about the consequences of commodification for historical ‘truth’ was well established. Hewison (1987:144) had famously argued that heritage was “bogus history” and that many heritage attractions were presenting a sanitised version of history which emphasised nostalgia and reassurance. Hewison’s claims were developed by other researchers (Bennett, 1988; Walsh, 1992; West, 1988) who argued that many heritage sites prioritised entertainment over education and historical accuracy, so that the messages presented to visitors were selective or partial. By the mid-1990s the ‘bogus history’ debate had largely ground to a halt within heritage studies but it was given a new lease of life when it was embraced by dark tourism research: indeed the debate gained an additional dimension through a focus on the appropriateness of commodifying death for tourist consumption.

Other researchers followed Foley and Lennon in examining issues of commodification and the implications for authenticity and/or historical accuracy in a range of contexts (Braithwaite & Leiper, 2010; Carr, 2010; Cole, 2000; Dale & Robinson, 2011; Dann & Potter, 2001; Gould, 2014; Heuermann & Chhabra, 2014; Lemelin et al., 2013; Lennon, 2009; Lennon & Mitchell, 2007; Marcuse, 2005; Murphy, 2015; Powell & Iankova, 2016; Rice, 2009; Sion, 2014a; Walby & Piché, 2011; Wight & Lennon, 2007). Their conclusions were broadly similar in being critical of the way that individual sites present death and suffering to visitors. Sharpley and Stone (2009b) sought to refine the debate through considering issues of kitsch and kitchification, arguing that the use of kitsch within dark tourism interpretation can transmit “feelings of comfort, safety and hope” (p.127) which renders dark sites palatable and comprehensible by visitors. However, Potts (2012) argues that the ‘kitchification’ argument is based on essentialist notions of kitsch and calls for more critical attention to what so-called kitsch means for tourists (see also Sather-Wagstaff, 2011).

In the late-2000s the ‘commodification’ argument was itself subject to a vigorous critique. Underpinning the debate was an assumption that any entrepreneurial or innovative approaches to the presentation of sites associated with death inevitably results in trivialisation or even Disneyfication (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). However, Bowman and Pezzullo (2010:195) dispute the notion that there is a ‘proper’ way to present (and respond to) death, and contend that dark tourism research “seems inevitably trapped in questions of authenticity versus commodification, which falsely present the matter of one of either/or”. Similar arguments are made

in specific contexts by Cohen (2011) and Oren and Shani (2012). The broader argument that tourism development leads to commodification (with consequent implications for authenticity) was, of course, well-established within tourism studies and, beyond identifying new case studies, early dark tourism research did little to advance this debate. In particular, the ‘commodification’ debate appeared wedded to essentialist notions of authenticity and was reluctant to engage with constructivist, experiential or existential conceptions (see L. Brown, 2013; Golańska, 2015; Rickley-Boyd, 2013; Wang, 1999).

A further critique of the ‘commodification’ argument addressed the stereotyping of visitors to places of death and suffering as passive and unquestioning. Again, this mirrors the shifting debate within heritage studies, where models of tourists as passive consumers had been replaced by conceptualisations which stress that tourists are critical and performative agents who can negotiate, challenge or reject the messages they encounter (Bagnall, 2003; Franklin, 2003; Smith, 2006, 2012). Similar arguments have been made for dark tourism. Visitors do not uncritically accept the ways that places of death are presented to them. Instead, they may be concerned about sanitised presentations of history (Austin, 2002) or frustrated at not being able to develop a more in-depth understanding of the events that had taken place at a site (Hughes, 2008; Muzaini et al., 2007). Furthermore, visitors can ‘read’ dark places in diverse ways and can accept, enrich or reject the messages and stories they encounter (Chronis, 2012; Du et al., 2013; Iles, 2006), often making their own meanings which may be different from those intended by managers (Robb, 2009; Strange & Kempa, 2003). In short, far from being voyeuristic sightseers, visitors to dark places need to be recognised as more critical and questioning than is often assumed.

Something conspicuously absent from the ‘commodification’ critique of dark tourism sites was the perspectives of practitioners and professionals responsible for curating, presenting and interpreting tragic events. This form of knowledge is produced outside the academy and is not communicated through academic journals (Tribe, 1997). On the few occasions when such professionals have participated in the academic debate (J. Brown, 2013; Schaming, 2014; Schulze, 2014) it is apparent that they are acutely aware, both of the challenges and dilemmas of presenting tragedy/atrocities to tourists, and of their responsibilities for balancing remembrance with the needs of visitors in such circumstances.

Overall, the debates about the ethics of dark tourism (particularly the implications of commodification) have been inconclusive, and have raised more questions than they have provided answers. While critics have been quick to identify what they see as distortion or trivialisation of places of death, they have been less willing to suggest ways to address the situation. For example, there has been little attempt to develop models of best practice or produce guidelines for practitioners. Indeed, academic researchers have rarely entered into dialogue with the practitioners and professionals responsible for managing dark places. By the late 2000s the debate about the ethics of dark tourism had burnt itself out and the focus of research moved on to other issues.

## 5. The politics of dark tourism

Many researchers have approached dark tourism or thanatourism from a rather narrow perspective which neglects the broader social and political context in which they are situated (Causevic & Lynch, 2011; Roberts & Stone, 2014). However, tourism at places of death and suffering can overlap with, reinforce or collide with the use of those places for broader political projects and agendas. As such there is a political dimension to dark tourism although it does not apply to all types of site and is of limited relevance to the

entertainment-centred sites at the 'lighter' end of Stone's dark tourism spectrum (Sharpley, 2009b). However, this dimension is not unique to dark tourism or thanatourism and there is an established body of research which has explored the relationship between heritage tourism and broader political projects (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a, b; Franklin, 2003; Graham, Ashworth, & Tunbridge, 2000; Smith, 2006; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) and this relationship is central to the concept of dissonant heritage. Research into the politics of dark tourism has focused on the different significance attached to places of death and suffering by different 'users' and has highlighted issues of tension or dissonance among those users. However, case study research is again dominant and, with the exception of Sharpley (2009b), there has been limited attempt to develop broader theories or models for understanding the politics and governance of dark tourism or thanatourism.

In addition to being of interest to tourists, places of death and suffering can also play an important role within state and nation building projects (Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Sharpley, 2009b; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Nation-states seek to construct and promote a national past to encourage allegiance to the political entity of the state and the social community of the nation. Central to this process is the construction and promotion of a shared (or collective) memory (Halbwachs, 1992). Consequently, the places associated with these events can become symbolically important sites of national remembrance and identification (Lelo & Jamal, 2013; Simone-Charteris et al., 2013). In recent years many academic disciplines (including history, political science, cultural geography, memory studies, heritage studies and anthropology) have interrogated the nature of collective memory and its relationship with national identity. The role of tourism in the construction of social/collective memory is also an emerging theme within tourism studies (Causevic & Lynch, 2011; Keil, 2005; Palmer, 2003; Park, 2010, 2011; Schäfer, 2016; Winter, 2009). Dark tourism, therefore, is often intimately connected to a broader politics of remembrance (Seaton, 2009a) and many sites of dark tourism also have important political roles as places of collective/national memory (Allar, 2013; Bird, 2013; Carr, 2010; Chronis, 2012; Du et al., 2013; Dunkley et al., 2011; Forsdick, 2014; Knox, 2006; Krakover, 2005; Pendleton, 2014; Schäfer, 2016; Stone, 2012a; Winter, 2009, 2011b; Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015a). However, the engagement with broader theories of collective memory in order to understand dark places is variable and sometimes rather limited.

In some cases the political significance of sites of death, violence and atrocity within state/nation building projects means that tourism is a tolerated (or secondary) activity at such places (Ashworth, 2004, 2005). In other cases, tourism is actively supported by nation-states as a means to project ideological messages of historical awareness, social justice and sometimes reconciliation (Beech, 2009; Robb, 2009; Sharpley, 2009b). Visits to places of death, disaster or atrocity create opportunities for tourists to negotiate or affirm senses of nationhood (Clarke & McAuley, 2016; Lisle, 2004, 2007; Pezzullo, 2009; Seaton, 1999; Slade, 2003; Tinson et al., 2015). Such forms of dark tourism usually have an overtly didactic intent (Ashworth, 2004) which can be used to explain how and why particular atrocities occurred, and impress upon visitors the importance of avoiding such events in the future (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013).

Some researchers have focused on the tensions between the use of the same heritage resources for both tourism and broader political projects. In particular, tourism may collide with efforts to (re) define collective memory and/or national identity. Nation-states are often reluctant to remember a particular historical period or event: indeed collective 'amnesia' is as much a part of creating a national history as collective remembering (Ashworth, 2008; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). In

such instances there is little desire to promote a dark past for tourism. These tensions have been examined in a range of contexts including Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge (Lennon, 2009, 2010); the heritage of communism in East-Central Europe (Light, 2000a; McKenzie, 2013); detention centres dating from an era of state repression in Argentina and Chile (Dalton, 2014); and the heritage of recent conflict ('the Troubles') in Northern Ireland (Nagle, 2012; Simone-Charteris et al., 2013). Recognising that forgetting is central to the construction of collective memory offers an alternative framework for understanding the selective messages presented at some dark places which moves the debate beyond rather simplistic notions of commodification and authenticity (see Section 4).

Other research has focused on how a heritage of suffering and atrocity can be utilised within political projects intended to bring about reconciliation and healing between social groups within a state who have a history of conflict (Beech, 2009; Nagle, 2012; Sharpley, 2009b; Simic, 2009). Prominent examples include the heritage of apartheid in South Africa (Ashworth, 2004) which is promoted to tourists as part of the state's reconciliation project and the projection of a new identity (to both its own citizens and the international community). Similarly, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda is increasingly incorporated into the country's tourist product in order to help foreign visitors learn about and understand the events (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013; McKinney, 2014; Sharpley, 2012). However as outsiders, international tourists may potentially intrude on internal processes of reconciliation and social reconstruction (Beech, 2009; Hohenhaus, 2013). Not all scholars are convinced about the role of dark tourism in helping divided communities deal with the legacy of violence (Nagle, 2012) and some explicitly reject dark tourism as a framework for understanding post-conflict reconciliation (Causevic and Lynch, 2011).

An additional dimension to the politics of dark tourism has recently emerged within the multidisciplinary field of postcolonial studies. A recent edition of *Postcolonial Studies* (volume 17 (3), 2014) was dedicated to the issue of 'dark travel' and while many of the papers show a very limited engagement with current debates in dark tourism scholarship, two contributions are of note. Clarke et al. (2014) propose the concept of 'dark travel'; travel that is in some way traumatizing, disturbing or unsettling (see also Skinner, 2012) and conceptualise dark tourism as just one form of dark travel. They are critical of dark tourism research for its failure to engage with cultural theory, particularly questions of historicity and representation. While there is some validity in this claim, it fails to recognise recent scholarship that has situated dark tourism practices within their broader historical context. Furthermore the proposal to bring postcolonial approaches to the field of tourism research shows little engagement with the growing body of work on the relationships between tourism and postcolonialism (see, for example, Chambers & Buzinde, 2015; Tucker, 2009; Winter, 2007; Wong, McKercher, & Li, 2016). The concept of dark travel has yet to be embraced by dark tourism scholars and has little to offer in clarifying the nature and scope of dark tourism.

Carrigan (2014) presents a more nuanced argument for greater attention to the intersections of dark tourism and postcolonialism which recognises that dark tourism research is increasingly recognising the tensions between tourism, nationalism and "the reassertion of marginalised or suppressed histories" (p.240). He calls for more attention to the genealogies of dark tourism (particularly the ways in which the legacies of colonialism influence the contemporary presentation of dark sites); a greater focus on the perspectives and voices of indigenous communities; and a fuller consideration of the responses to environmental disasters. He also argues that dark tourism scholarship can potentially have transformative potential if researchers were to direct their conclusions away from management issues and towards empowerment of

those groups whose voices are currently marginalised. To date, only a single study has explored dark tourism from a postcolonial perspective (Lemelin et al., 2013) but this perspective has the potential to develop a more nuanced understanding of the context in which places of death and suffering are presented to visitors through a fuller consideration of issues of power and representation. It also provides a framework for a fuller understanding of visitors through highlighting their attitudes and values towards the places (and people) they visit. Such issues are likely to be more significant to those approaching (dark) tourism from social science rather than business perspectives (see Tribe, 1997).

## 6. Understanding dark tourists

In the first decade of research there was little attention to the demand for dark sites and attractions, and few empirical studies of the people who visited them. Instead, early debate was characterised by generalisations and speculation, underpinned by three (usually unstated) assumptions: first, that there were people with a (more or less) defined interest in death, disaster and suffering; second, this interest was what motivated them to visit dark sites, places and attractions; third, only unusual or exceptional death was of interest to tourists. There was implicit acceptance that the 'dark tourist' (or 'thanatourist') existed but there was little understanding of their motivations, expectations and experiences. Furthermore, there was no consensus about whether the growth of dark tourism was something driven by attractions/providers or whether it was a response to a new form of tourist demand (Sharpley, 2005, 2009a; Stone, 2005, 2011a; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). However, by the mid-2000s there were repeated calls for more attention to the visitors to dark attractions and places (Dunkley et al., 2007, 2011; Hughes, 2008; Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Sharpley, 2009a; Sharpley & Stone, 2009a; Stone, 2005, 2006). Subsequently the research focus shifted towards exploring the nature of demand for places associated with death (with a growing recognition of the heterogeneous nature of this demand). This section considers four key themes in this research; motivations for visiting places of death and suffering; the experiences of visitors to such places; the relationship between visiting and senses of identity; and new approaches to theorizing the consumption of dark tourism.

### 6.1. Motives for visiting places associated with death and suffering

While tourist motivation is a well-established and extensively debated theme within tourism studies, dark tourism and thanatourism research was slow to address why people visit places associated with death. Early debate was largely speculative. Foley and Lennon (1997:155) contended that visits to dark sites were for "remembrance, education or entertainment". They later argued that such visits could be purposeful or incidental but most result from serendipity, mere curiosity or the inclusion of such places on the itineraries organised by tour companies (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Thus, most dark tourists are conceptualised as rather purposeless. Conversely, Seaton (1996) argued that motives for thanatourism were more specifically about encountering (and engaging) with death but these motives could vary considerably in intensity.

Other early studies similarly proposed reasons for why tourists visited places of death and suffering but, with isolated exceptions (Austin, 2002; Seaton, 2000), these were rarely grounded in empirical research with visitors. Ashworth (1996, 2002b, 2004) and Ashworth and Hartmann, (2005a) proposed three principal motives for visiting atrocity sites: curiosity about the unusual; a (sometimes voyeuristic) attraction to horror; and a desire for empathy or identification with the victims of atrocity. Other

suggestions included secular pilgrimage (Ashworth, 2004; Buntman, 2008; Richards, 2005; Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Slade, 2003; Tarlow, 2005); a desire for inner purification (Blom, 2000); *schadenfreude* (Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Dale & Robinson, 2011); "ghoulish titillation" (Wilson, 2008, p. 169); a childlike curiosity about mortality (Dann, 2005); a search for the otherness of death (Seaton, 2009b; Seaton & Lennon, 2004); an interest in personal genealogy and family history (Boyles, 2005; Buntman, 2008; Richards, 2005); nostalgia (Dann & Potter, 2001; Tarlow, 2005); a search for 'authentic' places in a commodified world (Johnston, 2011; Lisle, 2007); a fascination with evil (Lennon, 2010); and a desire to encounter the pure/impure sacred (Osbaldiston & Petray, 2011). The sheer diversity of suggested motives indicates how poorly the dark tourist (or thanatourist) was understood.

Some early studies also proposed different segments of visitors according to their motivations. Lennon and Foley (1999; 2000) proposed two types of dark tourist: those with a specialist interest or personal connection to a particular site (or the events that took place there), and those (the majority) without such a connection who visit for other reasons (see also Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2004). Others proposed a distinction between 'pilgrims' (those with specific connections to a dark site and clearly defined reasons for visiting it) and a more vaguely-defined category of 'general/other visitors' (Austin, 2002; Beech, 2000; Cole, 2000; Muzaini et al., 2007; Richards, 2005; Seaton, 2002; Winter, 2011b), again illustrating the early tendency to conceptualise dark tourism and thanatourism in terms of long-standing binaries (see Golańska, 2015). Subsequent studies developed more refined segmentations involving three or more groups of visitors (Biran et al., 2011; Braithwaite & Leiper, 2010; Lelo & Jamal, 2013; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015b).

From the mid-2000s onwards a number of research studies specifically focussed on motivations for visiting places associated with death and suffering. The findings of 30 empirical studies are summarised in Table 4. The table lists the motives in order of how frequently they were identified, but only motives identified in two (or more) studies are included. Every study has identified multiple motives (meaning that each author is listed more than once in the table); this, in itself, indicates that demand is highly heterogeneous and that tourists can visit an individual site for a wide range of reasons.

A number of key trends can be identified in Table 4. First, there is little evidence that an interest in death (including morbid curiosity) is an important motive for visiting places and attractions that are labelled dark. Conversely, some studies have specifically argued that such an interest was of little importance (Biran et al., 2011; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Farmaki, 2013; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016; Kokkranikal et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat, 2008) or completely absent from visitors' motives (Isaac & Çakmak, 2014). This calls into question the claim that dark tourism "entails fascination with death as a primary reason of attraction" (Korstanje & George, 2015, p. 13). This may be because researchers may not have specifically asked visitors about the importance of death and suffering within their reasons for visiting. However, it is also clear that many people visit dark places for reasons which do not include an interest in death or suffering (Seaton & Lennon, 2004; Sharpley, 2005; 2012). As such, identifying dark tourism or thanatourism as forms of special interest tourism is problematic.

Second, an interest in learning and understanding about past events is the most commonly reported motive. In this sense, the motivations for visiting places of death and suffering are very similar to those for participating in heritage/cultural tourism (Biran & Poria, 2012; Biran et al., 2011; Du et al., 2013; Miles, 2014). Other reported motives similarly have much in common with heritage tourism including an interest in history; a desire for remembrance;

**Table 4**  
Principal motives for visiting places of death and suffering.

Motive	Number of times this motive was identified	Authors	Site(s) of study (number in brackets refers to the number of research studies)
Desire or opportunity for education/ learning/understanding about what happened at the site	16	Best (2007); Bigley et al. (2010); Biran et al. (2011); Farmaki (2013); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Isaac and Çakmak (2016); Kamber et al. (2016); Kang et al. (2012); Le and Pearce (2011); Lelo and Jamal (2013); Preece and Price (2005); Sharpley (2012); Simone-Charteris et al. (2013); Thurnell-Read (2009); Winter (2011a); Yan et al. (2016)	Battlefield and sites of former/current conflict (6); Holocaust sites (2); convict prison (2); genocide sites (2); sites of natural disasters (1); conflict memorial site (1); site associated with slavery (1); site of mass murder (1);
Curiosity	10	Bigley et al. (2010); Biran et al. (2014); Farmaki (2013); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Kamber et al. (2016); Kang et al. (2012); Lelo and Jamal (2013); Rittichainuwat (2008); Simone-Charteris et al. (2013); Yan et al. (2016)	Sites of former/current conflict (4); Sites of natural disasters (3); conflict memorial site (1); Holocaust site (1); site associated with slavery (1)
Connecting with one's personal or family heritage/visiting because of personal connections to the site	6	Biran et al. (2011); Hyde and Harman (2011); Le and Pearce (2011); Mowatt and Chancellor (2011); Winter (2011a); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015b)	Battlefields (2); sites associated with slavery (2); site of current conflict (1); Holocaust site (1)
Desire to see it to believe it/understand it better/desire to 'connect'	6	Bigley et al. (2010); Biran et al. (2011); Brown (2016); Dunkley et al. (2011); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Tinson et al. (2015)	Holocaust sites (2); battlefield (1); site of current conflict (1); cemetery (1); multiple sites (1)
General/Leisure motives	6	Best (2007); Biran et al. (2014); Kokkranikal et al. (2016); Raine (2013); Rittichainuwat (2008); Yan et al. (2016)	Sites of natural disasters (3); convict prison (1); site of former conflict (1); cemetery (1)
Pilgrimage/secular pilgrimage	5	Brown (2016); Dunkley et al. (2011); Hyde and Harman (2011); Raine (2013); Winter (2011a)	Battlefields (3); cemeteries (2)
Interest in History and/or culture	5	Best (2007); Kokkranikal et al. (2016); Le and Pearce (2011); Preece and Price (2005); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015b)	Sites of former conflict (2); site of mass murder (1); convict prison (1); sites associated with slavery (1)
Remembrance	5	Dunkley et al. (2011); Farmaki (2013); Isaac and Çakmak (2016); Kamber et al. (2016); Sharpley (2012)	Sites of former conflict (2); genocide site (2); Battlefield (1);
Sense of moral duty/obligation; conscience	5	Hughes (2008); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Kang et al. (2012); Sharpley (2012); Thurnell-Read (2009)	Holocaust sites (2); genocide sites (2); conflict memorial site (1)
Interest in death/morbid curiosity	4	Best (2007); Biran et al. (2014); Raine (2013); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015b)	Convict prison (1); Cemetery (1); site of natural disaster (1); sites associated with slavery (1)
Visiting as part of an organised/planned itinerary	3	Best (2007); Brown (2016); Farmaki (2013);	Convict prison (1); sites of former conflict (1); cemetery (1)
Visiting somewhere important for national identity	3	Cheal and Griffin (2013); Hyde and Harman (2011); Tinson et al. (2015)	Battlefields (2); multiple sites (1)
To visit a 'must see' site	3	Hyde and Harman (2011); Isaac and Çakmak (2014, 2016)	Battlefield site (1); Holocaust site (1); genocide site (1)
Desire to honour personal ancestors	2	Lelo and Jamal (2013); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015b)	Sites associated with slavery (2)
Desire for contact and connection with death/dark events/violence	2	Podoshen (2013); Podoshen, Venkatesh et al. (2015)	Sites associated with black metal subculture (1); 'dystopian' sites (directly associated with death) (1)
Personal recommendation	2	Thurnell-Read (2009); Yankholmes and McKercher (2015b)	Holocaust site (1); site associated with slavery (1)
To see a famous site associated with death	2	Biran et al. (2011); Cheal and Griffin (2013)	Holocaust site (1); battlefield (1)
Spend time with friends	2	Best (2007); Hyde and Harman (2011)	Convict prison (1); battlefield (1)
Desire to help with disaster recovery	2	Biran et al. (2014); Rittichainuwat (2008)	Sites of natural disasters (2)
Other reasons (each mentioned only once in a single study)	10	Bigley et al. (2010); Dunkley et al. (2011); Isaac and Çakmak (2014); Isaac and Çakmak (2016); Le and Pearce (2011); Lelo and Jamal (2013); Preece and Price (2005); Raine (2013); Simone-Charteris et al. (2013); Tinson et al. (2015)	

Note: Includes only studies which have focussed specifically on motivations.

the wish to visit places connected with personal or family biographies (see [Porja et al., 2004](#)); and the desire to 'see it to believe it'. Clearly many people visit places of death and suffering from a desire to understand past events, rather than from a particular interest in the deaths which took place there. However, one motive that does appear to be more pronounced at some dark sites and attractions (particularly those associated with genocide) is a sense of duty or moral obligation (see [Dalton, 2014](#)).

Third, many motives appear to be incidental or general in nature. They include curiosity (see [Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a](#)) which is more common at sites associated with conflict or natural disasters. However, while identified in a number of studies,

curiosity is never a dominant motive for visiting places associated with death or suffering. Neither does curiosity necessarily equate to curiosity about death. Other related reasons include general/leisure reasons, and participation in an organised itinerary (see [Lennon & Foley, 2000](#)). In this sense, visiting a place associated with death or suffering may be only one of a number of different activities which a tourist undertakes during a holiday, meaning that such people are not necessarily dark tourists or thanatourists.

Fourth, secular pilgrimage is a relatively unimportant motive for visiting places associated with death or suffering, although it is more significant at battlefields and sites associated with slavery. There is some debate about whether pilgrimage is an appropriate

concept for understanding dark tourism or thanatourism. Some argue that dark tourism and pilgrimage are inextricably connected (Collins-Kreiner, 2016a, b); some reject pilgrimage as a framework for understanding dark tourism (Korstanje & George, 2015); and other argue that the distinction between tourists and pilgrims is blurred (Winter, 2011a) or dependent on context (Kidron, 2013). In short, it appears that visits to places of death may represent a form of pilgrimage for some tourists at some sites.

Overall, these findings raise important questions about the nature of dark tourism and thanatourism. In particular, these labels have been attributed to a particular form of tourism supply (a category of attractions which are related to death), but dark tourism and thanatourism do not appear to be a distinct form of tourist demand (see Miles, 2014; Seaton, 2009a; Sharpley & Stone, 2009b). In other words, the majority of people visiting so-called dark tourism sites do not appear to be dark tourists or thanatourists (see Biran & Poria, 2012; Biran et al., 2014; Butler & Suntikul, 2013b; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014; Miles, 2014; Slade, 2003; Smith & Croy, 2005). Furthermore many visitors are unlikely to self-identify as dark tourists (Baldwin & Sharpley, 2009; Butler & Suntikul, 2013b). In fact, 'true' dark tourism or thanatourism - in which people travel because of a specific interest in (or desire for an encounter with) death - may actually be quite rare (see Seaton, 1996), and confined to the types of marginal activities and interests which Podoshen, Venkatesh et al. (2015) and Podoshen, Andrzejewski, Venkatesh, and Wallin (2015) term "dystopian dark tourism" (see also Podoshen, 2013). In many cases the motives for visiting dark sites and attractions appear to be little different from those of heritage tourists (see Roberts & Stone, 2014).

## 6.2. Visitors' experiences and behaviour

Although initially neglected, there is now a considerable body of research into what visitors do, think and feel during a visit to a place of death or suffering. A focus on experiences - rather than motivations - has been proposed as more helpful for understanding dark tourism or thanatourism (Johnston, 2013; Seaton, 2002; Walter, 2009) and also offers a conceptual means to integrate supply and demand perspectives within dark tourism (Biran & Poria, 2012). Investigation of visitors' experiences has been eclectic in its approach, focus and context (with most focus on the 'darker' sites), but a recurring theme is that such experiences are complex and multi-layered and that, far from being a superficial encounter, a visit to a dark site has the potential to be profound and highly meaningful. However, there is no single type of experience since visitors can engage with (and respond to) dark sites or attractions in a wide range of ways (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a; MacCarthy, 2016; Robb, 2009; Yankholmes & Mc Kercher, 2015a) depending on their individual motivations, their national/cultural background (Du et al., 2013; Jamal & Lelo, 2011; Kamber et al., 2016; Rittichainuwat, 2008; Zhang et al., 2016); the extent of their personal connection to the site (Ashworth, 2008; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005b; Cohen, 2011; Poria et al., 2004); and the social context of their visit (MacCarthy & Willson, 2015).

A recent paper (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016) has identified 10 facets (physical, sensory, restorative, introspective, transformative, hedonic, emotional, relational, spiritual and cognitive) of the visitor experience. Many of these have been explored in the context of dark tourism and thanatourism, although cognitive and emotional experiences have received most attention. Cognitive experiences are mostly about learning, and many visitors to dark places seek to develop a better understanding of the site and the events that took place there (Austin, 2002; Brown, 2014; Chang, 2014; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Hughes, 2008; Kamber et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2012; Krakover, 2005; Muzaini et al., 2007; Thurnell-Read, 2009;

Zhang et al., 2016). However, there has been little investigation of whether they succeed, or the nature of such learning.

Other experiences are more relational in nature. Some visitors seek to 'connect' with the place they visit (Bird, 2013; Brown, 2016; Thurnell-Read, 2009), through showing empathy with victims (Brown, 2014; Chronis, 2012; Hughes, 2008; Yan et al., 2016), or engaging in performances of witnessing what took place there (Dalton, 2014; Knudsen, 2011; Lisle, 2004; Pezzullo, 2009; Robb, 2009; Tinson et al., 2015). There are particular types of performance associated with relational experiences, and ritual (either secular or sacred) is often an important part of the visit (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Dunkley et al., 2011; Iles, 2006; Keil, 2005; MacCarthy, 2016; Osbaldiston & Petray, 2011; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Such ritual may include participation in collective ceremonies of remembrance, or more personal commemorative practices such as lighting a candle, leaving flowers, writing messages, or placing objects (such as souvenirs) in an act of remembrance (see Knudsen, 2011; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Furthermore, leaving items at a site appears to be a common performance at cemeteries where famous people are buried (Brown, 2016; Toussaint & Decrop, 2013). While such practices are often interpreted by critics as being disrespectful they can be profoundly significant for individual visitors as a way of dealing with the emotional impact of visiting places of death or tragedy (Iles, 2006; Sather-Wagstaff, 2011).

For visitors who are seeking restorative experiences a visit to a dark site can be an opportunity for healing (Kang et al., 2012) or catharsis (Kidron, 2013). For other visitors, experiences are more introspective in nature. Their visit can be an occasion for visitors to reflect on their own morality and behaviour (Hughes, 2008; Johnston, 2016; Lisle, 2004; Stone, 2009a, 2009b; Thurnell-Read, 2009); an opportunity to negotiate and mediate mortality (Stone, 2009c, 2012a); and a chance to engage with the inexpressible (Goatcher & Brunnsden, 2011). Visiting places of death or suffering can also provide visitors with out-of-the-ordinary experiences and in this context some researchers ((Lee et al., 2012; Stone, 2013b; Toussaint & Decrop, 2013) have proposed that such places can be conceptualised as heterotopias (places of crisis or deviation that disrupt the stability and rhythms of 'normal' or everyday life (Foucault, 1986)). However, while the concept of heterotopia is useful in highlighting the potential of dark places to provide visitors with experiences of the extraordinary, this concept is not exclusive to (or defining of) dark tourism or thanatourism since many other types of tourist attraction/destination can be conceptualised as offering heterotopic experiences.

There has also been considerable recent attention to the emotional experiences of visitors at places of death and suffering, reflecting a broader interest within tourism studies to the emotional dimensions of the tourist experience (Buda, 2015b; Buda et al., 2014; Picard & Robinson, 2012; Tucker, 2009; Waterton & Watson, 2014). It seems self-evident that places associated with death and tragedy have the potential to produce profoundly emotional experiences and that visitors will, before their visit, be expecting such experiences (Nawijn et al., 2015). However, emotions themselves are not a unique (or defining) feature of dark tourism or thanatourism since all tourist experiences will involve emotions of some kind (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015), although the nature of such emotions has been proposed as a way to differentiate darker forms of dark tourism from other forms of tourism (Nawijn et al., 2016).

Research into emotional dimensions of the visitor experience has adopted a wide range of approaches and methodologies. In some cases the focus is on identifying the prevalence of emotions within the visitor experience (Best, 2007). However, most researchers have focussed on the nature of emotions experienced by visitors. Unsurprisingly the most common emotions are sorrow,

sadness, horror and grief (Austin, 2002; Baldwin & Sharpley, 2009; Brown, 2014, 2016; Chronis, 2012; Dalton, 2014; Dunkley et al., 2011; Iles, 2012; Isaac & Çakmak, 2016; Kidron, 2013; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Sharpley, 2012; Stone, 2012a; Zhang et al., 2016). Furthermore some sites can generate disgust and repulsion (Podoshen, Venkatesh et al., 2015); shock or fear (Buda, 2015a, 2015b; Buda et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2017); anger (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011); and, in some cases, disappointment (Podoshen, 2013). However, emotional responses can be positive as well as negative (Nawijn et al., 2016): some sites can stimulate (national) pride (Cheal & Griffin, 2013) or even a sense of hope (Koleth, 2014; Pezzullo, 2009; Sharpley, 2012). What is clear is that visiting a dark site is a profoundly emotional experience; is usually characterised by a simultaneous experience of a range of emotions (Nawijn et al., 2015); and that many visitors have a deep emotional engagement with the places they encounter (Sharpley, 2012).

A concept related to emotion is affect, itself another emerging theme within tourism studies (Picard & Robinson, 2012; Waterton & Watson, 2014). Although often used interchangeably with emotion, affect refers to the imperceptible, visceral and embodied ways in which people are affected by place before their conscious awareness of it and before they form an emotional response (Golańska, 2015; Pile, 2010). Places associated with death, suffering or danger have the potential (or capacity) to produce affective responses among visitors but to date only one researcher has explicitly focussed on the affective dimensions of dark tourism in the context of travel to dangerous places (Buda, 2015a, b; Buda et al., 2014). The importance of affect in other types of dark tourism awaits fuller investigation, although exploring affect presents considerable methodological and theoretical challenges.

In summary, recent research into visitors' experiences has challenged many early assumptions about the people who visit places of death and suffering. Visits to such places involve more than superficial voyeurism or sightseeing. Instead, many visitors are more deeply engaged than they have been given credit for, and their visits are opportunities for connection, understanding and meaning-making. In some cases, visiting dark places can be transformative and even life-changing for visitors (Buntman, 2008; Cohen, 2011; Dunkley et al., 2011; Koleth, 2014; Roberts & Stone, 2014; Stone, 2012a). These findings call for a reconsideration of some of the early ethical debates and moral panic about the intentions and behaviour of visitors to places of death and suffering.

### 6.3. *Dark tourism, thanatourism and identity*

Other research has focussed on the cultural 'work' and acts of meaning-making which take place during a visit to a place of death and suffering (see Jamal & Lelo, 2011). In particular, a range of research studies have explored the relationships between identities and visits to places of death or suffering. These studies have argued that such visits can be a means to affirm and reproduce particular identities (at individual, family, national and transnational scales). In some cases, death can be central to such identities, but more often, an interest in death may be of little importance. However, the relationship with identity is not exclusive to dark tourism or thanatourism, but has been identified in many other forms of tourism, particularly heritage tourism.

Some work has been undertaken at the level of individual identities. In a context where personal identities are increasingly defined through practices of consumption, tourists may visit dangerous places (frequently included in categorisations of dark tourism) to enhance their social status by gaining prestige and esteem in the eyes of peers (Buda & Shim, 2015; Sharpley, 2005, 2009a). Visits to some types of dark site – particularly battlefields – are often expressions of a particular hobby or passionate

interest (Seaton, 2000) rather than reflecting an interest in death, and enthusiasts often dress in a way that expresses their interests and self-image (MacCarthy, 2016; MacCarthy & Willson, 2015). Tourists may visit places associated with death or tragedy to affirm their self-identity as educated people with a concern to learn about (and better understand) historical events (Tinson et al., 2015), or they may use their visits to affirm particular 'moral' identities as people who 'care' about tragedy and atrocity (see Hughes, 2008). In other instances visits may be intended to demonstrate allegiance and identification with a particular subculture. For example, some people may visit dark places to affirm self-identity as Goths (Spracklen & Spracklen, 2012, 2014; Tinson et al., 2015). Similarly, fans of black metal visit places associated with death, paganism and Satanism to seek existential authenticity and affirm senses of self (Podoshen, 2013).

Visiting dark places can also be a means of defining or affirming collective identities. One example is family identities and visits to a place of death or suffering can be a means of consolidating family identification and bonding among those with a personal connection to the site (or what took place there) and their descendants (Fallon & Robinson, 2017; Kidron, 2013). However, the collective identity most closely linked to sites of death, tragedy or suffering is national identity (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a; Seaton, 2009a; see also Section 5) itself an important theme in heritage tourism research. Visiting a place of death and suffering can be an occasion to affirm and perform national identities. For example, an early study (Slade, 2003) argued that visits to Gallipoli (Turkey) by tourists from Australia and New Zealand had little to do with an interest in death but instead were mostly about patriotism and nationhood. Subsequent studies at Gallipoli have reached the same conclusion (Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Osbaldiston & Petray, 2011). The relationship between visiting places of death and suffering and national identity has been explored in a diverse range of other contexts (Best, 2007; Bird, 2013; Boyles, 2005; Clarke & McAuley, 2016; Du et al., 2013; MacCarthy & Willson, 2015; Pezzullo, 2009; Seaton, 1999; Simone-Charteris et al., 2013; Stone, 2012a; Tinson et al., 2015). At a still larger scale, visits to such places can be about transnational identities. This issue is of particular importance at sites of slavery and visits to such places can be an occasion to search for roots and (re)claim a sense of belonging to the African Diaspora (Lelo & Jamal, 2013; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Richards, 2005; Yankholmes & Mc Kercher, 2015b).

### 6.4. *Theorizing dark tourism consumption*

Traditional theories of tourism motivation have been of limited use in explaining the consumption of dark tourism or thanatourism. Consequently, some researchers have sought to develop specific theories that address visits to places associated with death and suffering, drawing on theoretical perspectives from related research in other disciplines. By far the most detailed and sophisticated theorization of dark tourism consumption is the "mortality mediation" model proposed by Stone and Sharpley (Stone, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2011b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a; Stone & Sharpley, 2008, 2014; see also; Walter, 2009) which draws upon notions of thanatopsis and the sociology of death to understand visits to places associated with death and suffering. This theory is also important for being one of relatively few pieces of research that seeks to clearly set out what is distinctive about dark tourism.

The mortality mediation thesis argues that death has been increasingly sequestered (removed from the public sphere) in contemporary societies, leaving individuals isolated from the realities of death. Moreover, the decline in organised religion has removed the overarching framework through which individuals

and societies come to terms with death and dying. Consequentially individuals may feel a sense of anxiety and vulnerability about death in ways that can challenge senses of self. At the same time there has been a marked increase in the representation and recreation of death within popular culture so that 'absent death' has become present in new ways, with popular culture taking the place of religion as a way of understanding and coming to terms with death and dying. In this context, dark tourism can be considered as a way in which death is represented and recreated in contemporary societies. Visiting places associated with death enables individuals to encounter and negotiate death in situations that do not involve terror or dread. It presents settings for individuals to satisfy their curiosity and fascination about death and to confront the inevitability of their own death through gazing upon the death of significant Others (Stone, 2009a). Dark tourism, then, is one of a number of contemporary institutions (see Walter, 2009) that mediate between (or connect) the living and the dead. Like attempts to understand dark tourism in the context of postmodernism, the mortality mediation model insists that dark tourism must be understood with reference to its broader social and cultural context.

Mortality mediation is significant in that it focuses attention not on motives for visiting places of death and suffering but on individual experiences of visiting such places. Stone (2012b) recognises that most people do not visit dark sites from a specific interest in death. Instead, of more importance is the *consequences* of such visits. A visit to a dark site is an opportunity to accumulate "death capital" (Stone, 2011b, p. 698) which can be drawn upon in reflection and contemplation on the nature of death (and life). It provides a means for consuming an otherwise taboo topic within "a safe, socially sanctioned space" (Stone, 2012b, p. 1578). It can be a way of remembering (offering a new way for understanding the role of dark places in the construction of collective memory). As a form of *memento mori* ('remember that you will die') dark tourism can remind people of their own mortality and can also offer a form of moral guidance on how (or how not) to live one's life. All these possible practices have implications for the management of sites associated with death (Stone, 2011b).

More broadly, Stone (2009b) argues that visiting dark tourism sites can be a way of reconfiguring and communicating morality within a secular society. The declining role of religion in providing moral guidance (along with the increasing individualisation that characterises contemporary societies) means that many individuals feel uncertain and confused regarding issues of morality and 'correct' behaviour. Sites of dark tourism can be spaces which provide and communicate moral meaning enabling visitors to engage with, and negotiate, issues of moral concern (although this will take complex and different forms in different types of 'dark' sites). In the process, morality is revitalised so that dark tourism may act as a "moral guardian of contemporary society" (Stone, 2009b, p. 72). Stone and Sharpley (2014) expand this argument with reference to dark leisure (activities that are conventionally considered to be deviant or taboo). They argue that, like dark tourism, dark leisure activities can be viewed as a way of renegotiating moral boundaries by attempting "to create and maintain new moral frameworks through the expansion and testing of taboo boundaries" (p.61). They note this perspective needs further investigation, but it is significant for presenting a new way of thinking about morality and dark tourism that goes beyond moral panic.

Mortality mediation is a complex and challenging theory. It suggests that visitors to sites associated with death and suffering may reflect upon (and contemplate) death in a multitude of ways (which will often be incidental, unintended, or implicit) and some visitors may not engage in such reflection at all. The nature of such reflection will also vary according to the social and cultural background of visitors. According to this model, dark tourism is

characterised by personal and individual experiences, rather than being an inherent characteristic of a place or site. Furthermore, contemplation of mortality may be intertwined with a broader (and, again, sometimes incidental or unintended) reflection upon a range of other issues. The theory also reinforces other research which suggests that visiting dark sites can be profound and meaningful experiences for visitors.

The complexity of the mortality mediation model presents considerable challenges for researchers, so that many have sidestepped it altogether. Nevertheless, there is an emerging body of research that has explored issues of mortality mediation at a range of sites associated with death and dying. These include the 'Body Worlds' exhibitions (Goulding et al., 2013; Stone, 2011b); Ground Zero in New York (Stone, 2012a); and blogged accounts of visits to Sarajevo (Johnston, 2016). Other research suggests that visiting cemeteries is a way of reducing anxiety about death or reflecting upon life (Brown, 2016; Leevit, 2012; Raine, 2013). Mortality mediation has also been examined in historical contexts (Casbeard & Booth, 2012; Seaton, 2009a) and in literary sources (Johnston, 2013). Podoshen, Venkatesh et al. (2015) seek to extend the mortality mediation model in the context of 'dystopian dark tourism' by adding the dimension of "dark aesthetics" (p.324) that enable tourists to engage in simulation (and which spur particular emotions) as a means of relieving fear about death and dystopia.

The mortality mediation model has been criticised for being derived from a rather narrow range of case studies (so that it may not apply to the full spectrum of dark tourism sites) and for its predominantly Western focus (Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015a). Certainly the theory, with its emphasis on the sequestration of death, is based on contemporary Western practices and understandings with regard to death and dying. Stone and Sharpley make no claims that the theory has universal relevance but nevertheless the mortality mediation model has been used rather uncritically to explain dark tourism consumption in non-Western settings (for example, Biran et al., 2014).

An alternative approach to theorizing dark tourism consumption similarly looks to other disciplines – in this case, psychoanalysis – for explanation. Buda uses writings of Freud and Lacan on voyeurism, desire and the death drive to explore experiences of dark tourists in places that are potentially dangerous (Buda, 2015a, b; Buda & McIntosh, 2013; Buda & Shim, 2015). She argues that such visits can illustrate a desire for the forbidden (particularly risk and danger). Moreover visits to dangerous places can involve accessing the death drive in order to confront personal fears of death (which has parallels with mortality mediation) and can also be a way to negotiate personal memories and past traumas (see also Korstanje & Ivanov, 2012). To date, Buda's work has focussed on a very specific form of (dark) tourism – visits to conflict zones and dangerous places – and the application of psychoanalytic concepts to other forms of dark tourism awaits further investigation.

## 7. Managing dark tourism and thanatourism

Although it has not attracted as much attention as other topics, the management of places associated with death and suffering for tourism has been a consistent research theme over the past two decades. However, this literature is eclectic and inconsistent in its focus and coverage, so that some topics (in particular, managing authenticity) have received considerable attention while others have been neglected. Much of the debate has been largely conceptual in nature, with limited attempts to propose guidelines or frameworks for the management of dark attractions. Furthermore, academic researchers have rarely engaged with the perspectives of the professionals responsible for managing such attractions. This section examines three aspects of the management of places of

death and suffering for tourists: attraction management issues, interpretation, and marketing/promotion.

### 7.1. *The management of places of death and suffering*

As visitor attractions, dark sites face many of the management issues shared by other types of attraction. However, the otherness associated with death also creates challenges for managers that are specific to places of death or suffering (Seaton, 2009b). For example, there is a consensus about the need for sensitivity and respect in the presentation of such places to their visitors (Ashworth, 1996; Austin, 2002; Clark, 2014; Garcia, 2012; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Sharpley, 2009a; Strange & Kempa, 2003). Seaton (2009b) develops a more nuanced argument, contending that a specific management issue for thanatourism sites (which sets them aside from other sectors of the tourism economy) is their distinct aura which arises from the associations with death (see also Osbaldiston & Petray, 2011). A challenge for managers is to maintain and manage this aura. Consequently Seaton argues that the most effective management of such sites may be “hands-off, rather than hands-on intervention” (p.88).

An established body of case study research has provided commentary or analysis on specific management issues and problems, either at individual sites (Ashworth, 2005; Boyles, 2005; Frew, 2012; Hartmann, 2005; Marcuse, 2005; Whitacre & Greene, 2005) or at particular categories of site (Baldwin & Sharpley, 2009; Garcia, 2012; Hohenhaus, 2013; Laws, 2013; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Shirt, 2016; Sion, 2014a). The challenge of balancing conservation, restoration and authenticity is a recurring theme. A broader management issue is the challenges of dealing with multiple audiences. Ashworth (1996, 2002b, 2008; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a, b) has argued that three principal audiences for places of death or suffering can be identified: victims, perpetrators and observers/bystanders (which includes tourists). Each group may have different perspectives on what is to be remembered (and how), and the role of tourism in this process. Furthermore the motives and intents of producers and consumers may also diverge (Ashworth, 2004). The role of management is therefore to reduce dissonance and conflict between different users (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005a, b).

Seaton (2001, 2009b) has developed these arguments in the specific context of thanatourism. He proposes a ‘heritage force field’ in which a thanatourism site is a competing arena of different interests among four groups of stakeholders: 1) the owners and controllers of thanatourism sites (largely heritage professionals in both the public and private sectors) who determine the goals and mission of a particular visitor attraction; 2) the groups who are represented at such sites and whose stories are told there; 3) host communities (since all thanatourism sites are in locations where people live) who can experience both benefits and disadvantages of tourism development; 4) visitors who will have particular expectations and requirements from a thanatourism site. A fifth group – the media – can also be involved (Seaton, 2009b). The role of site managers is to attempt to reconcile the interests of different stakeholders, through consultation and participation in the site development process.

Although not always framed within the models proposed by Ashworth and Seaton, a range of research studies have explored the perspectives of particular stakeholders within dark tourism or thanatourism and the implications for the management of such sites. In most cases the focus is on individual stakeholders. One group is the managers or operators involved in the provision of tourist experiences based on death or suffering (a group whose perspective is frequently neglected). Such stakeholders are concerned with presenting dark sites in an appropriate way which

balances education and remembrance with the requirements of visitors (Garcia, 2012; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Schaming, 2014; Schulze, 2014) and in some cases can be concerned with advocacy around themes of social justice (Pezzullo, 2009). A second group is local communities (Kim & Butler, 2015) who may be resentful about becoming the focus of dark tourism (Wright & Sharpley, 2016) or may have their own agendas about how a dark past is presented and interpreted to visitors (Morales, 2013; Wu et al., 2014). This group can also include indigenous communities whose perspectives and voices are often unheard or marginalised (Lemelin et al., 2013). A third stakeholder group is local government professionals responsible for tourism development or branding. In some cases they may be reluctant to promote dark tourism within a destination’s tourist product (Yoshida et al., 2016) or, alternatively may seek to ensure that dark forms of tourism bring a benefit to the wider community (Heidelberg, 2014).

Fewer researchers have examined the perspectives of multiple stakeholders within a single study. In some cases, the focus is on consultation with a wide range of stakeholders when deciding how to interpret a particular dark event (Frew, 2012). In other cases, the spotlight turns to conflict among different stakeholder groups. For example, balancing remembrance for a domestic audience with management and interpretation for international tourists can create the potential for dissonance (Friedrich & Johnston, 2013). Alternatively, attempts by managers to enhance the visitor experience may offend visitors who regard such developments as desecrating a site of pilgrimage (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Richards, 2005). There can also be conflict *within* a particular stakeholder group (illustrating the difficulties of treating an individual stakeholder group as a homogeneous entity). For example, local communities may be far from united in their responses to a tragic event becoming the focus of tourist interest (Kim & Butler, 2015). Similarly tourists themselves visit dark places for a wide range of reasons (see Section 6) so that visitors who feel a deep personal connection to a particular site may feel resentment to others who visit for more general motives (Yankholmes & McKercher, 2015b).

One stakeholder group that has received conspicuously little attention is visitors themselves. Despite the growing attention to the people who visit places associated with death and suffering there has, with a few exceptions (Austin, 2002; Kamber et al., 2016; Magee & Gilmore, 2015; Nawijn et al., 2015) been little scrutiny of the expectations or requirements of visitors. This issue is occasionally addressed in passing, and is usually underpinned by (untested) assumptions about what visitors want from their visits. However, a fuller understanding of the requirements of visitors can enable site managers to anticipate and reduce dissonance between stakeholders and can also be potentially used to manage the expectations of visitors in advance of their visit (Krisjanous, 2016). An equally neglected group of stakeholders is non-visitors (something that applies to heritage sites more generally). There is evidence that some people may choose not to visit dark places for a variety of reasons which include deliberate retaliation against providers (Podoshen & Hunt, 2011), or anxiety or apprehension about what they may encounter (Zheng et al. 2017). Understanding reasons for not visiting is important if managers wish to reach out to such people.

### 7.2. *Interpretation of sites of death and suffering*

There is widespread acceptance (drawing on established debates in heritage tourism) that places of (or associated with) death have an educational role and there has been an increasing focus on this role in recent decades (Dunkley, 2015). It is also clear that many people visit dark sites with the intent of learning and



understanding (even if informally) about past atrocities or tragic events (Austin, 2002; Biran et al., 2011; Brown, 2014; Chang, 2014; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Hughes, 2008; Kang et al., 2012; Muzaini et al., 2007; Preece & Price, 2005; Thurnell-Read, 2009). Consequently, interpretation is an important component of the management and presentation of places of death, suffering and atrocity (Sharpley & Stone, 2009b). There has, again, been abundant case study research, usually in the form of commentary on the strategies of interpreting individual sites (Ashworth, 2005; Dalton, 2014; Fengqi, 2009; Frew, 2012, 2013; Gould, 2014; Hohenhaus, 2013; Kang & Lee, 2013; Schaming, 2014; Schulze, 2014; Strange & Kempa, 2003; White, 2013; Willard et al., 2013). The focus is usually on messages rather than media, although some analysis has advocated particular interpretive strategies such as theming (Oren & Shani, 2012) and the potential of virtual/online media (González-Tennant, 2013; Kaelber, 2007). Furthermore, a wider body of research has examined and critiqued the ways in which individual sites of death or suffering are *presented* to visitors (often with a focus on collective memory, but without specific reference to heritage interpretation).

Again, there has been a more conceptual debate about the interpretation of dark sites for multiple audiences. Ashworth and Hartmann (2005a) argue that victims, perpetrators and bystanders (see Section 7.1) will each require different interpretive strategies which emphasise different messages and perspectives so that it may be difficult to interpret a site in a way that is acceptable to all parties (Boyles, 2005). Their solution is “market separation” (p.11) although they provide little detail as to how this is to be achieved. Sharpley (2009b) proposes a model which seeks to resolve such dissonance by integrating the four groups of stakeholders in Seaton’s (2001) ‘heritage force field’ model with the different approaches to presenting past events proposed by Poria (2001, 2007). This model involves identifying each stakeholder group, determining each stakeholder’s particular history, and producing a negotiated (or cooperative) historical narrative for the site’s interpretation. To date this conceptual model awaits further testing and application.

Another debate focuses on the potential of interpretation to engage visitors emotionally rather than cognitively. This is a long-standing issue since, writing in 1989, Uzzell argued for ‘hot’ interpretation of sites of war and conflict which is not afraid to challenge or shock visitors and engage them emotionally (see also Uzzell & Ballantyne, 1998). Hot interpretation clearly has broader relevance to both dark tourism and thanatourism but most analysis of the concept goes little beyond identifying examples in practice (Frew, 2012; Kang & Lee, 2013), or discussing its benefits (Kang et al., 2012). However, Witcombe (2013) offers a detailed analysis of immersive experiences in the interpretation of dark sites, arguing that these create opportunities to engage visitors emotionally and affectively (see also Dalton, 2014). Professional interpreters have also debated the challenges of interpreting conflict or other sensitive topics in a way which has an impact on visitors but avoids sensationalism (Bardgett, 2005; Currie, 2014; Haan, 2005).

A further issue is the reception of interpretive messages by visitors. In particular, visitors may not notice or understand interpretive messages, or may interpret them in a way that is different from that intended by managers and interpreters (Ashworth, 2008; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a, b; Strange & Kempa, 2003). This may be because messages may be contradictory, difficult for visitors to understand, or no longer relevant (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005b; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). An alternative perspective emphasises that, like any cultural ‘text’, visitors can ‘read’ a dark site in a multitude of ways depending on their own past experiences and ‘positionality’. This means that visitors can make their

own meanings at a dark site, and that there can be a multitude of possible interpretations of such a site (Du et al., 2013; Robb, 2009; Strange & Kempa, 2003; Walby & Piché, 2011). A more recent development is the use of smartphones by many visitors to search for additional information which, again, may not accord with the message intended by interpreters (Staiff, 2014). Visitors are, therefore, active participants (or co-creators) in making meaning at places of death and suffering (see Smith, 2006, 2012; Staiff, 2014; Staiff, Watson, & Bushell, 2013) so that professional interpreters no longer have control over the messages received by visitors. This argument obviously applies to heritage interpretation in all contexts and is not something unique to places of death or suffering.

Overall, while ‘supply’ aspects of interpretation have attracted most attention there has been little detailed scrutiny of the ways in which visitors engage with interpretive media (and messages). Similarly, while there is abundant evidence that learning is a motive for, or requirement from, visiting such places, there has been little detailed attention to the nature and extent of visitors’ learning (an issue which is under-researched in heritage interpretation more generally). This is a potentially important issue given the many dark sites which have an overtly educational mission. Moreover, further research is needed to understand whether experiences of (and responses to) interpretation are predominantly cognitive or emotional, and the extent to which a more intense emotional response can reinforce educational messages.

### 7.3. *The marketing of dark places/destinations*

The marketing and promotion of places associated with death, atrocity and suffering is a neglected topic (Farmaki, 2013; Johnston, Tigre-Moura, & Mandelartz, 2016) and the very limited literature on these issues is eclectic and fragmented. The promotion or marketing of places associated with death and suffering is sometimes addressed in passing (or within broader discussions of the supply side of dark tourism or thanatourism), but is rarely a central research focus. Moreover, the academic discipline of marketing has paid scant attention to dark tourism (although see Brown, McDonagh, & Shultz, 2012). This lacuna is surprising, since sites of death or suffering are like any other tourist attraction in that they “must be packaged, promoted, priced and positioned” (Brown et al., 2012, p. 198). Furthermore, a range of public and private sector actors are engaged in the promotion of such places for visitors in the same way as for other tourist attractions or destinations. The reluctance to investigate marketing issues in the context of dark tourism and thanatourism may reflect the extensive debate in the early stage of research about the commodification of places of death for tourism. In a context where the marketing of dark places may be regarded as inappropriate, unseemly or exploitative (Brown et al., 2012) researchers appear to have avoided the topic. The few studies that have addressed the marketing of dark sites or attractions mostly take the form of case study research but, with a few exceptions (Brown et al., 2012; MacCarthy, 2016), there has been little application of concepts, models or theories from marketing studies/science to dark sites.

Places can utilise their associations with atrocity or suffering to create (or enhance) place products in order to attract visitors. Associations with death or atrocity heritage can transform a location into somewhere extraordinary, which can be used to attract additional visitors (Ashworth, 2004; Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005a). In this context, a range of case studies (focusing on a diverse range of contexts) have considered the role of dark sites/histories in creating place products, attracting additional visitors, and contributing to economic development (Eskew, 2001; Essah, 2001; Horodnikova & Derco, 2015; Isaac, 2014; Isaac & Ashworth, 2011; Rofe, 2013; Warner, 1999; White, 2013). In other cases, the focus is on the

(re)branding of destinations following war or conflict (Volcic et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2014), or the reluctance to embrace dark tourism in creating place products (Simone-Charteris et al., 2013). However, the use of associations with death in place branding is not unique to dark tourism since there is a substantial literature on the use of heritage for such purposes.

Other research has focused on specific marketing issues including the challenges of marketing sensitive sites (Austin, 2002) and the role of images in constructing a site as dark (Smith & Croy, 2005). An emerging research theme is the marketing messages presented to visitors in advance of their visit on websites, both those of attractions themselves (Heuermann & Chhabra, 2014; Krisjanous, 2016) and those of private companies and tour operators (Johnston et al., 2016; Powell & Iankova, 2016; Smith & Croy, 2005). However, the ways in which websites influence the decision to visit (or not visit) a dark site has, to date, received little attention.

## 8. Methods in dark tourism and thanatourism research

The methods for researching tourism at places of death and suffering have attracted occasional comment and debate (Dunkley, 2007; Johnston, 2011; Podoshen, Andrzejewski et al., 2015; Seaton, 2009a; Wight, 2006). A wide range of methodological approaches have been adopted (usually reflecting the disciplinary background of the researcher). A summary of the research methods adopted in more than 100 academic papers and chapters over the 1996–2016 period is presented in Table 5. The most common research approach involves qualitative methods (see Biran & Hyde 2013; Johnston, 2011; Wight, 2006), usually a combination of in-depth interviews and observations of visitors' behaviour. Such methods are predominantly used by authors with backgrounds in anthropology, sociology and human geography, mirroring a broader trend within tourism studies towards greater use of qualitative research approaches (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). In many cases, the reason for employing qualitative passes without comment but some researchers have argued for the specific advantages of such methods (Dunkley et al., 2011; Friedrich & Johnston, 2013; Thurnell-Read, 2009).

Second, despite the claims that dark tourism research was dominated (at least in its early stages) by an implicitly positivist (or

post-positivist) underpinning (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Golańska, 2015), quantitative approaches (usually questionnaire surveys with large samples) are not particularly common. They are predominantly employed by researchers with a disciplinary background of psychology, consumer behaviour or business/management studies. Some scholars outside the discipline of tourism studies (Clarke et al., 2014; Korstanje & Ivanov, 2012; Naef, 2014; Sion, 2014b) have criticised dark tourism research for its predominantly quantitative/questionnaire-based methods and approaches, but as the table shows, there is little foundation for this claim. Again, some researchers have argued for the advantage of quantitative approaches in dark tourism research (Biran & Hyde 2013; Wight, 2006).

Third, Table 5 indicates that there have been many accounts of particular sites that rely on the observations and interpretations of the researcher who takes on the role of a privileged and expert commentator. Relatively few have employed formal analytical techniques (such as semiotic analysis, discourse analysis or content analysis). Some of these accounts are noteworthy for reluctance on the part of the researcher to seek to understand the broader social, cultural and political context in which a place of death or suffering is presented to visitors. Moreover the unwillingness to engage with such “indigenous knowledges” (Tribe & Liburd, 2016, p. 52) has sometimes led researchers to critical judgements that are characterised by ethnocentrism. The reluctance to engage directly with visitors accounts for the considerable degree of speculation and generalisation about motives and experiences that characterised the first decade of research.

Some researchers have advocated alternative methods or sources of data in order to throw greater light on tourism at places of death and suffering (Dunkley, 2007; Johnston, 2013; Podoshen, 2013). Given the growing importance of Web 2.0 as a site of knowledge creation and exchange in tourism (Tribe & Liburd, 2016) there is increasing use of a range of online sources including attraction websites, discussion fora, and travel blogs. While websites provide another perspective on supply (and related issues such as marketing), discussion fora and blogs have been particularly useful for exploring the motivations and experiences of visitors. There is occasional use of written sources including fiction, travel writing, guidebooks, and visitors' comment books which again can provide new insight into visitor experiences. To date

**Table 5**  
Methods used in dark tourism and thanatourism research, 1996–2016.

Method	Number of studies
Qualitative methods	58
<i>Of which:</i>	
• <i>In-depth interviews</i>	18
• <i>Participant observation</i>	3
• <i>Autoethnography</i>	1
• <i>Mixed qualitative methods (mostly observation and in-depth interviews)</i>	36
Interpretative accounts of site meanings (mostly based on authors' observation)	29
Questionnaires (using large samples and usually a broadly positivist approach)	18
Analysis of secondary textual materials:	16
<i>Of which:</i>	
• <i>website content</i>	5
• <i>online fora/travel blogs</i>	5
• <i>travel writing</i>	1
• <i>visitors books</i>	1
• <i>other published sources</i>	4
Mixed quantitative and qualitative methods (questionnaires and in-depth interviews)	10
Historical accounts of a site's development	7
Analysis of visual materials (tourists' photographs)	1
Total:	139

Note: includes: journal articles and book chapters which engage (even if critically) with dark tourism or thanatourism as an explanatory framework. Purely conceptual papers are excluded. Each publication is included in only 1 category. Includes papers published online in 2015/2016.

there has been limited use of visual resources (and associated analytical methods) although isolated studies have used tourists' photographs to understand the experiences of visitors to places of death and suffering.

## 9. Conclusions and future research priorities

When first proposed in the mid-1990s dark tourism was presented as a new form of tourism, rooted in the specific circumstances of the late 20th century. The related concept of thanatourism was presented as the contemporary form of a much older phenomenon. Both were initially viewed as rather obscure forms of special interest tourism that attracted curiosity but limited academic attention. However, over the past decade dark tourism (and, to a lesser extent, thanatourism) have become established as mainstream research topics within tourism studies/tourism management, and are the focus of vigorous debate and critique. This has happened in the context of a broader growth of interest in issues of death and dying within the social sciences, as the growing profile of 'death studies' as a multidisciplinary research focus testifies.

The concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism have created an opportunity for tourism researchers to explore new issues and push the boundaries of tourism research in new directions (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015; Johnston, 2011). Two decades of research have illuminated the plethora of ways in which tourists engage with places of death, suffering and atrocity, their reasons for doing so, and the nature of their experiences. Recent research has also made an important contribution to a better understanding of the emotional and affective dimensions of the tourist experience. Dark tourism has also led to new theories of tourism consumption. Foremost among these is the mortality mediation model which explicitly links dark tourism to broader (and long-established) practices of thanatopsis. This model proposes a completely different way of thinking about dark tourism which focuses attention on the experiences of visitors to places of death and the implications of these experiences. More broadly, it argues that understanding dark tourism requires an understanding of the changing nature of societal relationships with death, dying and the dead (Stone, 2012b). The challenging nature of this way of thinking about visits to places of, or associated with, death means that it has been quietly avoided by many researchers, and the theory awaits fuller investigation and development.

Dark tourism and thanatourism research has also been noteworthy for its multidisciplinary nature. Debate has been advanced both by scholars working within the fields of tourism studies/tourism management but also by those working in other disciplines or fields. These influences are summarised in Table 6. Within tourism studies/management the dominant contributions have been grounded in heritage tourism, tourism motivation and tourist experience/behaviour. However, researchers based in a range of other disciplines (including history, sociology, marketing, psychology, literature, business/management studies, law, history, archaeology and political science) have also turned their attention to tourism at places of death or suffering, along with those in multidisciplinary subject areas (such as criminology, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, memory studies, death studies, and media/journalism studies). Of these, the dominant influence has been sociology (particularly the sociology of death). Of the two broad approaches to the academic study of tourism - tourism social science and the business of tourism (Tribe, 1997) - the former has been the biggest influence on dark tourism and thanatourism research. In addition, the disciplinary influences on dark tourism and thanatourism research have changed over time. In the early stages, most scholarship was rooted in heritage tourism, but other perspectives (particularly those derived from sociology) within

**Table 6**  
Disciplinary influences on the development of research in dark tourism and thanatourism, 1996–2016.

<i>Within Tourism Studies/Tourism Management</i>	
Heritage tourism	***
Tourist experience/behaviour	***
Authenticity	***
Tourist motivation	**
Tourist-host relations	**
Destination/attraction management	**
Special interest tourism	*
Tourism politics	*
Tourism marketing	*
Tourism economics	*
<i>Other Disciplines/Fields</i>	
Sociology (of death)	***
Anthropology	***
Criminology	**
Human Geography	**
History	**
Archaeology	**
Memory Studies	**
Psychology	*
Media Studies/Journalism	*
Literary criticism	*
Post-Colonial Studies	*
Law	*
Death Studies	*
Marketing	*

\*\*\*strong influence; \*\* limited influence; \* minimal influence.

tourism studies/tourism management have been increasingly influential over the past decade.

Laws and Scott (2015:49) argue that tourism "may be seen as a mosaic of topics, theories and methodologies", and the mosaic metaphor can be equally applied to dark tourism (and, to a lesser extent, thanatourism). This can be interpreted as both a strength and a weakness. The multidisciplinary nature of research means that perspectives from tourism studies/tourism management have been enriched through the contribution of scholars working in other disciplines and fields. In this context, Stone (2013a:309) argues that dark tourism represents "a multi-disciplinary academic lens through which to scrutinise a broad range of social, cultural, geographical, anthropological, political, managerial and historical concerns". On the other hand, the wide range of ways of investigating tourism at places of death and suffering has resulted in an eclectic and fragmented research output, and may have inhibited the development of a coherent body of theory.

However, for all the achievements of two decades of research, dark tourism in particular has proved to be a contested and divisive concept (Roberts & Stone, 2014; Stone, 2016). First, there is little consensus over how dark tourism (and thanatourism) should be defined. Neither is there agreement about what forms of subject matter, places and experiences constitute dark tourism. In particular, some researchers have been determined to push the boundaries of dark tourism, to embrace sites and experiences that are tangentially (and sometimes tenuously) related to death. Consequently the scope and utility of the concept is increasingly ambiguous. As Ashworth and Isaac (2015:317) argue, dark tourism research has reached the stage where "a quality of darkness could be attributed actually or potentially, to some extent, almost everywhere".

Second, the initial distinction between dark tourism and thanatourism is now less clear. There is little consensus or consistency over which term is most appropriate to describe the relationship between tourists and places associated with death. As originally proposed, dark tourism and thanatourism were quite distinct approaches to the tourism-death relationship. However, this distinction is now frequently disregarded so that many researchers use the

labels interchangeably (while others prefer one or other term on grounds that sometimes appear quite arbitrary). The effect has arguably been to undermine the utility and currency of both terms.

Third, academic scrutiny of tourism at places of death and suffering has tended to concentrate on particular types of site (see Table 2), meaning that other parts of Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum have been largely neglected. In particular, the whole issue of 'lighter' dark tourism (which includes things such as ghost tours and entertainment-based attractions themed around death, suffering or torture) has received little attention. Such attractions are frequently assumed to offer a rather frivolous and superficial form of entertainment but the motives and experiences of visitors to such places are poorly understood. It is not yet clear if visits to such attractions have enough in common with the darker forms of dark tourism to justify including them under the umbrella of dark tourism (or thanatourism).

Fourth, there has been limited concern to develop or apply theory in order to understand tourism at places of death and suffering (a notable exception being the mortality mediation model). Instead, much research has adopted a case study (and often rather descriptive) approach. Consequently, dark tourism research has been described as "theoretically fragile" (Sharpley 2005:216; see also Sharpley, 2009a; Stone, 2006; Stone & Sharpley, 2008), meaning that it is often held in low regard by scholars in other disciplines. For example, there has also been limited engagement with (or contribution to) the wider body of theory about tourism and tourists from within tourism studies/tourism management. Two decades of research have added little to long-standing debates about authenticity or tourism ethics. There has also been a limited contribution to debates about tourist motivation (beyond highlighting the complexity of such motivations) or (mortality mediation theory aside) the nature of the tourist experience. Furthermore, dark tourism and thanatourism research have added little to the existing literature about the management and interpretation of visitor attractions. Finally, two decades of scholarship have contributed almost nothing to understanding the economic dimensions of the contemporary tourism industry. Dark tourism research has also been criticised for its reluctance to engage with theoretical perspectives from other disciplines, particularly that relating to death, dying and the dead (although some analysis has made use of the notion of thanatopsis). In particular, the exchange between dark tourism scholars and those in the emerging multi-disciplinary area of 'death studies' has been limited. More broadly, dark tourism and thanatourism scholarship has shown little engagement with broader themes in critical social science, such as the 'mobilities paradigm' (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006) or neoliberalism (Tribe, Dann, & Jamal, 2015).

Fifth – and perhaps most importantly – there is limited evidence that dark tourism or thanatourism represent a distinct form of tourist demand. Both concepts were predicated on the assumption that (some) tourists had a clearly-defined interest in death or suffering. However, a growing body of research into the motivations of visitors has called into question whether there is such a thing as a dark tourist. Rather than being motivated by a particular interest in death and suffering, many visitors are engaged in purposeful quests (in some cases, pilgrimages) for learning, understanding, connection, empathy and remembrance. As such their motivations and experiences are difficult to distinguish from those of heritage tourists. If there are tourists with a specific fascination with death they appear to be a rare phenomenon.

Therefore, can dark tourism be identified as a distinct form of (special interest) tourism in its own right or is it simply a form of heritage tourism? It was originally conceptualised as something distinct from heritage tourism and many researchers have subsequently adopted this position. Yet two decades of research have not

clearly established how dark tourism is clearly differentiated from heritage tourism. Some argue that the focus on mortality is a distinctive characteristic of dark tourism (and thanatourism) but this characteristic is also shared by most heritage sites. The mortality mediation model proposes that the distinctive feature of dark tourism is the opportunities it provides visitors to places of death and suffering for reflection and contemplation of the nature of mortality). However, it is not necessary to embrace the overarching concept of dark tourism in order to investigate such experiences. Others have suggested that some forms of dark tourism can be defined by particular emotional experiences, although research into this issue is at its early stages. What is clear is that many researchers who focus on the touristic use of places associated with death and suffering see no need to make use of either dark tourism or thanatourism as explanatory frameworks, preferring instead to frame their research within concepts such as 'dissonant heritage' or 'difficult heritage'. If anything, after efforts to delimit dark tourism and thanatourism as distinct forms of tourism, there is now increasing convergence with heritage tourism (illustrated by the growing use of phrases such as 'dark heritage' or 'dark heritage tourism').

Overall, Biran and Hyde (2013) argue that dark tourism has not yet matured as an area of academic investigation and it is difficult to disagree with this assertion. Writing in 2009 Seaton argued that "there are still many more questions than answers, and there are almost certainly many more still to be asked" (2009a:538) and the situation is little different now. Consequently, after two decades of research, some scholars are sceptical about whether dark tourism will hold as an analytical framework (Schäfer, 2016). Others have proposed abandoning the concept altogether, arguing that it is now of little use for understanding the contemporary relationships between tourism and death (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015; Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Isaac, 2015).

However, there is little doubt that the relationship between tourism and places of death will remain an important theme in the academic study of tourism. Indeed, Sharpley and Stone (2009a:251) argue that the importance of dark tourism research lies "in what it reveals or may reveal, about the relationships between life and death, the living and dead, and the institutions or processes that mediate, either at the individual or societal level, between life and death". Conceptualised in this way, dark tourism can provide a lens for considering and understanding the broader ways in which contemporary societies engage with death and the dead (Stone, 2012a, 2013a). Perhaps, then, a more relevant question is whether dark tourism is the most appropriate label for such a research focus. The use of the term 'dark' has been frequently challenged. Some object to its pejorative overtones and assumption that visiting places of death and suffering is somehow morbid behaviour. Others dislike the essentialist overtones of 'dark', arguing that darkness is socially constructed and therefore means different things to different people. The term has also been criticised for conflating extremely diverse places, sites and visitor experiences that have little in common. Moreover, the very concept of dark tourism reflects a way of thinking about tourism (and death) that is specific to English-speaking countries since neither the term nor the concept translate easily into other languages (Ashworth & Isaac, 2015; Hartmann, 2014; see also Lee et al., 2012).

However, alternative terms are equally problematic. While thanatourism has none of the overtones associated with the term 'dark', it assumes visitors are motivated by the desire for an encounter with death, a claim for which there is limited empirical support. On the other hand, thanatourism recognises a continuum of intensity within motivations for visiting places of death in which an interest in death can play a very small part. Furthermore, thanatourism (as originally formulated) is grounded in thanatopsis

which is central to the mortality mediation model. Therefore a reformulated thanatourism which focuses on experiences of thanatopsis - rather than motivations - could be a way forward. Alternatively, a simple term such as tourism at places of death and suffering (see Isaac & Çakmak, 2014) has the advantage of describing the phenomenon without any of the overtones associated with 'dark' and without any implicit assumptions about the motivations and experiences of visitors. Similarly 'death tourism' serves the same purpose (although analysis of this concept to date has tended to dismiss or ignore altogether two decades of research into dark tourism). Ultimately, such is the traction and popularity of the term dark tourism that it is unlikely to disappear. Indeed, Roberts and Stone (2014) and Stone (2013a, 2016) argue that, despite its limitations, the term represents a recognised research 'brand' through which to explore the relationships between tourism and death. The widespread recognition of the term dark tourism appears to be the strongest argument for retaining it (although the term 'dark heritage' would equally suffice).

### 9.1. Priorities for future research

Regardless of what label is attached to the phenomenon, it is clear that the relationships between tourism and death are (and will remain) a legitimate theme within tourism research. This raises the question about the future direction for such research (see Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Jamal & Lelo, 2011; Sharpley & Stone, 2009a; Stone, 2005, 2011a). In the following discussion, a number of future research priorities are identified, which are organised around the six key themes which this paper has considered.

The first theme of this review concerned debate about the definition and scope of dark tourism and thanatourism. Doubtless new definitions and typologies will be proposed but this issue is not a research priority. After two decades of research, agreement over how dark tourism (or thanatourism) should be defined and categorised appears as elusive as ever. In this context, Stone (2016) argues that matters of definitions are of less importance than recognition of the importance of the tourism-death relationship and what it has to tell us about contemporary societies.

The second theme of this review was the ethical issues associated with the presentation of places of death and suffering to tourists. Here there are a number of avenues for future research in order to move the debate beyond well-worn issues of commodification and (in)authenticity. For example, there is an opportunity to engage with wider debates about ethics in tourism in order to develop models of the ethical issues and relationships associated with tourism at places of death (see Johnston, 2015). Furthermore, greater engagement with the professionals responsible for managing such places could lead to models of best practices, or guidelines for practitioners. In addition, future research might explore ethical issues from the perspectives of tourists themselves, particularly the ways in which they negotiate ethical dilemmas in the course of their visits.

The third theme concerns the political and ideological context of tourism at places of death and suffering. Future research can continue to explore the influences of broader political projects of remembering (and forgetting) on the ways in which places of death and suffering are presented to their visitors. Similarly, the role of tourism at such places in the formation (or contestation) of collective memories and identities requires fuller scrutiny. A further issue concerns the role of tourism at sites of death or atrocity within political strategies of peacemaking or national/ethnic reconciliation. To date, much of the debate about these issues has been at a conceptual level and the fact that there is dissonance between different users is now well established. Future work could explore in more detail the nature of such dissonance through

engaging with the perspectives of multiple 'users' and stakeholders (the approach of Friedrich and Johnston (2013) is a notable example). In such cases the need for sensitivity to local perspectives and voices is important. Broader attention to the political and ideological context of places of death and suffering also creates opportunities for greater exchange and debate with other multi-disciplinary fields such as memory studies or postcolonial studies. Here, the challenge for tourism scholars is to convince those in other disciplines that tourism research has a valid contribution to make in understanding the contemporary uses of places of death and suffering.

The fourth theme was the nature of visitors to places of death and suffering and here there is a plethora of issues for future research. Motivations are now reasonably well understood, although future research can continue to explore why people choose to visit such places and the extent to which an interest in (or desire for an encounter with) death plays a role in the decision to visit such places. To do this may require asking different questions of visitors in different ways than previously. There is also a need to explore motivations at a wider range of sites, especially those at the 'lighter' end of Stone's dark tourism spectrum where motives may be very different.

The experiences of visitors is another important issue, particularly since recent conceptualisations of dark tourism suggest that it constitutes a particular type of experience, rather than a category of motivation. Visitor experiences are multifaceted, but of the 10 facets of experience identified by Packer and Ballantyne (2016) cognitive, emotional and relational experiences have, to date, received most scrutiny. Continued research is needed into these issues but at a broader range of sites. Many researchers have identified empathy as an important part of visitors' experiences and here future research could usefully engage with Tucker's (2016) call for a critical approach which distinguishes between "lazy" and "unsettled" empathy (p.41). In addition, more attention is needed to the introspective, sensory, transformative and spiritual dimensions of the experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016; see also; Johnston, 2013). This will need a greater focus on what 'happens' to visitors and the cultural 'work' they undertake when visiting a place of death and suffering. The mortality mediation thesis – which proposes that dark tourism offers a means for understanding how secular societies 'deal' with death - offers a promising way forward (Stone, 2011b, 2011c, 2012a, 2012b). Another aspect of the experience that awaits fuller investigation is the social context of the visit and the ways in which the presence of others (friends, family and other visitors) shape individual experiences. In the future, researchers could also examine the on-site experience in its broader context (Roberts & Stone, 2014; Nawijn et al., 2016) to include what comes *before* the visit (anticipation and expectations) and what comes *after* (including practices of remembering and reflecting). The longer term impacts on visitors (particularly cognitively and emotionally) of visiting a place of death or suffering are also poorly-understood. However, to develop a better understanding of the visitor experience will require more nuanced models of visitors themselves.

Future research might also focus on those visitors to places of death and suffering who have hitherto been overlooked. Foremost among these are children and young people. As Kerr and Price (2016) argue, most research has focussed on the experiences of adults while little attention has been paid to children and young people who accompany adults, whether within a holiday trip or as part of educational visits. Another overlooked visitor group is members of local communities for whom a place of death may have very different meanings from tourists. Future research can also consider non-visitors and the reasons why some people choose *not* to visit places of death.

The fifth theme is the management of places of death and suffering for visitors. There are many specific issues relating to management, interpretation and marketing which are potential areas for future research. However, in broad terms, there is a need to move the focus of investigation beyond conceptual debates, commentaries or case studies. Instead, researchers could usefully focus on the intentions, agendas and interactions of the four groups of stakeholders (managers, those represented, host communities and tourists) identified by Seaton (2009b). In terms of managers, academic researchers need to engage more directly with this group to develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced in presenting, interpreting and marketing places of death to their visitors. In turn this could lead to collaboration with managers in developing guidelines for optimum practice. Similarly, the people whose stories are represented at a place of death represent a stakeholder group that has, to date, been largely neglected. Engaging with such groups enables a better understanding of the tensions over the interpretation and marketing of such places, but could potentially contribute to developing strategies that are considered acceptable and appropriate.

The perspectives of local communities as a stakeholder group have been largely neglected to date (Kim & Butler, 2015). Therefore, future research might focus on the ways in which local communities are impacted by, negotiate, and respond to becoming the focus of touristic interest based on a particular instance of death or tragedy. Here, the substantial literature on host-guest relations could be usefully applied to tourism at places of death. The perspectives of public sector organisations (which seek to represent the interests of local communities) also require fuller scrutiny, particularly where tourism based on places of death is promoted with the intention of generating benefits for local communities. More broadly, future research can consider the economic impacts of tourism at places of death and suffering (Wight, 2006).

Furthermore the expectations and needs of visitors as stakeholders present a range of issues for future research which can complement the growing literature on motivations and experiences. For example, the ways in which expectations are shaped (or modified) by marketing materials (including websites) is an emerging research issue which requires further investigation. During a visit to a place of death of suffering, little is known about how visitors respond to management interventions, and the impact of such interventions on the auratic quality of a place of death or suffering as perceived and experienced by visitors. Another issue concerns the ways in which visitors interact with interpretive media during their visit and the extent to which their experiences of interpretation are predominantly cognitive or emotional.

The sixth theme of this review was the methods used in dark tourism and thanatourism research. Over the past two decades, many researchers have been reluctant to engage directly with the people involved with tourism at places of death or suffering (whether visitors or managers) so that there has been a reliance on both observation and detached expert commentary/interpretation. Most of the research priorities identified above require getting 'close' to tourists and other key actors, and there are a range of both quantitative and qualitative methods that allow this. Furthermore, there are many opportunities for researchers to explore the utility of new or alternative sources of data (particularly those available through the internet) to understand tourism at places of death and suffering.

Finally, an overarching issue for future research is the need to broaden its geographical scope. Academic scrutiny of dark tourism and thanatourism has, to date, been largely Eurocentric, with most attention directed to sites and places in Europe, USA and Australia. However, the relationship between tourism and death in the Developing World has received much less attention (Friedrich &

Johnston, 2013; Levey, 2014). While there is a need to explore such tourism in a broader range of geographical contexts, this needs to move beyond simply focusing on hitherto under-researched countries. The very concepts of dark tourism and thanatourism are grounded in specifically 'Western' ways of thinking about relationships between the living and the dead. Such concepts have sometimes been used uncritically in non-Western contexts, but it is important to recognise that, in other parts of the world, the relationships between societies and their dead take very different forms. This means that the use of Western frameworks for understanding the tourism-death relationship in other parts of the world may not be appropriate (Lee et al., 2012; Yoshida et al., 2016). Instead, there is a need for alternative ways of thinking about visits to places associated with death that are sensitive to local understandings of death and the dead. In short, this will require the development of new ways of theorizing tourism-death relationships by scholars working in non-Western contexts. It will also require the development of new terminology that has more utility in non-Western settings. A number of researchers in Asia have begun to address this challenge (Lee et al., 2012; Yan et al., 2016; Yoshida et al., 2016; Zheng et al., 2017) but such research is still at an early stage. Academics interested in tourism at places of death and suffering will need to recognise and embrace a plurality of approaches and perspectives, rather than relying on a 'one size fits all' Western model.

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Dr Duncan Light is Senior Lecturer in Tourism in the Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Bournemouth University, UK. He has research interests in heritage tourism and the relationships between tourism and (national) identities. He is the author of *The Dracula Dilemma: Tourism, Identity and the State in Romania* (Ashgate, 2012).